

# FROM THE FRENCH CAPITAL

## PRESTIGE IN TUNIS AND AFFAIRS AT HOME.

SIGNS OF A NORTH AFRICA REACTION—BISMARCK'S HAND IN THE LATE PROCEEDINGS—SCRUTIN DE LISTE AND MINISTERIAL CHANGES.

PARIS, June 3.—The time has not yet come for philosophical appreciations of that campaign against the Kroumirs which has aroused the ire of Italian politicians and British newspaper writers. When it does there will be some curious and edifying revelations about foreign intrigues in North Africa. Public opinion here exaggerated the military promenade made by the French troops, in one sense, and undervalued its importance in another. As a military operation, it seems to the uninitiated an insignificant affair, because there have been no brilliant feats of arms to be recorded; whereas the mission of the French Generals was to take precautionary measures against an enemy incapable of serious resistance, but whom it was necessary to intimidate. The English press may say that an expedition against the rebellious tribes whose aggressions upon the French frontier have been a subject of complaint in Algeria since 1871, was merely a pretext for the assumption of a claim to meddle in Tunisian domestic affairs. It was rather that last feather by which the camel's back was broken, and by all who will not designedly refuse to accept evidence it must be admitted that the French Government did not act one day too soon. The Kroumir outbreak, if it had been isolated, was unimportant; those undisciplined barbarians could have been chastised easily and effectually by the border garrisons. That outbreak was merely a part of the general insurrectionary plan against French domination in Africa, which, fomented by Italian emissaries, threatened to extend to all the Arab tribes. The Kroumirs are not more formidable than the Ouled-Hamïa or the Ouled-Cheraga, but the latter are in the interior; for them there can be no communication with foreign traders, from whom they can obtain the arms and ammunition, without which no insurrection can be serious; whereas the former held the region extending to the sea-coast, and, via Tabarca and Bizerte, could be supplied at any time with the necessary war material allowed to pass free by the Tunisian Customs. It was for this reason that the French have occupied, and will continue to occupy, the Mediterranean ports, in spite of the grotesque outcry about usurpation uttered by those speculators who, having succeeded in selling powder and muskets to the Kafirs and the Zulus to be used against their fellow-countrymen, think it an outrage because any foreigners will presume to interfere with their traffic. What did Birmingham care whether the conflagration spread, and the French colony was wasted with fire and sword? or, rather, was it not to the interest of Birmingham that it should spread, as the longer and more general was the trouble the more commercial enterprise would profit, all of which might be some sort of compensation for French non-compliance with English demands about ad valorem duties.

The French Government was well informed on all this machination, and the greatest mistake of which it has been guilty is the postponement of a settlement until the situation became so critical that a further delay of 30 days would have so compromised French prestige in her own colony that 100,000 men might have been needed to restore things to the *statu quo ante*. Even as it is anxiety is fully justified. The Ouled-Sidi-Cheikh and their allies did obtain arms and ammunition before they were cut off from their base of supplies. Their emissaries, with Mussulman agents from Morocco, are industriously working upon the native populations in the Tell and in the Province of Oran, among whom they circulate stories of French defeats in Tunisia, and repeat the old prediction that, after 50 years' dominion in Africa, Allah would expel the infidel invaders. Given the hatred of Mohammedans for Christians, these reports and excitations find credence and sympathy, and as the crops have failed and the cattle died from the want of pasture and water—as the Arabs have nothing to lose—the first genuine check sustained by the French will be the signal for a general rising in which the *goums* of the so-called friendly tribes will make common cause with their co-religionaries. At no time since the conquest has the French prestige in Algeria been more seriously threatened. Col. Innocenti's column lost heavily in a recent encounter with the rebels, who, although beaten, are so little discouraged that they have renewed their attacks with such vigor as to force the expedition to retreat northward of Géryville, which important outpost of the colony is left to be defended by its ordinary garrison. The War Department vouchsafes no explanation of this movement, but that it is considered to be of moment may be judged from the fact that 10 battalions of infantry, 12 squadrons, and 15 cannon have been dispatched in hot haste from Algiers to reinforce the Cerez division, which operates to the south of Oran. If, as a good many shrewd French politicians affirm publicly, Prince Bismark was the prime instigator, through his Italian tools, of the Tunisian imbroglio, with the object of keeping the French too busy at home to be able to meddle with Continental affairs, he has entirely succeeded, as months must pass before the pacification of the southern coast of the Mediterranean becomes an accomplished fact.

Still, except in political circles not entirely engrossed by questions of local interest, the mass of the nation shows nothing but indifference, not only to the situation in the colony, but to all foreign relations in general. The press was virtuously indignant at Italy's ingratitude, and objurgated her statesmen and journalists with justifiable acrimony. But they are very forgiving in France, and, now that the Italian newspapers have become a trifle less vituperative and another Cabinet has struggled into existence—it may be upset before my letter reaches New-York—are ready to hold out the olive branch and float the 600,000,000 loan, just as if there had never been any quarrel between the "sister nations." Apropos of the financial operation, of which the first fruits will be an increase of the Army and Navy of Italy, it is asserted that the French Government has withdrawn its embargo on the emission by way of compromise. The Quirinal will cease to oppose the French protectorate over Sidi Mohammed on condition that MM. de Rothschild shall have full liberty to solicit French capital. For the credit of M. Jules Ferry's Cabinet, it is to be hoped that this tale may be unfounded, although when we remember that the French Minister of Foreign Affairs has admitted the authorship of an article in defense of German policy, published by a German political magazine, anything, however inconsistent and undignified, is possible. There will be an interpellation in the Chamber on this incident and the probable eviction of the offending minister as its consequence as soon as the Senate shall have voted on the *Scrutin de Liste* bill, to which it is thought to be in a majority hostile. If it rejects the bill, this rejection will be set down to the underhand influence of Messrs. Ferry, Grévy, and Barthélemy St. Hilaire, and, in that case, as the Senate has not enough backbone to support those gentlemen against the expression of the Chamber's want of confidence, the entire Ministry may be dismissed. Such, indeed, I have reason to believe are the tactics of the majority of the national representation. Gambetta is decided that in the next Chamber the number of his supporters shall be overwhelming. With the Bardoux measure this result would be a ministerial crisis, which he desires to avoid if possible; but if the Senate should prove intractable, the same aim will be accomplished by the installation of such a ministerial combination as is disposed to follow instructions from the Palais Bourbon. The reactionary newspapers are trying to make as much trouble as they can out of this apparent conflict of powers, but their game is too well known to succeed. The Republic has worked very satisfactorily for 10 years; the tradesmen and the rural population find that they are more prosperous than they ever were under a régime of which one of the greatest elements of strength is that there is positively nothing to put in its place. Of the so-called "directing classes"—a misnomer, I think, of M. Constans—no one need say anything; how little they have to do with political direction was demonstrated at last Sunday's election. In point of fact, the aristocrats don't care to direct, and are quite satisfied when they have signed an address to his Majesty *in partibus*, the Count of Chambord, or have lia-

tened to a mass for the repose of the souls of Napoleon III. and the poor boy who was a victim to his own stupidity in Zulu-land. Amusement is the sole object of aristocratic preoccupations, and, if enough of that be procurable, white and tri-colored pretenders must expect nothing more than platonic protestations of allegiance on their birthdays.

The weather has grown too warm for the theatre, where nothing now is given but pieces which are so emphatically and essentially "played out" that none but foreigners and provincials can be tempted inside, even by free tickets. Yet, as the Grand Prix is still a week hence, and no one can go away from Paris until after that final opportunity to show off the last sweet things in gowns and bonnets, society has elected to have *ricevimenti* in the day-time and to go to the Bessedelièvre concerts at night with, on Saturdays only, the circus, followed now and then, if people are unusually festive, by an excursion to Mabilly. You see that if society had not some place wherein to exchange gossip, it would die of inanition and, as a consequence, the patronage of afternoon teas and musical promenades is extended and reputations are dissected most unscrupulously and spitefully, whether the subject anatomically reviewed belongs to the monde, the demi-monde, or the intermediate stratum known as trade and finance. Mme. de Kaula, of the Cissey-Westyne scandal, was a very interesting theme for a while, but society had been disappointed twice in its pilgrimage to the Palais de Justice, where the Baroness, having been sued by her linendraper for declining to pay for her clothes, compromised without public demonstration. This indisposed society against Mme. de Kaula, whose difficulty with the Viennese, M. Klein, about a five hundred franc parasol handle, did not concern people.