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DIPLOMACY

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DIPLOMACY

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CHAPTER V

THE IDEAL DIPLOMATIST

The principles which experience has shown to be necessary to sound diplomacy can well be illustrated by examining the qualities needed by the ideal diplomatist—What are these specific qualities?—Some are now out of date—Others are still essential—The basis of good negotiation is moral influence and that influence is founded on seven specific diplomatic virtues, namely :—(1) Truthfulness—(2) Precision—(3) Calm—(4) Good temper—(5) Patience—(6) Modesty—(7) Loyalty

WHAT are those “general principles of good sense and experience” to which, at the conclusion of the last chapter, I referred? They can, I think, most conveniently be expounded if in this chapter I try to define the moral and intellectual qualities which the ideal diplomatist should possess. Yet if I catalogue these qualities in the shape of personal characteristics, I should not wish it to be supposed that I am indulging in a mere character sketch in the manner of Theophrastus or La Bruyère. My purpose is more practical than that. It is to illustrate by these qualities what rules and prescriptions sound diplomacy, in the passage of centuries, has evolved for itself. I wish at the

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same time to lay down certain standards of criticism by which the student of diplomacy may be able to judge what is "good diplomacy" and what is "bad diplomacy." And I hope thereby to indicate to the reader that the art of negotiation requires a combination of certain special qualities which are not always to be found in the ordinary politician, nor even in the ordinary man.

Most writers on diplomatic theory have devoted much space to a discussion of the qualities necessary for a successful negotiator. They are generally agreed that an ambassador, if he is to be successful, should be able to gain the confidence and liking of those exercising authority in the country to which he is accredited. This necessarily entails consideration both of time and of place. A man who might have made an admirable ambassador in the seventeenth century is unlikely to prove anything but a laughing-stock to-day. A man who had been eminently successful at Teheran might prove a ghastly failure if transferred to Washington. These differences are obvious and need not detain us. Yet before I pass to what I should call the permanent qualities of the negotiator it may be interesting to glance for a moment at those other qualities which were once thought necessary and which to-day no longer apply.

In the admirable article upon Diplomacy contributed to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* by Professor

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Alison Phillips, some interesting extracts are given from former manuals defining the qualifications necessary for the ideal diplomatist. Ottaviano Maggi, for instance (whose *De Legato* was published in 1596), contended that an ambassador should be a trained theologian, should be well versed in Aristotle and Plato, and should be able at a moment's notice to solve the most abstruse problems in correct dialectical form : he should also be expert in mathematics, architecture, music, physics and civil and canon law. He should speak and write Latin fluently and must also be proficient in Greek, Spanish, French, German and Turkish. While being a trained classical scholar, a historian, a geographer and an expert in military science, he must also have a cultured taste for poetry. And above all he must be of excellent family, rich, and endowed with a fine physical presence.

More specific qualities were sometimes demanded. Thus we find the Princess of Zerbst, mother of the Empress Catherine of Russia, writing to Frederick the Great advising him to choose as his Ambassador to St. Petersburg a handsome young man with a good complexion ; whereas a capacity for absorbing without derangement vast quantities of intoxicating liquor was considered essential in any envoy to Holland or the German Courts.

These qualifications are no longer regarded as

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absolutely essential by those who nominate candidates for the Diplomatic Examination. It might be said even that the old theory of selecting a certain type of personality for a certain type of post is falling into disrepute and being succeeded by the idea that a man who has proved himself efficient in one country is likely on the whole to be equally efficient in another. Experience has shown that there is much truth in this contention and that intelligence and character are equally effective in Warsaw as they are in Buenos Aires. It is sometimes said, however, that the British Foreign Office press this idea too far and are apt to make their appointments without regard to the psychology of the individual or the conditions of the post to which he is being sent. Such a criticism is, on the whole, unfounded.

It is interesting also to observe that throughout the ages opinions have differed on the question whether intelligence or character, cunning or probity, are the more effective instruments of diplomacy. Even some quite modern diplomatists have sought to justify the diplomatic lie. Thus Prince Bülow contended that Bethmann-Hollweg should have flatly denied that he ever used that unfortunate phrase about "a scrap of paper." Count Szilassy, in his treatise on diplomacy, definitely argues that in certain circumstances it is "patriotic" to tell a deliberate falsehood. Such

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writers are not representative of classic diplomatic theory. Count Szilassy was a very minor diplomatist, whereas Prince Bülow was the most disastrous statesman that even Germany has ever possessed. The general trend of opinion upon the art of negotiation has been markedly in favour of "credit" and "confidence" in preference to deception. Nor is this more enlightened conception merely a product of comparatively recent times.

Monsieur de Callières, for instance, published in 1716 a treatise entitled: "*On the manner of negotiation with Princes ; on the uses of diplomacy ; the choice of ministers and envoys ; and the personal qualities necessary for success in missions abroad.*" This manual, which was regarded as a text-book by eighteenth-century diplomatists, contains many wise and righteous precepts, some of which I shall quote in the pages that follow. For the moment I shall only reproduce the following passage as indicating that, even at a time when Frederick the Great was four years old, the Bülow theory of diplomacy made no appeal to men of common sense.

"The good negotiator," writes de Callières, "will never base the success of his negotiations upon false promises or breaches of faith ; it is an error to suppose, as public opinion supposes, that

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it is necessary for an efficient Ambassador to be a past master in the art of deception ; dishonesty is in fact little more than a proof of the smallness of mind of he who resorts to it, and shows that he is too meagrely equipped to gain his purposes by just and reasonable methods. Doubtless the art of lying has on occasions been successfully practised by diplomatists ; but unlike that honesty which here, as elsewhere, is the best policy, a lie always leaves in its wake a drop of poison. . . . Even the most dazzling diplomatic triumphs which have been gained by deception are based upon insecure foundations. They leave the defeated party with a sense of indignation, a desire to be revenged and a resentment which will always be a danger.

Even were deceit not in itself repugnant to every right-minded person, the negotiator should recollect that he is likely for the rest of his life to be constantly engaged in diplomatic business, and that it is essential for him to establish a reputation for straight and honest dealing so that thereafter men may be ready to trust his word."

II

It will be evident from the above that even in the eighteenth century diplomatists who put down on paper the results of their own experience placed moral integrity in the forefront of the qualities which a successful diplomatist must possess. M.

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Jules Cambon, writing more than two-hundred years after Callières, was of the same opinion.

“It will be seen,” he writes, “that moral influence is the most essential qualification of a diplomatist. He must be a man of the strictest honour if the government to which he is accredited and his own government are to place explicit confidence in his statements.”

If therefore we admit that the ingenious diplomatist is likely to prove the unreliable diplomatist and that the unreliable diplomatist is certain to be a dangerous failure—then we must examine what special virtues, under the general heading of “moral influence,” our ideal diplomatist must either possess or acquire.

First among these virtues is truthfulness. By this is meant, not merely abstention from conscious misstatements, but a scrupulous care to avoid the suggestion of the false or the suppression of the true. A good diplomatist should be at pains not to leave any incorrect impressions whatsoever upon the minds of those with whom he negotiates. If, in perfect good faith, he misleads a foreign minister, or if subsequent information contradicts information which he had previously communicated, he should at once correct the misapprehension, however temporarily convenient it may seem to allow it to remain. Even if we judge negotiation

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by its lowest standards, it is evident that the correction of inaccurate information increases present credit and fortifies future confidence.

Nor should the negotiator for one moment allow himself to agree with Machiavelli that the dishonesty of others justifies any dishonesty in oneself. Baron Sonnino, Italian Foreign Minister in 1918, caused to be carved upon the mantelpiece of his study the motto "*Aliis licet : tibi non licet*,"—"others may : you mayn't." That motto should be borne in mind by all diplomatists.

A similar rule is applicable to those who have to deal with the subtleties of the Oriental mind. A notable British diplomatist, who had long experience in the Far and Middle East, was in the habit of providing younger negotiators appointed to Oriental capitals with the following piece of advice : "Do not waste your time in trying to discover what is at the back of an Oriental's mind ; there may, for all you know, be nothing at the back ; concentrate all your attention upon making quite certain that he is left in no doubt whatsoever in regard to what is at the back of *your* mind."

The principle that truthfulness is essential to any efficient diplomacy is, as I have said above, no very recent discovery. I have already referred to Lord Malmesbury as an example of the old diplomacy and have described his methods. Yet even Lord Malmesbury learnt by experience that duplicity

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simply did not pay. Writing to Lord Camden in 1813, in response to a request for his opinion regarding diplomatic conduct, he expressed himself as follows :

“ It is scarcely necessary to say that no occasion, no provocation, no anxiety to rebut an unjust accusation, no idea—however tempting—of promoting the object you have in view—can *need*, much less justify, a *falsehood*. Success obtained by one is a precarious and baseless success. Detection would ruin, not only your own reputation for ever, but deeply wound the honour of your Court. If, as frequently happens, an indiscreet question, which seems to require a distinct answer, is put to you abruptly by an artful minister, parry it either by treating it as an indiscreet question, or get rid of it by a grave and serious look ; but on no account contradict the assertion flatly if it be true, or admit it as true, if false and of a dangerous tendency.”

III

If truthfulness be the first essential for the ideal diplomatist, the second essential is precision. By this is meant not merely intellectual accuracy, but moral accuracy. The negotiator should be accurate both in mind and soul.

The professional diplomatist is inured, from his earliest days as an attaché, to rules of precision.

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It is the amateur diplomatist who is apt to be slovenly. Even politicians, even cabinet ministers, have been known to overlook the fact that diplomacy, as its name implies, is a written rather than a verbal art and the great high-roads of history are strewn with little shrines of peace which have either been left unfinished, or have collapsed when completed, for the sole reason that their foundations were built on the sands of some verbal misconception. Bjorkoe, Buchlau, Thoiry, Stresa, Munich—these ruined temples should serve as warnings to all young negotiators.

Professional diplomacy is not, as a rule, so liable to imprecision. An ambassador almost invariably receives his instructions in writing; the representations which he thereafter makes to the foreign government are either embodied in a carefully drafted Note or conveyed in a personal interview; in the latter event he is careful, immediately on his return, to record the course of that interview in a despatch to his own government.

It is customary, moreover, when an ambassador has to make to a foreign government a communication of special importance that he should bring with him a short synopsis or *aide-mémoire* of what he is instructed to say. He may read this memorandum out to the foreign minister and he may also leave a copy behind. Conversely, when an ambassador receives from a foreign minister

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some vitally important oral communication, it is a wise precaution on his part to submit to the latter his version of the conversation before reporting it officially to his own government. Failure to take this precaution has led to regrettable incidents in the past. A classic instance of such a misunderstanding is the repudiation by M. Guizot in 1848 of promises made verbally to Lord Normanby (then British Ambassador in Paris) and which the latter had reported in a despatch to London. M. Guizot stated that Lord Normanby had completely misinterpreted his remarks and that he had never made any promises of the nature asserted. He added the wise dictum that the report of a conversation furnished by an ambassador to his home government could only be regarded as authentic and binding if previously submitted for observations to the person whose statements it is supposed to represent.

Yet, although the professional diplomatist is seldom guilty of what I have called "intellectual inaccuracy," his temptation to what I have called "moral inaccuracy" is persistent and extreme.

This moral inaccuracy takes several forms. The experienced diplomatist is well aware that human actions are at the mercy of chance occurrences and that prophecy is always dangerous. He is thus tempted, if not to avoid all predictions, then at least to phrase his forecasts in a Delphic style.

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The spirit, as well as the ingenious diction, of the Sibyl all too often furnish an example for the anxious diplomatist. He prefers to hedge. Justified, though he assuredly is, in avoiding all rash prophecies, as all intemperate statements, yet a diplomatist should not hesitate to inform his government of the direction in which he himself believes local events are likely to develop. The "heads I win, tails you lose" type of despatch may, it is true, enable an ambassador, after the event, to claim prescience by recalling his previous reference either to tails or to heads; yet it is not of deep benefit either to his government or to his own reputation. All too often diplomatists are so afraid of being accused of lack of judgment, that they avoid expressing any judgment at all. In evading these responsibilities they are omitting to perform one of their most desirable duties.

This is perhaps only a negative failing, but if this tendency towards moral imprecision affects an envoy's communications with the government to which he is accredited, then most serious damage may be done. An ambassador is rightly preoccupied with the task of maintaining friendly relations with the authorities with whom he has to deal. At times this preoccupation becomes excessive. It not infrequently occurs that a diplomatist, when instructed by his government to make a communication which he knows will cause irrita-

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tion and pain, so waters down his instructions that an inaccurate and flaccid impression of their purport is conveyed.

Even if he be sufficiently loyal and conscientious to carry out the strict letter of his instructions, he is sometimes tempted, in order to avoid giving offence, to accompany the delivery of these instructions with such intonation of voice, such conciliation of gesture, as to imply that he himself does not really agree with the intimation which he has been instructed to make. These temptations, and their attendant symptoms, will be referred to again under the heading of "loyalty."

IV

A third quality which is essential to the ideal diplomatist is the quality of calm. Not only must the negotiator avoid displaying irritation when confronted by the stupidity, dishonesty, brutality or conceit of those with whom it is his unpleasant duty to negotiate ; but he must eschew all personal animosities, all personal predilections, all enthusiasms, prejudices, vanities, exaggerations, dramatizations, and moral indignations. The well-known epigram of Talleyrand, when asked to give advice to a young diplomatist, would be echoed by all experienced negotiators : "*Et surtout pas trop de zèle,*" "And above everything, do not allow yourself to become excited about your work."

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The impassivity which characterizes the ideal diplomatist may render him much disliked by his friends. In fact the manner of suspended judgment, of sceptical tolerance, of passionless detachment which denotes the trained diplomatist, is often taken by outside observers to suggest that he is conceited, lazy, stupid, or very very ill.

The quality of calm, as applied to the ideal diplomatist, should express itself in two major directions. In the first place he should be good-tempered, or at least he should be able to keep his ill-temper under perfect control. In the second place he should be quite exceptionally patient.

The occasions on which diplomatists have lost their tempers are remembered with horror by generations of their successors. Napoleon lost his temper with Metternich in the Marcolini Palace at Dresden on June 26, 1813, and flung his hat upon the carpet with the most unfortunate results. Sir Charles Euan Smith lost his temper with the Sultan of Morocco and tore up a treaty in the imperial presence. Count Tattenbach lost his temper at the Algeiras Conference and exposed his country to a grave diplomatic humiliation. Herr Stinnes lost his temper at Spa.

Patience and perseverance are also essential to any successful negotiator. M. Paul Cambon—one of the most successful diplomatists in modern history and French Ambassador in London for

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over twenty years—was a miracle of patience. He arrived in England at a time when Franco-British relations were strained almost to breaking point. When he left it, we were firm allies. Throughout those twenty years M. Paul Cambon waited. He was always conciliatory; he was invariably discreet; he was the soul of loyalty; and he was always there. His extraordinary capacity for seizing the right moment, his delicate “sense of occasion,” the extreme dignity of his manner, rendered him by 1914 a man who was universally trusted and universally esteemed. Similar patience has not always been displayed by the envoys of other nations who have wished to secure some rapid triumph and to return home quickly bearing some brilliant result. All too often these impatient ambassadors have frightened the British bull-dog away from its bone.

The brother of Paul Cambon—M. Jules Cambon, French Ambassador in Berlin—in his attractive study of *The Diplomatist* puts patience among the first of diplomatic virtues. “Patience,” he writes, “is an indispensable quality for the successful negotiator. The wind is bound to be contrary at times, and then one has to tack to get into port.” And he then proceeds to cite as an instance of patience and perseverance his own negotiations with Kiderlen-Wacchter before the war.

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V

A diplomatist may be truthful, accurate, calm, patient and good-tempered, but he is not an ideal diplomatist unless he be also modest. The dangers of vanity in a negotiator can scarcely be exaggerated. It tempts him to disregard the advice or opinions of those who may have had longer experience of a country, or of a problem, than he possesses himself. It renders him vulnerable to the flattery or the attacks of those with whom he is negotiating. It encourages him to take too personal a view of the nature and purposes of his functions and in extreme cases to prefer a brilliant but undesirable triumph to some unostentatious but more-prudent compromise. It leads him to boast of his victories and thereby to incur the hatred of those whom he has vanquished. It may prevent him, at some crucial moment, from confessing to his government that his predictions or his information were incorrect. It prompts him to incur or to provoke unnecessary friction over matters which are of purely social importance. It may cause him to offend by ostentation, snobbishness or ordinary vulgarity. It is at the root of all indiscretion and of most tactlessness. It lures its addicts into displaying their own verbal brilliance, and into such fatal diplomatic indulgences as irony, epigrams, insinuations, and the barbed reply. It may pre-

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vent an ambassador from admitting even to himself that he does not know Turkish, Persian, Chinese and Russian sufficiently to enable him, in any important matter, to dispense with the services of an interpreter. It may induce that terrible and frequent illusion of the professional diplomatist that his own post is the centre of the diplomatic universe and that the Foreign Office is both blind and obstinate in ignoring his advice. It may betray him, when entertaining visiting politicians or journalists, to speak with disloyalty and cleverness about his own foreign secretary. And it may bring in its train those other vices of imprecision, excitability, impatience, emotionalism and even untruthfulness. Of all diplomatic faults (and they are many) personal vanity is assuredly the most common and the most disadvantageous.

Among the misfortunes into which personal vanity drives the frail spirit of man there is one which has a more specific bearing upon the practice of negotiation. It is self-satisfaction. It leads first to a loss of adaptability, and second to a decline in imagination.

Diplomatists, especially those who are appointed to, and liable to remain in, smaller posts, are apt to pass by slow gradations from ordinary human vanity to an inordinate sense of their own importance. The whole apparatus of diplomatic life—the ceremonial, the court functions, the large

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houses, the lacqueys and the food—induces an increasing sclerosis of personality. Such people, as they become older, incline to a slowness of speech, movement and perception which is almost akin to pompousness. The type of M. de Norpois is not, it is true, a common type in modern diplomacy. But, if it is unfair to take him as a sample, it is wise to regard him as a warning.

It is this rigidity of spirit which, as it settles upon the less gifted diplomatist, deprives him of his adaptability. He fails to respond with his former elasticity to conditions of which he disapproves or to ideas with which he is not familiar. This fault is of course common to all those who surrender themselves without a struggle to late middle age. Yet in a diplomatist it entails a real diminution of efficiency, since adaptability—or the power of putting oneself in another's place—is an essential element in successful negotiation.

Let me once again quote Callières :

“ It is essential that a negotiator should be able to divest himself of his own opinion in order to place himself in the position of the Prince with whom he is negotiating. He should be able, that is, to adopt the other's personality, and to enter into his views and inclinations. And he should thus say to himself—‘ If I were in the place of that Prince, endowed with equal power, governed

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by identical prejudices and passions, what effect would my own representations make upon myself? ”

With loss of adaptability comes loss of imagination. In a young diplomatist, imagination is often a snare. “ *Pas de fantaisie* ” was the advice given (fruitlessly we may suppose) by the elder Bülow to his more famous son. Yet, if an older diplomatist loses his gift of imagination, he becomes all keel and ballast without sail. He fails to respond to the new winds which may blow from his own country, or to the squalls which may arise suddenly in the country where he is stationed. He becomes so satisfied with himself that he loses his former interest in the psychology of others. And since psychological alertness is one of the most vital factors in negotiation, a diplomatist who becomes lethargic in such matters has passed the period of usefulness.

Let me conclude this chapter with the seventh great virtue of the ideal diplomatist. It is the virtue of loyalty.

The professional diplomatist is governed by several different, and at times conflicting, loyalties. He owes loyalty to his own sovereign, government, minister and foreign office ; he owes loyalty to his own staff ; he owes a form of loyalty to the diplomatic body in the capital where he resides ; he owes loyalty to the local British colony and its

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commercial interests ; and he owes another form of loyalty to the government to which he is accredited and to the minister with whom he negotiates.

There is always a tendency among diplomatists who have resided for long in foreign countries, and who have perhaps fallen out of contact with their own people and with their own foreign office, to find that their loyalties become a trifle blurred. They are apt either to love the country in which they reside with a sentimental passion which blinds them to all its vices, or else to loathe it with an intensity which is impervious to all its virtues. Alternatively they may have become so impressed by the doctrine that the function of an ambassador is to create " good relations " with a foreign government, that they confuse the end with the means, and see " good relations " not as part of their functions but as the sole purpose of their activity. Their intense concentration upon the work of their own mission may blind them to the fact that their own country does in fact possess missions in other capitals as well, and that the only central authority which is in possession of all sources of information and which is able to balance correctly the diplomatic position in one country against that in another, is the Foreign Office at home. Personal antipathy to some foreign colleague may diminish their readiness to co-operate with that colleague even when co-operation is the policy of the two countries

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which they represent. Old traditions, old rivalries even, may make it obnoxious to them to execute full-heartedly some new policy which a Foreign Secretary may advocate. And occasionally, even, personal friction with his staff may divert the attention of an envoy from the more serious business of his mission.

To all such poisons which may attack the negotiator there is one sovereign antidote. That antidote is loyalty above all to the government whom he serves.

I have previously indicated how easy it is for a diplomatist who finds himself in disagreement with the policy of his government to indicate that disagreement without violating the strict letter of his instructions. Yet even if he "assents with civil leer" he should know full well that his attitude is in fact an act of silent disloyalty.

A more subtle and unconscious disloyalty may intrude into the reports which he himself sends home. Even Callières warned the diplomatist against the temptation of telling his own government what they would *like* to hear, rather than what they *ought* to know. The most honourable envoy is liable to slide into this temptation without realizing that by so doing he is in fact committing an act of disloyalty towards his own government, who should be told the bitter truth.

Yet how tempting it is, for a diplomatist abroad,

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while not departing from veracity, to make the most of all favourable fact! He knows that his despatches will reach Downing Street or the Quai d'Orsay at the same time as other despatches from other capitals. He also knows that the Foreign Office officials who have to read and minute these despatches are overwhelmed with work and burdened with anxiety. He knows that (human nature being as it is) a comforting despatch arouses feelings of pleasure, whereas a disturbing despatch causes pangs of pain. Inevitably the harassed official who finds upon his table six despatches coming from six different countries is distressed by sharp criticisms of inertia at home or gloomy forebodings of trouble in the future. He turns with relief from the despatch of Sir Charles X . . . (who writes, "Unless you take urgent and immediate action complete catastrophe will result") to the despatch of Sir Henry Y . . . (who writes, "Owing to the vigour and foresight manifested by His Majesty's Government the situation is now completely in hand; you may leave everything to me, I need no further instructions").

Inevitably the harassed official comes to the conclusion that Sir Charles X . . . is "cantankerous and wrong-headed," whereas Sir Henry Y . . . is "definitely a reliable man." And here again François Callières, so long ago as 1716, uttered his warning.

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These, then, are the qualities of my ideal diplomatist. Truth, accuracy, calm, patience, good temper, modesty and loyalty. They are also the qualities of an ideal diplomacy.

“But,” the reader may object, “you have forgotten intelligence, knowledge, discernment, prudence, hospitality, charm, industry, courage and even tact.” I have not forgotten them. I have taken them for granted.