

The Times
July 10, 1881

TUNIS.

TUNIS, JULY 10.

The action of the French in dealing with the insurrection on the coast is severely criticized. Only one acquainted with this country is aware that the district near Sfax and Kairwan is inhabited by Arabs who are very fanatical. There is no reality in the statement that they were incited to rebel from Tripoli. They showed signs of rebellion from the moment that the French troops entered Tunisian territory, and it is inexplicable that measures were not taken for securing quietness and safety to the Europeans in that district before the French troops were withdrawn from the country. Now it will be far more difficult to suppress the insurrection, and the French have again committed a gross and inexcusable blunder before Sfax. They are bombarding the town without having an adequate force available for occupying it. All the troops they have there consist of 600 men, with two pieces of artillery, and they dare not land the Tunisian troops, who may refuse to fight against their co-religionists. The officer commanding the troops off Sfax himself declared that he had not a sufficient force to effect a landing. The bombardment may, therefore, lead to the destruction of European property by the Arabs. The insurrection has assumed such large proportions that unless put down with a strong hand the consequences all over the Regency may be very serious. The mere occupation of Sfax will have no effect on the insurgents.

I have just had the opportunity of inspecting the papers referring to the sale of the property about which I telegraphed yesterday. There is no doubt that the contract for the sale had been concluded, but was afterwards cancelled, owing to the interference of the French authorities, who declared to the purchaser that the sale would only be valid if approved of by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A French ironclad from Greece, *La Galissonnière*, has just arrived off Goletta.

Telegraphic communication with the coast is again restored, but no reliable news has been received at any of the coast towns. From Sfax it is reported that the bombarding continues, but the landing of troops has not yet been effected. This afternoon some French troops will be embarked at Goletta for Sfax. The only person who can identify the Maltese who made a threatening gesture at the officer who was shot at Manouba is a French soldier who has left for France. It appears strange that the only witness by whose evidence it is hoped to trace the murderer should have been allowed to leave the country.

An official telegram from Mehdia announces that a French steamer has left Sfax for Tunis and that she brings back the 1,500 Tunisian troops that had previously been conveyed there. The authorities did not land them, as it was clear that they would not fight against the Arabs, but this was evident to every one before they had left for Sfax.

Up to last night the insurgents had not surrendered, and the French troops off Sfax were insufficient to effect a landing. The forts had been dismantled, and the Arab portion of the town partially destroyed. Some damage was also done to the European buildings.

[A portion of the above appeared in part of our First and in our Second Edition of yesterday.]

MEHDIA, JULY 10.

The town is now quiet, but the insurgent tribes are within 15 miles of Mehdia, and a rising is imminent in several villages at a short distance from here. The Arabs are watching the movement at Sfax with great interest, and a rising may take place all along the coast. The insurgents are elated by the continued successful resistance.

PARIS, JULY 11.

General Logerot arrived to-day at Goletta, to take the command of all the troops in Tunis. The vessel which arrived there yesterday from Sfax states that the Arabs had erected intrenchments on the beach with banks of sand, behind which several guns of heavy calibre attempted to answer the French fire, but these intrenchments had been knocked to pieces, and the guns dismantled. According to the Tunis correspondent of the *Temps*, the insurgents at and around Sfax number 15,000. They are not discouraged, and restore at night what the French destroy in the daytime, whereas the French ought to employ the electric light, and keep up the bombardment all night. On the insurgents replying to the French fire, the Tunisian soldiers who had been conveyed by the French to repress the insurrection uttered shouts of joy and encouraged the insurgents. "It would be imprudent to land them; their presence is an encumbrance, and the best thing would be to send them back to Tunis, shooting a few of them for an example. It is impossible to reckon on these fanatics as soldiers. Remark that it is we who are feeding them, and that they have never been so well treated." On Friday the French, though not very numerous, attempted a landing, but had to abandon it in view of crowds of Arabs collected from all directions. The Arabs have had a large number killed, whereas not a Frenchman has been shot, though the Arabs have kept up a steady fire. A Monastir telegram mentions that the Tunisian troops had been taken back to Goletta.

The French Fleet has left Toulon for Sfax, whence it will proceed to Gabes and remain there till tranquility is restored.

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