

The Times
July 7, 1881

TUNIS.

SIR H. WOLFF asked the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether, in the treaty between England and Tunis of October 5, 1662, there is not the following provision:—"Article 8. Le Consul ou tout autre Anglais résident à Tunis ne sera forcé de s'adresser à aucune autre cour de justice qu'au Dey lui-même par lequel seul justice lui sera rendue;" whether the same stipulation does not occur in Article 8 of the treaty of the 13th August, 1716; whether analogous provisions do not exist in the treaties of other Powers which are still in force; and whether in consequence the privilege of access to the Bey is not a privilege and immunity conferred by treaty on Her Majesty's Agent and Consul-General and confirmed by Articles 11 and 5 of the treaty of 1875.

SIR O. DILKE.—The treaties of 1662 and 1716 were abrogated by the treaty of 1875, which was substituted for all existing previous treaties and in which the article in question was not repeated. I may, however, point out to the hon. member that even if this article were still in force, it would give no "privilege of access" to the Consul any more than to any other British subject who might present himself before the Bey for the purpose of seeking justice; and its effect is entirely annulled by the 24th article of the Treaty of 1875.

SIR H. WOLFF said the right hon. baronet had not stated whether analogous provisions did not exist in the treaties of other Powers which were still in force.

SIR C. DILKE.—I shall be glad if the hon. member would state what those treaties are. I have on four or five occasions informed the House that the most careful search has failed to find any article of the kind in any treaty, and Lord Granville has made a statement to this effect in another place. That statement has been elaborately contradicted, especially in a letter in *The Times*; but in none of these contradictions have articles in treaties been quoted to upset the statement.

ITALY AND TUNIS.

LORD R. CHURCHILL asked the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether it was a fact that the Italian Government had refused to recognize the French Protectorate in Tunis, and the appointment of M. Roustan as intermediary for their official communications with the Government of the Bey; and whether the Italian Government had more than once since the commencement of the French hostilities against Tunis pressed Her Majesty's Government to act in concert with them, particularly with respect to the appointment of M. Roustan; and what answer Her Majesty's Government had made to those proposals.

SIR C. DILKE.—It is not the fact, so far as Her Majesty's Government are aware, that the Italian Government have refused to recognize the French Protectorate in Tunis, or the appointment of M. Roustan. The Italian Government have inquired of Her Majesty's Government through the Italian Ambassador in London what are the views of Her Majesty's Government on certain questions arising out of the position of France in Tunis, and Lord Granville has, in reply, informed his Excellency of the communications which Her Majesty's Ambassador in Paris has been instructed to make to the French Government on these questions. (Hear, hear.)

BRITISH TRADE WITH TUNIS.

LORD R. CHURCHILL asked the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he would lay upon the table a return showing the number of British colonists and the extent of British trade at Susa, Monastir, Medhia, Sfax, and Gabes, in the territory of Tunis; also a return giving the same information with respect to Tripoli and Bengazi.

SIR C. DILKE.—I do not know whether the noble lord has read the reports furnished yearly by Her Majesty's Consular officers in Tunis and Tripoli, but these give all the information which Her Majesty's Government are able to supply.

BOMBARDMENT OF SFAX.

LORD R. CHURCHILL asked the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he had reason to believe that the French Government had any intention to proceed to a bombardment of Sfax, or to take any hostile measures towards the town and people of Sfax; and whether they would intimate to the French Government that any damage to British property arising out of such hostile measures would entitle the owners thereof to full compensation to be demanded by the Government.

SIR C. DILKE.—As a French Consul and several French naval officers appear to have been attacked and wounded at Sfax, it is possible that such measures as the noble lord contemplates may be taken by France. It is not usual to make beforehand any such intimation as the noble lord suggests, and if the occasion arises Her Majesty's Government will, of course, strictly follow the precedents in similar cases of destruction of neutral property.

FRANCE AND TUNIS.

The EARL of BEOTIVE asked the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether his attention had been called to a statement in the public Press that M. Roustan directed not only the Foreign Office of Tunis, but also all the Government Departments, and that claims by the municipality and other bodies against Europeans and other bodies were made by M. Roustan; whether he could inform the House what guarantees for the protection of British interests existed under such a system; and whether he was aware that in one of the aforesaid capacities M. Roustan had adjudged a portion of ground adjoining the English Church, and secured in perpetuity to the British colony by an ancient deed of the Beys of Tunis, to a French subject who never set up any claim to the land prior to the French occupation.

SIR C. DILKE.—I have already on several occasions stated to the House that questions arising out of the twofold nature of the functions discharged by M. Roustan were under the consideration of Her Majesty's Government, and were the subject of communications with the Government of France. These communications will be laid before Parliament. We have not received any information respecting the ground adjoining the English Church. I must be allowed to point out that a question of this nature requires a search through the papers in the French and Turkish departments of the Foreign Office, and may require consultation with the Secretary of State and the Permanent Under-Secretary. This question was placed upon the paper at the close of the sitting of last night, and

reached me for the first time at half-past 11 o'clock this morning. I may add that it is not always possible to accept, without inquiry, the statements of fact in the questions relating to Tunis of the noble lord, for one which he put to me on Thursday last has been the subject of correspondence between myself and the principal gentleman named in it, and I am assured that, as far as he is concerned, there is no foundation for the statements referred to. (Hear, hear.)

The EARL of BECTIVE gave notice that he would repeat his question on another occasion, as some of his information rested on unimpeachable authority that would lead the hon. baronet to modify what he had just said. (Hear, hear.)

INSURRECTION IN TUNIS.

The EARL of BECTIVE asked the Secretary to the Admiralty whether Her Majesty's Government, in consideration of the probability of the present serious insurrection caused by the French invasion spreading to the immediate neighbourhood of the city of Tunis, intended sending some ships of war to Goletta in place of those sent towards Tripoli in order to protect British subjects resident in Tunis and its neighbourhood.

Mr. TREVELYAN.—The Condor has been ordered back to Goletta. It is evident that the danger of which the noble lord is apprehensive is not regarded as imminent, because the French have no ship at Tunis of a larger class than the Condor. The fleet under Sir Beauchamp Seymour is cruising within four days' call, and, if further occasion arises, more ironclads will be sent. (Hear, hear.)