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Like another Chouannerie

Vaublanc's specula principum for the post-Restoration age

March 5, 2018 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

[A short bit of filler until I get to a few more polemical pieces I have in mind.]

The “specula principum,” or “mirrors for princes,” was a longstanding genre in European literature starting from at least the Carolingian period in the early 9th century, with the most notable examples from that time probably being Sedulius Scottius and Hincmar of Reims. Such books of instruction and advice, dedicated to personal rulers as opposed to institutions, covered various subjects from exhortations to virtue and piety, household and fiscal management, selection of ministers, ecclesiastical relations, and so forth. With the rising tide of cameralistic practices making personal rulership increasingly anachronistic, the genre largely faded away while also becoming increasingly irreligious over time.

Vincent-Marie Viénot, comte de Vaublanc (1756-1845) was inspired to take a late stab at this in 1833. (<https://books.google.com/books?id=2NQbzJuzUYoC>) He called it an “instruction for princes in the 19th century.” He was quite adamant about calling it “instruction” and not “education,” that is to say by limiting discussion to the practical exercise of statecraft. He did not see much value in a king being a scholar for its own sake. This was implicitly a way of rebuking ideals of secular humanist education which would ultimately reach their apex in late 19th century republican laicite.

The problems facing Vaublanc and the ultra-royalist milieu by then were, firstly, constitutional and populist ideas displacing understandings of personal lordship, as for instance those expressed by the Orleanist supporter Andre Marie Jean Jacques Dupin:

Hence he [Louis-Philippe] did not take up the arms of France, as if he had inherited it; He did not call himself Philip VII, as if it were the continuation of the other dynasty. In it, it all began. In a new way. He was freely chosen, freely accepted by the national wish; This is its LEGITIMACY, not quasi but full and entire, the purest, the most honorable, the truest. The furthest from usurpation. This legitimacy is all popular, it has earned him first of all the beautiful title of citizen-king.

This character of the accession of Louis-Philippe is not ideal, fantastic; It is real, it can not be misunderstood; It is literally written in the acts which have consecrated the elevation of the new dynasty. These acts, all conceived in terms of law, have a precise and rigorous meaning, which makes it impossible to evade its meaning and to disregard its effects.

The body of the French nation is a common stock of ideas, principles, interests, and sympathies; And that its adherence to the July Revolution, which would be qualified as an insurrection by the partisans of the fallen branch, would render it irreconcilable with them, and would become the first pledge of its fidelity to his engagements.

Writing as he did three years after the Restoration was toppled to make way for citizen-king Louis-Philippe, Vaublanc secondly felt the need to decisively abrogate some of his earlier leanings during the Revolution, when he was an adherent of English constitutionalist ideas and a representative of the moderate monarchiens (see also (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2017/10/04/old-school-cuckservatism/>)), e.g. Freteau de Saint-Just (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmanuel_Marie_Michel_Philippe_Fr%C3%A9teau_de_Saint-Just), as well as a defender of Lafayette.

Thirdly, he had to find a way to elevate monarchical primacy without sanctioning Bonapartism or Caesarism. The indecisions of parliamentary monarchy with its drive toward conciliarism was contemptible, but so was the erosion of the *droit coutume*. The attempted resolution of this problem was to declare the necessity of the king to jealously guard his power, to make him supreme adjudicator of parliament (if any), but to limit this sphere of power only to "government," and to leave "administration" to another circle. In this vein, he praises Louis XIII while condemning Cardinal Richelieu.

The usual emphasis on the cardinal virtues are reiterated, with further additions of "constancy" and "indefatigable vigilance."

One place where he inverts this, though, is when talking about the utility of pride. This is possibly influenced by much of the Counter-Reformation literature that tried to grapple with the implications of Machiavellianism: "I do not hesitate to say it; it is by noble personal passions that princes and great bodies can establish and maintain monarchies, and not by the weak sentimental intentions. Wherever you do not find this magnanimous pride, announce a quick decadence and a shameful fall. We thus enter a dangerous road; and they will be in vain, all the efforts that will be made to get out. Stop here to repeat to your student: Princes must always take high and generous advice. It is especially at the beginning of a reign that one must practice this maxim."

"In a monarchy people can only be led by admiration," he says. The governing style of a king should be that of "firmness combined with condescension and even familiarity; but in such a way that the royal majesty remains always in its strength and in its greatness," so as to ultimately "inspire admiration by the nobility of his conduct, the dignity of his manners, so obtaining on every parliament the influence necessary to be the regulator."

The core principle behind successful court politics, according to Vaublanc, is the distinction between, not friend and enemy, but friend and favorite. A favorite is sycophantic, "flatters more than he advises," never says a truth even the least unpleasant, and is characterized by an insatiable thirst for honors and riches. Friends, on the other hand, speak harsh truths with blunt force and flaming passion.

It is imperative that king and chambers/parliament have a single corporate identity. The example he gives is Charles II's conduct during the Exclusion Crisis concerning the succession rights of his brother, the Duke of York.

The passage that is most directly relevant to criticizing the conditions of the July Revolution is when he discusses the fluctuations of parliamentary monarchy.

"In this kind of government, the passions are constantly agitated, the demarcation of see that which contributes to the law, can not be positively explained, even less fixed; the limits they are given in writing only serve to engender endless arguments. We must therefore expect continual shocks, predict them, and not be surprised. The prince will feel that frequent relations are almost indispensable, that in this alternative of opposing and often violent movements, the royal majesty must have a great ascendancy, if he knows how to use his position. But he will lose all the advantage, if he fears to communicate, if he stays away."

Louis XVI's relative problem, then, was that he went there [to the chambers] several times suddenly, pronouncing the most noble, most touching, most generous speeches; he always produced strong emotions; the majority was all his in those moments. But hardly was he out of the room, that everything changed by the inspiration and speeches of the enemies of the throne. All his power was abandoned; nothing could be done for him because he could do nothing for himself.

In effect, the argument is that though the king must in some sense carry an aura of "alienness" and "strangeness," it mustn't be overdone. The king shouldn't fear to be forceful and perhaps even vulgar, if the alternative means a cold, distant demeanor that feigns superiority but only masks apathy and indecision. Such a balance is Vaublanc's attempted reconciliation of constitutional monarchy bastardizing the lord-tenant distinction and rabid legitimism being perhaps too anti-popular especially in an era of modern communication.

But under no circumstances should public opinion be an autonomous variable in any important equation. Vaublanc, being a strong ultra, was no fan of the liberalizing tendencies of PMs like Elie, duc Decazes and the vicomte de Martignac during the Restoration, and the memories of newspaper-backed revolts (e.g. Adolphe Thiers and *Le National* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_National_%28Paris%29)) against Charles X's Four Ordinances of Saint-Cloud blowing up into revolution were obviously quite fresh.

"Le roi règne mais ne gouverne pas" wouldn't cut it.

So Vaublanc writes:

"What is vulgarly called public opinion, that thing elusive in politics, which has varied a thousand times during the revolution, can be carried suddenly to noble things, and great, as we have seen it throw itself into the last degree of turpitude, the sans-culotterie. Variable and inconstant in its nature, for that very reason it does not exist. Sometimes it is a fantasy of the moment that one does not know how to explain; at other times, and more often than not, it is engendered by the fear which, from one corner of Paris, traverses the whole of France, sometimes it is a mania of foreign imitations, sometimes an epidemic

disease which seizes us, and throws us with violence towards the excesses most opposed to the things we most admired. It is an incurable disease, as a general malady and of all time; but its momentary phases can be used by a skillful hand, precisely because they are so variable. If, as I said, the prince is the regulator of the chambers, he will be the regulator of the public opinion. If, by a vigorous and magnanimous conduct, always the same, it did not involve the people that he governs, this people would place themselves in the last rank of nations, but that is impossible. Recall the immense number of changes of opinion in France during forty years; and when you have thus traced the story of this so-called divinity. The so-called public opinion is never anything else than the training of exuberant spirits, either by a party or under a weak government."

Finally, most revealingly of all, he exhibits his Austrophilia and desire for some sort of federal or composite monarchy with multiple independent centers of power:

The happy fruits which an empire can derive from the differences preserved in the provinces, are shown especially in the Austrian Empire. There, each province, each kingdom preserves its laws, its old usages, and thus contributes to the maintenance of the whole with an unshakable constancy. This constancy comes from the fact that each country knows very well that by defending this set, it defends its particular way of being, of existing. From this comes the immense resources which this empire has always found in reserves.

Each province is free under a supreme ruler who confines himself to directing everything, and who does not see to the exercise of invasive powers by him. I call this a well-constituted people. It is so constituted by old usages, by a steady march and always the same. The ruler does not fear that his destiny depends on a riot in the capital; for this empire has no sovereign capital of the other cities. Vienna is the capital of only the province of Austria.

I present these ideas, because I am convinced that time is not far from where we will feel the necessity of rendering to all France the part which belongs to it in general affairs. Only then can she say that she is really free. Reflections on such an important subject and on such striking examples, will extend the thoughts of your pupil and free his mind from the vain prejudices of our ideologues, that Bonaparte knew how to appreciate so well.

Ultimately, Vaublanc tried to mask the old corporate patriotism with the passion of popular autocracy that he hoped could be more nominal than anything else.

In practice, the latter never truly regained any relevance, and any form of personal rule, venality, or holding office by birthright quickly became a synonym for corruption, indeed an intrinsic equivalence. Widespread desire for comprehensive social insurance, conscript armies, unified civil codes, etc. meant that the model of "empire with no sovereign capital" was seen as an outmoded sign of feudal fragmentation and weakness, a pitiful display of kleinstaaterei (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2017/03/11/the-counter-enlightened-liberalism-of-heinrich-von-treitschke/>).

Mirrors for princes died for a reason: the fear of being ruled by anything other than protocols and systems.

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2 thoughts on “Vaublanc’s specula principum for the post-Restoration age”

1. Pingback: [Vaublanc’s specula principum for the post-Restoration age | Reaction Times](#)

2. [Imperial Energy](#) says:

[March 7, 2018 at 3:27 pm](#)

“The “specula principum,” or “mirrors for princes,” was a longstanding genre in European literature starting from at least the Carolingian period in the early 9th century, with the most notable examples from that time probably being Sedulius Scottius and Hincmar of Reims.”

Excellent. Thank you for getting round to doing this. Earlier, we requested that you provide some examples of this for you have a remarkable talent for ferreting out old works. Make it a series.

“With the rising tide of cameralistic practices making personal rulership increasingly anachronistic, the genre largely faded away while also becoming increasingly irreligious over time.”

Too complex, or did the division of labor require the sovereign to take on different duties? That is, the sovereign role was more of a regulator and supervisor.

“The usual emphasis on the cardinal virtues are reiterated, with further additions of “constancy” and “indefatigable vigilance.””

Energy.

Dr Francia had all those virtues in spades.

“In effect, the argument is that though the king must in some sense carry an aura of “alienness” and “strangeness,” it mustn’t be overdone. The king shouldn’t fear to be forceful and perhaps even vulgar, if the alternative means a cold, distant demeanor that feigns superiority but only masks apathy and indecision. Such a balance is Vaublanc’s attempted reconciliation of constitutional monarchy bastardizing the lord-tenant distinction and rabid legitimism being perhaps too anti-popular especially in an era of modern communication.”

“While democracy was non-existent, the Sovereign, nevertheless, was assiduous in attending to public opinion. One of the Sovereign’s rules was that he wanted to be told at once what people were “unhappy” over and when he was given an answer he usually responded with “but tell me what they are really unhappy over”.”

“The Sovereign met frequently with members of the public – often, but not always, in a private setting. In these “private audiences”, the Sovereign listened to people’s grievances and problems attentively and was always swift in ensuing that the Sovereign’s ministers, or whoever was the relevant person, took the necessary action to address injustice or a government failing. Nevertheless, there were always a few “set-piece” public addresses and military parades and reviews each year.”

“In addition, the Sovereign cultivated a myth of omniscience and omnipotence. Political failure was never attributed to the Sovereign but always to his ministers or employees (who could always be replaced and often were). Furthermore, there was extensive de-centralisation on many political, legal and economic issues and individual ministers, governors and mayors succeeded or failed on their own standing, or so it always seemed. Success was lavishly rewarded but failure was often seen as disgraceful and ministers or lower-level employees would usually resign of their own accord. Nevertheless, those who failed were often, after review by the Sovereign, personally re-appointed to a high stress, do or die position. Success restored the minister, failure ended their career forever.”

“The Sovereign had a system of radical honesty, in which his key political and military staff was expected to speak honestly and critically if necessary. Nevertheless, the Sovereign had a system of total surveillance regarding his government. Private or secret communication was forbidden (for employees) and every staff member was subject to video and audio recording, which was usually reviewed by his Household intelligence unit, though the Sovereign would often “surf” the various “channels” and observe employee behaviour.”

“Over the years, the public often wondered what the Sovereign actually did; all they knew was that the system appeared to work.”

....

1: If a King steers, then it is likely the King will fail.

2: If the King fails, then the concept of monarchy may be discredited.

3: Thus, a King must not steer.

4: However, if a King does not steer and, therefore, the state functions according to the principles and assumptions of the paradigm, then some people may question the necessity of having a monarchical system because the King is superfluous.

5: If people come to believe that a monarchical system is unnecessary – because the King is superfluous – they may come to view the monarchical system as undesirable; thus, the King is discredited.

6: If enough people come to believe that the monarchical system is undesirable because the King is discredited, then they may desire and, therefore, act to remove the King and end the monarchical system.

7: If a King steers, he will likely fail and thus monarchy will be discredited; if, however, the King does not steer, then people may come to doubt the necessity and desirability of the King and may attempt to replace not just the King but the monarchical system; as a result, the King fails.

8: In conclusion, as Marcus Aurelius said, “it is a King’s lot to do good and be damned.”

<https://imperialenergyblog.wordpress.com/2018/01/18/the-steel-cameralist-manifesto-part-8-steel-sovereignty-from-equipose-to-energy/>

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