officer in the army of Louis XV., and his mother, also of noble family, was a member of the royal household at Ver­sailles. An accident in infancy rendered Talleyrand lame for life, and changed his whole career. His upbringing was, in accordance with the fashionable heartlessness of the day, entirely left to strangers ; and while a boy he was, in con­sequence of his lameness, formally deprived by a *conseil de famille* of his rights of primogeniture,—his younger brother, the Comte d’Archambaud, taking his place ; and he was destined for the church. He keenly felt the blow, but was powerless to avert it ; and he used his enforced profession only as a stepping-stone to his ambition, always despising it, and coolly and defiantly forsaking it when he found it an embarrassment.

When he was removed from the country he was sent to the Collége d’Harcourt, where he speedily distinguished himself; and in 1770, when sixteen years of age, he became an inmate of the Séminaire de St Sulpice, his education being completed by a course in the Sorbonne. Much as Talleyrand despised the church as a career, he never ceased highly to appreciate theology as a training, and he publicly testified to its value to the statesman and specially to the diplomatist. While achieving distinction as a student, he carefully cultivated such society as might promote his advancement; and it was in the circle of Madame du Barry that his cynicism and wit, reported by her to the king, gained him the position of abbé. To his arts of manner were added, not only his advantages of birth and scholarship, but a penetrating judgment of men and affairs, a subtle audacity, and a boundlessly selfish ambition. As early as 1780 we find this *abbé malgré lui* to have reached the important position of “agent-general” of the French clergy. His ability and his flagrant immorality alike rendered him a marked man, and the latter did not prevent his appointment, in accordance with his father’s dying request to the king, as bishop of Autun in January 1789. The clergy of his own diocese immediately elected him a member of the states-general; and he delivered before his constituents one of the most remarkable speeches which the crisis produced, containing a sagacious and statesmanlike programme of the reforms which the condition of France demanded. He thus entered the assembly as one of its leaders.

The states-general had hardly met ere Talleyrand’s influ­ence was called into play. He successfully urged the clergy to yield to the demand of the commons that the three estates should meet together; and the nobles could thereafter only follow the example thus set. On the question of the extent of the assembly’s authority he again sided with the popular leaders. As a financier of great foresight and power he soon became justly celebrated; and his position in the assembly may be estimated by his appointment as one of a committee of eight to frame the project of a constitution. All his previous successes were, however, eclipsed by the daring with which he attacked the rights and privileges of his own order. He had seconded the proposals that the clergy should give up their tithes and plate for the benefit of the nation, and on 10th October 1789 he himself proposed a scheme whereby the landed property of the church should be confiscated by the state. On 2d November, after violent debates, his project was carried, and the old clergy thereafter ranked him as an enemy. But his general popularity so much increased that he was charged by the national assembly to prepare a written memoir in defence of its labours ; and the mani­festo, read on February 10, 1790, was received with great approval throughout the country. On the 16th he was elected president of the assembly for the usual brief term. On various subjects he was now looked up to as an authority,—on education, on electoral and ecclesiastical reform, on banking, and on general finance. His career as a diplomatist had not yet begun.

On July 14, 1790, Talleyrand, at the head of 300 clergy, assisted at the fête in the Champ de Mars in commemora­tion of the fall of the Bastille, and publicly blessed the great standard of France. By this time, however, the dispute as to the civil constitution of the clergy had broken out, the decision of the assembly being resisted by the king, backed by the pope. When in November the king yielded, Talleyrand boldly took the required oath, only two bishops following his example. New bishops were elected by the assembly, and these he, in open defiance of the church, consecrated. In the end of April 1791 he was suspended from his functions and excommunicated by the pope. Without a moment’s hesitation Talleyrand aband­oned his profession, which he never afterwards resumed. He had been false to its vows, and had scandalized it by his shameless life. It was only in the preceding February that he had, in declining nomination for the archbishopric of Paris, felt, indiscreetly enough and contrary to his usual practice, the necessity of writing to the *Moniteur* a hypo­critical confession of his gambling propensities, stating his gains at 30,000 francs. Although in 1801 the excom­munication was recalled, it was nearly half a century after his first act of defiance ere he became personally reconciled to the church, and then only when he was at the point of death.

On purely political lines, however, Talleyrand’s career became more and more celebrated. In the beginning of the same month of April 1791, his friend Mirabeau having just died, he was appointed to succeed him as a director of the department of Paris, a position which still further increased his influence in the circles of the metropolis. On the flight of the king in June, Talleyrand leaned at first and cautiously towards the duke of Orleans, but finally declared for a constitutional monarchy with Louis XVI. still on the throne. Ere the constitutional assembly brought its existence to a close on 14th September, he unfolded before it his magnificent scheme of national education, which, in the words of Sir Henry Bulwer, “ having at one extremity the communal school and at the other the Institute, exists with but slight alterations at this very day.” The assembly had voted that none of its members should be members of the new legislative body, so that Talleyrand was free ; besides, events were hurrying on with strange and critical rapidity ; and Talleyrand left France for England, reaching London in the end of January 1792. With this visit his diplomatic career may be said to have begun.

He was not formally accredited, but had in his pocket an introduction to Lord Grenville by Delessart the foreign minister ; the king himself was aware of his mission, the ostensible object of which was to conciliate England. Talleyrand for his part shared the ulterior views of Narbonne, the minister of war, that it would be for the advantage of his country to divert its energies, which were morbidly directed to its internal troubles, into another channel, and to precipitate an Austrian war. Although received well in London society, he found the want of official credentials a fatal obstacle to his diplomatic nego­tiations, and he returned to Paris, whence he was almost immediately again despatched to the English court under much more favourable conditions. He was nominally only attendant with De Chauvelin, the minister plenipotentiary, but he was really the head of the embassy, and he carried with him a letter of Louis XVI. to George III. At this time, indeed, Talleyrand’s relations with Louis were very close,—far closer than he afterwards cared or dared to avow. All, however, was of no avail. The startling course of the Revolution made the English look askance