

## THE FRENCH IN TUNIS.

The French troops and ships of war are completing the conquest of the Regency of Tunis; and the seaport town of Sfax, in the Gulf of Gabes, on the eastern coast, has been captured by bombardment and by assault. The Gulf of Gabes, anciently the Lesser Syrtis, which is a wide indentation of the North African coast between Tunis and Tripoli, is navigable to the ports of Gabes and Sfax. The name of Sfax would seem to be Greek, but the Arab name for cucumbers, which are much grown and exported here, is "Sfakon." The town has sixteen thousand inhabitants, and is divided into two sections, both of which are within the outer wall, and this is embattled and castellated in the antique style. The Mussulman part of the town is on a height; and from the karbash or citadel there is a wide panoramic view over the city and gardens, and the surrounding country, as far as the Gulf of Gabes and the Kerkennah Islands. The Frankish or European town is below, and is protected by two batteries. Sfax is wanting in the chief luxury of an African town—the wells; and its water supply is derived from cisterns, which are kept up by the householders chiefly at their own expense. There are, however, at a short distance outside the gates, two other great cisterns, and nearer to the walls a huge inclosure, containing hundreds of cisterns, made and kept up by the endowments left for that purpose by charitable persons.

Since the French invasion of the northern and western parts of the country ruled by the Bey of Tunis, there had been symptoms of restlessness among the interior tribes, and at Sfax this was evinced to a degree which excited forebodings. The warlike Mussulman devotees assembled and applied for a watchword to the Tripoli sects, who assured them that the Turkish troops would come to their aid. This increased the excitement, and it was easy to read in the natives' faces their threatening disposition. No European ventured into the suburbs, where robberies and murders were frequent. On the 28th ult. the officers of the French gun-boat *Chacal*, who had just landed, were being shown over the town by M. Mattei, the French Vice-Consul, when some Arabs, evidently obeying a signal, issued forth, armed with pistols and other weapons. The *Chacal's* officers, seeing that a conflict was imminent, wishing to save the French Vice-Consul's family, rushed to his house and begged them to make for the boats, which they immediately did. There were several ladies, and the Arabs pursued them, but aimed especially at M. Mattei, who received several blows, one of them almost breaking his left arm. An officer was also struck. The ladies, having dashed into the water to escape their pursuers, were picked up by boats and conveyed to the *Chacal*. Meanwhile, the Consul's children had been brought from school and taken off in another boat. All the European residents fled with their children and sought refuge on board the *Chacal* or on board a Tunisian vessel stationed in the roads. Many of them were wounded, but all escaped with life except two Maltese, who were overtaken, killed, and cut to pieces on the beach. The Arabs then pillaged the houses of the Europeans. The Marabouts unfurled flags and stimulated the Arabs, telling them that it was a holy war. Other Arabs of the neighbouring tribes arrived in the midst of the tumult. M. Mattei remained on board the *Chacal*, while his family were taken to Goletta. It was believed that the rising was premature, and that a general revolt had been planned. The movement was at first directed mainly against the French, the French Consulate being sacked and the flag torn to shreds, but all the other Europeans were menaced.

In consequence of this outbreak several French gun-boats, with about sixteen hundred French troops on board, were sent to Sfax, and a bombardment was commenced on the 5th inst., which was continued five or six days, throwing about seven hundred bombshells. Our illustration, from a sketch by an eye-

witness on the 5th, shows the gun-boats Pique and Chenev, at a distance of one mile and a quarter from the forts, bombarding the place. After the destruction of the Arab quarter of Sfax, the Kasbah, and the forts, by the French shells, the captains of the Alma and the Reine Blanche sent towards the shore two launches, armed with revolver-cannon and filled with infantry soldiers. The natives, imagining that a landing was about to be attempted, hurried to the seacoast, their number being estimated at fully 30,000. Disembarkation under these conditions being impossible, the French contented themselves with sending several volleys of mitraille into the Arabs, many of whom were killed. On Thursday week, however, the French naval squadron from Tunis arrived, and next day "bombarded the town methodically." The French troops were landed on Saturday morning, and, after two hours' severe fighting, gained possession of the town and forts, or of their ruins, which are now in French occupation. The bombardment last Saturday recommenced at five o'clock in the morning. It was followed by the landing of 1500 seamen. They led the attack; 3500 infantry afterwards joined in the operations. The forts were taken at half-past seven, and the French flag was hoisted. The Arabs made, it is said, a desperate resistance. The town had to be taken house by house. The Arabs are reported to have lost very heavily. A multitude of Arab horsemen were decimated by shells from the frigates. The French are encamped in the town. The Europeans have not yet returned, fearing fresh troubles.

File name: 1881-07-23p86ILN.pdf

2 page(s)

Indexed under: Capture of Sfax, Gabes, Bombardment, Lesser Syrtis, Cucumbers, Population, walls, citadel, Kerkennah, batteries, cisterns, Tripoli, Turkey, Chacal, Mattei, Consul, school, Maltese, deaths, Marabouts, Goletta, Consulate, Bombardment, pique, Kasbah, Alma, Reine Blanche, rebel numbers, Fighting, French troops, Street fighting