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TUESDAY, AUGUST 13, 1907

MOROCCO'S TROUBLE.

Events in Morocco are moving much more swiftly than was anticipated. For, even before the small French expeditionary force, now on its way from Oran to Casa Blanca, has had time to pass from the Mediterranean into the Atlantic, the French war-ships already on the spot have bombarded the Moorish port. The bombardment was not an affair of blank cartridge. It was carried through in serious earnest, and the Moors are said to have lost heavily in killed and wounded. The engagement, if such a term can be applied to it, was precipitated by the Moors themselves, and, according to one version, was due to the treachery which is engrained in their national character. The French Consulate had asked the commander of the Galilée for a guard of marines, and it was arranged with the Bashaw of Casa Blanca that the guard should be landed. But the marines had no sooner set foot on shore than they were fired upon by the Bashaw's own Moorish troops and by the tribesmen who had come into the town to make common cause with them. An officer and six sailors were wounded, but the rest drove the Moors before them at the point of the bayonet and made their way to the Consulate. Then the bombardment began, and the two French cruisers, "Du Chayla" and "Galilée," poured shells into the town batteries till they were reduced to ruins, and destroyed the surrounding quarter belonging to the hostile tribesmen. The Moors, of course, were quite unable to make any effective reply, and their commander speedily requested a cessation of the bombardment and the pardon of the French admiral, who peremptorily told him to surrender to the French Consul. Only sheer perversity, says the "Daily Telegraph" can suggest any sympathy for the ruffianly Moors who have brought this well-deserved punishment upon their own heads, and the twelve Europeans who were butchered and barbarously mutilated the other day have thus, in a sense, been promptly avenged. But the bombardment does not close the chapter. Rather, it begins a new one, of which the sequel is beyond all guessing. "Only God knoweth" is a favourite Moorish proverb, and it is peculiarly applicable to the present case. But Monday's events have cleared the way for the arrival of General Drude and his little army of three thousand and have given the Moors a foretaste of what they may expect if they indulge in further acts of hostility. It is important to note that the Spanish gunboat landed a party of forty marines for the protection of the Spanish Consulate, while a force of five hundred Spanish troops is under orders to operate with General Drude. No one can over-estimate the value at this juncture of a thoroughly good understanding between the French and Spanish Governments, who were designated by the Convention of Algeciras to act as the mandatories of Europe, inasmuch as they were authorised to organise a police force for Morocco. For the tranquility of the diplomatic world it is essential that this co-operation shall continue, and the Spanish Government, while naturally anxious not to become involved in Morocco more deeply than the honour of Spain requires, is to be congratulated on ignoring the outcry raised against it intervention by a strong section of the Opposition, which has throughout disliked the role assigned to and accepted by Spain.

Unquestionably, the situation is serious though the steps taken by France are irreproachable, and her intentions have been announced to and have received the approval of all the Great Powers. Such is the perfect confidence reposed in the Government of the Republic by Great Britain that is now declared that no British warship will be sent to Casa Blanca, inasmuch as the measures to be taken by the French are considered entirely adequate for the protection of British interests. We hope that other Powers will show a like confidence, if only to help to convince the Moors that they cannot expect to derive any advantage from international jealousies. Unfortunately, the Sultan of Morocco, with whom France and Spain will have to deal, exercises but a very shadowy and slender authority over his own officials, such as the Bashaw of Casa Blanca, and still less over the Kabyle tribesmen, who are practically responsible for the recent outrages. The Maghzen have hastened to express to the French Minister at Fez their "profound regret" for the outbreak, just as they regretted the murder of Dr. Mauchamp near the Algerian border at Marrakesh. But regrets are useless when they are not backed by any proof of their sincerity. No one believes in the desire of the Maghzen to put a stop to fanatical murders, and if they had the desire it is more than doubtful if they have the power. For these abominable outrages are ebullitions of strong national feeling against the introduction of an unwelcome civilisation, and against the appearance of the Cross in the hand of the Crescent. The most powerful factor in Morocco is not the Sultan, nor the Pretender, nor Raisuli, nor Ma El Ainin, the holy man of the desert at the back of Cape Juby. He is the Mahdi of the land, and a "holy war" in Morocco is not a contingency that any Power could face with equanimity. Bombardments always have sequels. No Englishman—and no Frenchman for that matter—will forget what a surprising chain of events has followed the shelling of Alexandria. When a European nation has landed an expeditionary force in a town after a bombardment which has shattered the old half-savage authority, it finds it no easy matter to withdraw, for it cannot face the responsibility of leaving anarchy rampant. With a strong central Moorish Government, on which independence could be placed, the position of affairs would be much simpler. Satisfaction could be demanded, and when it had been given the avenging force could retire. In this case withdrawal will be hazardous, inasmuch as other outrages are almost certain to follow—they are already threatened at Rabat and elsewhere—whether there is holy war or not. France and Spain will, of course, act with resolution, and will not shrink because the future is uncertain and the commitment may be heavy. But those who know the story of the conquest and occupation of Algeria will not underestimate the risks and strain of a guerilla war in a difficult and practically unknown country, and against wild races of the martial quality of the Moors. They will appreciate, moreover, the anxieties which would weigh upon Ministers at Paris and Madrid, even if—which is, perhaps, rather too much to hope—none but friendly and sympathetic eyes were watching the fulfilment of the task.