

The French Government is beginning to discern the magnitude of the task it undertook in assuming the protectorate of Tunis. As the experience of Algeria has abundantly proved, the introduction of European civilization among the Arab tribes of North Africa is a very troublesome and tedious process. It was only the other day that the refractory Kroumirs seemed to vanish into space before the advance of the French battalions, and a military promenade seemed all that was necessary to induce the Bey to accept the French Republic as his guardian and M. ROUSTAN as his Minister. The bulk of the troops was recalled, and France was enriched with a new dependency. Suddenly all is changed, and exultation has given place to anxiety. It was always likely that the tribes in the interior of Tunis would prove refractory if any serious attempt were made to interfere with them; but the French Government seems to have believed that no trouble was to be anticipated in the towns on the coast. This belief has now been rudely dispelled. Sfax is in revolt, and the latest accounts which reach us announce that the town was bombarded on the evening of Tuesday. We have received no details as yet of the results of the bombardment; but it is probable that it will be effective in quelling resistance on the spot and in the immediate neighbourhood. What its effect may be, however, on the temper and attitude of the Arab tribes in general is a good deal more uncertain. The condition of Algeria is full of disquietude, and though there is probably no direct connexion between the revolt in the Oranais and the disturbances at Sfax, yet the fact that behind the fringe of European civilization that runs along the northern coast of Africa there lies a vast network of untamed tribes whose love of independence is quickened by fanatical hatred of the Frank is well calculated to inspire anxiety. No

one, of course, can question the power of France to hold her position in Algeria, and, if need be, to reduce the refractory tribes in Tunis to submission. But no one who wishes well to France can care to see her resources squandered in a series of petty African wars, or her civilizing mission degenerate into a career of exhausting and profitless conquest.

We fear it must be admitted that the whole progress of France in Africa has been little better than a succession of costly delusions. The occupation of Algeria was first undertaken by CHARLES X. in order to divert public attention from political discontent at home, and its final subjugation was accomplished only at tremendous cost. More than once since Algeria first became a French colony have the French people and their rulers entertained the idea of extension in Africa and the conversion of the Mediterranean into a French lake, as the phrase ran. To absorb Morocco on the one side and Tunis on the other was the policy of LOUIS PHILIPPE, though it was frustrated by the resolute opposition of LORD

PALMERSTON. This policy, or, at any rate, that portion of it which concerns Tunis, is now once more in the ascendant. From motives quite as much connected with domestic politics as with the interests of African civilization, France has now taken the step she has been contemplating, with more or less persistency and eagerness, ever since she first set foot in Africa. It still remains to be seen, however, whether the acquisition of Tunis will prove any more to her advantage than the original conquest of Algeria. It is already clear that the work to be accomplished is not to be all of that profitable and benevolent character which was described with so muchunction in the despatches of M. ST. HILAIRE. The development of commerce and civilization, the reconstruction of the ancient aqueducts of Tunis, the spread of railways and telegraphs throughout the Regency, must now wait until it is possible for the pioneers of French enterprise to move about the interior without the escort of the soldiers of the Republic. We need not attach too much importance to the disaffection actually displayed at Sfax or at Souk-el-Arba, nor can we doubt that the French will find it comparatively

easy to re-establish and maintain order in the various towns along the coast. But this is not at all what was contemplated when the Government of the Republic undertook the protectorate of Tunis. France was to acquire a new and fertile province by the simple expedient of substituting its own authority for that of the Bey. A new field was to be open to French enterprise and capital, and all the frontier troubles were to disappear with the reduction of the convenient Kroumirs. The French Government was to meet the electors with all the *prestige* of a successful expedition, reflecting abundant credit on the national arms and promising a grateful solace to the national vanity. Thus a Government not very remarkable for strength and popular respect allowed itself to be led with a light heart into a serious adventure without fully counting the cost. What was meant to be a brilliant political stroke, resulting in a profitable annexation, now turns out to be something very different indeed. If Tunis is to be annexed, it must first be subdued, and this with Algeria in a condition which causes grave and increasing anxiety. There were some both in England and France who foresaw what was likely to happen from the first. M. PAUL LEROY-BEAULIEU, in the *Journal des Débats*, insists that the whole coast of Tunis, from Biserta to the island of Djerba, should have been strongly occupied, and that the French army of occupation should not have been so speedily withdrawn. But it is more than probable that if this necessity had been foreseen from the outset the French Government, and, still more, the French people, would have thought twice before entering upon the undertaking. The season was certainly ill-chosen if a serious expedition against the tribes of the interior of Tunis had been contemplated. What was evidently looked for was that the submission of the Bey would be followed by the submission of his nominal subjects, and that Tunis would be annexed at the cost of an imposing military parade.

It would be idle to deny that the recent developments of French policy in Africa have been watched by all parties in this country with serious misgiving. It was not because Englishmen discerned a menace to their own national interests in the virtual annexation of Tunis by France that they regretted and deprecated the step, still less because they suspected a disposition on the part of France to reopen the Eastern Question by entertaining designs upon Tripoli, but because their own experience has taught them what the French might have learnt in Algeria, that in the subjugation of Mussulman races it is by no means the first step which is the most difficult. We have deprecated the forward policy of France partly because, while indifferent on the score of English interests to its immediate consequences in Tunis, we have been mindful of its possible effects in the future on the balance of power in the Mediterranean, and partly because we have all along foreseen that France was entering on an adventure likely in the long run to be a good deal more prejudicial to French interests themselves than to those of any other Power. We will not say that our forecast has already been justified by events; but it is clear that the French are discovering that the task they have undertaken is a good deal more formidable than was anticipated only a few weeks ago. We cannot doubt that the true wisdom of the French Government in present circumstances will be to minimize the extent of its influence in Tunis—to hold the coast, and gradually to develop its commercial intercourse, but to leave the interior of the country, as far as possible, in the hands of the BEY. The attempt to subdue the tribes of the interior by force of arms would not only be unwise in itself, as unduly straining resources which it is the true policy of France to husband with anxious forethought, but might easily raise questions concerning the Turkish

frontier and the territory lying beyond it which would be regarded with no little anxiety in Europe. The direct interests of England in this direction are perfectly clear and well-understood. More than once in the present century England has been invited to take Egypt, as the country in which her Mediterranean and Eastern interests are chiefly centred, and our reasons for declining the offer have been precisely those which we have urged on France in deprecation of the annexation of Tunis. We have no desire to increase our responsibilities so long as our vital interests are secure, and the embarrassments which France is now encountering in Northern Africa certainly do not induce us to regret the abstinence which we have consistently recommended and practised.

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