

FRANCE ON THE WRONG TRACK.

BY PIERRE DE COUBERTIN.

THAT French politics have lately been undergoing great changes, nobody who lives in France can deny; but from the outside these changes are far less conspicuous. Not only does our foreign policy maintain its wise and quiet appearance, the more so since it is in the hands of so clever and thoughtful a man as is M. Delcassé, but the rather brilliant period of the Exposition has done much to lessen the interest awakened at other periods by problems of internal administration. I am not speaking of the Dreyfus case, which proved dramatic enough to arouse universal excitement, but Thiers' efforts to start the Republic, Gambetta's work and premature death, Jules Ferry's colonial ambitions, Grévy's resignation of the Presidency, Carnot's life and assassination, the Panama affair, the quarrel between protectionists and free-traders, the rise and fall of Boulangerism, Lavigner's initiative, and many other facts—caused the world to be attentive to what was going on in France. At present the world is busy considering what the consequences may be of the South African war or the Chinese rebellion; what attention it can give to French affairs is largely taken up by Waldeck-Rousseau, who is supposed to be fighting for the good of the country and the maintenance of the Republic against a coalition of powerful Clericals and unsubdued Monarchists.

NO PLOT AGAINST THE REPUBLIC.

There may be such a coalition somewhere, for it has been in existence ever since the beginning of the century; and during the first fifteen years of its life the third Republic had more than once to deal with the combined efforts of Clericals and Monarchists. Her leaders, then, ought to be very well acquainted with the management of such a war; and having fought it successfully so many times, ought to know how to grasp victory once more, especially if, as the case seems to be, the struggle has lost much of its importance and violence. One would fail to understand how the death of the Comte de Paris and the Pope's call to French Roman Catholics in favor of the Republic could have had no effect upon anti-republicanism. The truth is, that since both events took place the believers in the superiority of monarchical solutions became few in number and less influential than they had ever been before. Conservative Republicans began to organize them-

selves, and, one after the other, the Roman Catholic bishops were led to utter words of peace and tolerance. How did it happen, then, that suddenly the government should have been shaken strongly enough to feel bound to call even on Socialists for help? The answer is easy and clear. Such a fact never happened. The Republic has not been for five minutes in danger of being upset for many and many years. Not only did Déroulède's attempt to carry on a *coup d'état* on the day of President Felix Faure's funeral prove a complete failure, but his aim was to reorganize the Republic according to his own well-known ideas and not in the least to overthrow it. Déroulède never was a Monarchist and very likely will never be one for many reasons; the chief one being perhaps that he can hope to become the head of a Republican administration, while he has no chance of ever laying a crown on his valuable forehead. Less unsuccessful in a way but purely grotesque and inoffensive was Baron Christiani's *attentat* on Derby Day at Auteuil. A few people belonging to what is supposed to be the highest social circles in Paris made it clear that they were able on some occasions to behave like roughs, and that was all.

The so-called *procès de la Haute Cour* was a rather ridiculous experience. The Nationalists, Legitimists, Imperialists, and anti-Semites prosecuted on the ground of having joined in setting up a conspiracy against the Republic were found to have acted quite apart from one another, without a plan, almost without money, and not even knowing exactly what they were hoping for.

THE PREMIER'S MISTAKE.

Waldeck-Rousseau's initial and probably irreparable mistake was to make the Dreyfus case the pivot of his policy, and to consent to heavy sacrifices in order to bring forth a more peaceful time, when the great peace-maker, the World's fair, was near at hand. Waldeck-Rousseau entered political life long ago, for he was Gambetta's co-worker; but, as a politician, he displayed more power than ambition. His profession, that of a lawyer, seems to have been of far greater interest to him: when President Casimir Perier resigned, he might have been his successor, but did not appear eager to secure this high position. He was a wealthy man, enjoying life thoroughly, having many friends, and glad to receive them in his house, where artists and writers were always sure

to meet with a hearty welcome. Thus it was that Waldeck-Rousseau, having become acquainted with many *intellectuels*, was led to share their passionate appreciation and bitter condemnation of Méline's policy. Other circumstances of smaller moment helped in urging him to the front, perhaps quite against his own will. He was declared the needed man, the one who could restore the nation's moral unity.

Frenchmen are always fond of summing up a whole stock of facts in a short and mighty sentence. If Abraham Lincoln, when the frightful secession war came to an end, had pointed out the necessity of restoring the moral unity of the American people, nobody would have dared to find any exaggeration in his words. But that the Dreyfus case should have ruined the moral basis of French nationality, the work of so many centuries, is an idea that may spring out of disturbed minds during a crisis, but that ought not to outlive the circumstances through which the crisis has developed itself. Whether Waldeck-Rousseau really believed that France had been morally injured to the very depths of her soul, or for some other reasons which he did not care to tell, he undertook the repairing of our "moral unity."

LOSING INFLUENCE IN THE EAST.

The first thing he did was to charge royalism and Roman Catholicism with having corrupted the public mind all round. Notwithstanding the failure of a previous attempt to prove the strength and power of the monarchical party, it was insisted upon that the Republic was still in great danger of being upset—an argument by no means rational coming from republican leaders—and that it would remain so until royalism should have been crushed all through the country. The religious orders were the object of fiery denunciations because of their backward tendencies and their enormous wealth; the amount of the latter, as well as their membership, was systematically exaggerated; popular excitement was raised artificially by unscrupulous arguments, and finally a law was introduced which, under pretence of regulating the right of association, provided for the destruction and confiscation of all religious orders, whether they be devoted to the care of the poor and the sick or to the education of youth.

This made the Pope's interference a necessity, especially as, cleverly enough, the progress of these orders had been presented as unfavorable to the Church's true interests. Leo XIII.'s letter to the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, while preserving the writer's usual moderation and showing his lasting friendliness to France, included a warning which the Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet ought not to overlook. Conservative or

radical, every French administration during the nineteenth century proved eager to enjoy the advantages which belong to France as "the eldest daughter of the Church," and which constitute in the East her most valuable endowment. In China as well as in the Holy Land, the right of representing and protecting the Roman Catholic missions strengthens greatly the influence of French envoys; other nations are of course dissatisfied with such a privilege, and have often objected to its maintenance. The German Emperor is particularly anxious to see it suppressed, but up to this day the Pope has not given his consent. That he will give it if the anti-religious tendencies prevail in France, is quite certain: he will not even have the alternative of doing otherwise, because missionaries of other nationalities will, in a short time, take the place of the French, weakened and disorganized by the hostility against them at home.

UNDOING GAMBETTA'S, FERRY'S, AND CARNOT'S WORK.

Together with Roman Catholicism, military institutions and colonial expansion were denounced as the Republic's most dangerous enemies. Gambetta, Ferry, and Carnot had taken great pains to improve the former and to start the latter: they had worked hard and perseveringly in order to raise the army above any discussions and to make the colonies popular. The "État-Major" was Gambetta's favorite work. He considered that, in a democratic state where no hereditary principles provide the army with permanent and undisputed commanders, the General Staff is the only warranty of order and stability. He claimed also that the heads of the army ought to be chosen according to their personal knowledge and technical accomplishment, rather than to their political opinions. This was no theory on his part, for he used his wonderful influence in forcing General de Miribel into the position of chief of the army staff, very much against the will of the Republicans, who knew that the general's republicanism was not very ardent. Gambetta's choice proved excellent, and Miribel's services were as loyal as they were valuable. Carnot followed in these steps, and during his seven years' term of office his efforts in the same direction were numerous and effective. He had wisely and thoughtfully considered Tocqueville's words on the anti-military spirit that usually rises in a democracy: he knew that the chiefs of a great army cannot be asked to show much enthusiasm in submitting to elected representatives of the civil power: therefore, he had for them flattering attentions and used kind words toward them. The result was great. The republic had a splen-

did and powerful army to support her peaceful plans, and this army was loyal; nobody can doubt it, since otherwise the imperialist and royalist leaders would have succeeded in securing its help to restore the Bonapartes or the Orleans, while they failed constantly. This, however, did not seem sufficient, and, imprudently enough, the Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet undertook to develop Jacobinism among the army officers and under-officers.

Colonial expansion is, more especially, Jules Ferry's work. The great statesman foresaw the necessity of opening a wide area of new land before such a country as France after 1870—beaten, but far from broken, and anxious to make a fresh start and to act. He knew that her vitality could not be suppressed, and that her strength would have to be used in distant colonization, if not in European agitation. His troubles and pains were still greater than Gambetta's and Carnot's. Having lost India, Canada, and Louisiana by the fault of inefficient rulers, France had been told so often that this misfortune was owing to her lack of colonizing power that she firmly believed it, and certainly the Algerian experience was not meant to undeceive her; she was therefore obstinately opposed to further steps in Tunis, Tonquin, and Madagascar; and, not satisfied with having upset the Ferry cabinet on account of its wise but resolute policy in Asia and Africa, she bestowed upon the ex-prime minister the most bitter and unjust unpopularity. But facts were stronger than prejudices, and Frenchmen at last opened their eyes to the beauty and wealth of their new empire. Yet, sedentary as they are now, it needs time and repeated encouragement to induce them to settle in lands so distant. Any anti-colonial movement, then, is to be feared, and its effects on the prosperity of the empire would be ruinous and immediate.

UNPRACTICAL REFORMS.

The theories which are to be found at the bottom of these imprudent undertakings of the Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet are of a strikingly unpractical character. Such Utopias had not come to the front since the days of 1848, when Cabet, Saint-Simon, Fourier, and their half-lunatic followers were busy describing the charms of the future social golden age. Armed citizens may reach just the kind of military standard that Switzerland requires, or perhaps Belgium; volunteers may, in such countries as England, the United States, Australia, and Canada, where the strong Anglo-Saxon traditions prevail, give a powerful help to a regular army; but nowadays, and unless Germany, Italy, and Austria do the same, to change the French military organiza-

tion into a republican militia system would be for France to abdicate her control in European politics and to give up her influence as a world power. The militia theory is noble and humane, and it has also an economical superiority, because it is, doubtless, the cheapest way of preparing the nation's defense. But the present state of things is such that for a big country to be prepared only to defend itself means no true prestige and no real power.

Another theory, that of equal rights for all human races, leads to a policy contrary to any colonial progress. Without indulging in even the most lenient form of serfdom, not to speak of slavery, the superior race is justified in refusing to extend several privileges of civilized life to the lower one. A fair treatment, justice to all, and special protection to the natives against the possible cruelties and encroachments of their rulers are enough, in many cases. Of course, it is the duty of the latter to try and raise the lower race to their own standard; but such an educational work is very slow, and to hasten it is simply to injure it and, at the same time, to straiten colonization and weary those who are busy at it.

A BLIND ALLEY.

To carry on these unwholesome plans, Waldeck-Rousseau had to find support elsewhere than in the ranks of the Moderate Republican party. He wanted Socialist help and secured it by asking one of the more clever Socialist leaders, Millerand, into the cabinet. Socialists are, as a rule, much too practical in their ways, if not in their aims, to be contented with hoisting to the top one of their foremost men. They claimed more than that, and the premier had to concede many of their claims, and therefore to give up many of his former views and principles. The result was, in one word, that Waldeck-Rousseau and his followers, while non-Socialists themselves, were harnessed and bound to drag the Socialist cart. The great danger of such an experience lies in this, that France is perhaps of all nations the most anti-aristocratic, but at the same time the most anti-communistic. At the bottom of French civilization lies propriety, the cornerstone of the whole building. No Frenchman will ever consent, if he is a proprietor, to cease to be one; or, if he is not, to give up hope of becoming one. Thus, it is impossible for communism to conquer France without civil war breaking out. Any one who leads her toward socialism leads her in a blind alley whence she won't be able to escape quietly; blood will have to be shed, time and money lost, space won on rivals given up. This is no prophecy, but the result

of past experiences; history provides us with serious warnings. Even with far less genius, Napoleon I. would have succeeded, all the same, in making the "Dix-huit Brumaire;" and, with none at all, Napoleon III. succeeded in restoring the Empire; in both circumstances, the trump in the Bonapartist cards was propriety, damaged already by Utopian laws and threatened with a still worse treatment. How is it that a man like Waldeck-Rousseau does not remember such things? Thiers, who knew France better, said thirty years ago: "*La République sera conservatrice ou elle ne sera pas.*" After thirty years, his word remains true; the Republic has lived, progressed, and got strong; no other foe is to be feared but socialism; socialism alone can kill her.

MORE HARM DONE.

A twofold result of the Waldeck-Rousseau policy is already conspicuous. In striving to master the French nation and force it into certain ways against the will of a great part of the people, the cabinet has been led to treat unjustly, and to denounce as enemies of the Republic, all the Republicans who did not approve its views and refused to support its plans. Passionate ill-feeling was thus aroused between Frenchmen at the very moment when it became possible for them to forget the Dreyfus quarrel, and it was most necessary to try to soothe its bad effects. However ridiculous may be the statements that ex-Premier Ribot has turned a Monarchist and that ex-Premier Méline seldom dreamed of anything else than of betraying the republican cause, such statements, when printed daily in the papers and uttered even in the House of Parliament, end in misleading public opinion. Lies and slanders, sad to say, are never inoffensive.

One result, therefore, is to sow hatred in the French soil; the other is to give France a heavy handicap in the race of nations. Concord and harmony are necessary to any people whose foreign policy is at all active and daring. On the contrary, if agitated and busy with quarrels, a nation cannot do more than defend its rights, and must not look forward to increasing its shares and profits. France would not lose much by following for a short time a purely defensive policy (indeed, she has done so for a long time—since the Franco-German war), if Europe were to-day what it was some twelve years ago. But circumstances have changed radically; "pushfulness" is to be found everywhere. England conquers South Africa, Germany builds up a powerful fleet, Russia settles in North China, Australia celebrates her coming of age as a nation, Austria progresses in the Balkans, the

United States assume a world policy, the Prince of Bulgaria means to become a king, Greece wants Crete, and Japan, Korea; even Spain seeks strength and wealth by trying to unite with the Spanish-speaking American republics. France alone is fettered, and cannot even take up her own African Hinterland without giving way to sharp discussions between Frenchmen. From the French point of view, and without in the least approving the perfectly absurd idea of an interference in the Anglo-Boer conflict, it is safe to say that a better occasion for deciding the Newfoundland and the New Hebrides questions will never be found. England paid the price that was asked elsewhere for preserving neutrality (such bargains are regrettable, but sentiment is out of the question in modern politics); she did not pay France anything, because she had nothing to fear from her, seeing that France had too much trouble at home to be attentive to developments outside.

IS IT TOO LATE?

France's prosperity is threatened by two kinds of men—conquerors and ideologists. During the last centuries, particularly during the last one, some of her rulers have led her to believe that she was God's soldier, and that her fate was to be raised above all nations and to govern Europe. At other times she was taught that the light of the world lies in her hands, and that the laws she makes, the ways she tries, the principles she proclaims, are to extend finally everywhere, and to be found superior to any others. All this is nonsense; and by adopting such childish views France has never failed to lose what she had gained and to run very serious risks.

The present Republic, however, showed obvious signs of wisdom and resisted the conquering spirit on several occasions; we must now resist the Utopian spirit. So far, we have unfortunately given way to it; but I do not think we shall go much farther. France is simply on a wrong track, and nothing is easier, when she perceives it, than to go back and take the other track. We shall have lost time and money, that's all. Of course, the risk would become great if the reign of Utopia were allowed to continue for some years more; but young Frenchmen have been brought up during the last fifteen years in a somewhat different manner than their fathers. I myself have done something to make manly games popular among them, to make them go abroad, to make them long for freedom and initiative. A young man who has played football and has traveled is not, as a rule, prompted to claim state help or to shut himself up in the dreamy castle of Utopia.