

SOME UNTOLD STORIES OF THE LATE WAR.

London, Saturday, May 2, 1874.

The Prussian correspondent of the *Times* spoke a few days ago of certain mysterious letters addressed to the Emperor William during his uninvited presence at Versailles, which having been discovered after his Majesty's departure, at the Prefecture where he established his head quarters, have since been published. Specimens of the letters which the King received from all parts of France, are, in fact, contained in M. Delerot's recently issued *Occupation de Versailles*, which seems to me the most interesting and most complete work on any one subject, or portion of a subject, hitherto produced in connection with the Franco-German war. The Emperor William, resembling in that respect the late Duke of Wellington, is, it appears, in the habit of reading and annotating all his letters, and it is said that etiquette alone prevents him from answering them with his own hand. This he could not have done in the case of the afore said epistles from correspondents in France, who naturally did not sign their names. But he read and made marginal notes upon all that seemed deserving of special attention. In one, from Strasbourg after the surrender he is addressed as "*Sire bombardeur!*" Another commences in English, "Old rascal!" After which the writer takes refuge in French—a language quite as rich in insulting expressions as our own. A third is subscribed, "*Un français qui ne t'aime pas,*" against which the Emperor has written, "*Il me semble!*" Among the multitude of curious facts brought forward, often for the first time, in this interesting book, I will mention two—one relating to Prince Bismarck, the other to the war contributions, owed systematically and on so large a scale.

Prince Bismarck is naturally not a stealer of clocks, but he was exceedingly anxious to obtain possession, by fair means, of the clock which had marked the hours while Thiers and himself sat before it discussing the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Lending over the dial of this ornamental time-piece which had so fascinated the great diplomatist, and which reminded him of the crowning triumph of his life, was a figure of the devil, the sight of which had, it appears, irritated Thiers beyond bearing, causing him to cry out, from time to time, "*Ah, ce diable! ce, maudit diable!*" Bismarck, had he been a vain man, might perhaps have taken these exclamations as addressed to himself. In any case they interested him, and it was he himself who told the story to the proprietress of the house in which he had taken up his quarters. He at the same time offered her any amount for the clock—the infernal machine, as Thiers considered it—which had struck the hour in which France formally succumbed to Germany. But the patriotic lady would not do business with the arch-enemy of her country on any terms. Bismarck, to the last moment, begged that the magic clock might be ceded to him, and when he went away left his address that it might, if possible, be sent after him. Then two of his aides de camp appeared, and prayed to be allowed to purchase the clock that they might offer it to their chief, who had set his heart upon it. They were prepared to pay exorbitantly for it, not, they said, a million francs, but anything within reason or even considerably beyond. But no; the clock was not for sale.

M. Delerot, however, declares that when, a short time afterwards, the clock was examined the pendulum was missing, and he suggested that the enterprising aides de camp must have detached it, and carried it off to present it to Bismarck at Berlin.

Now, as to the contributions and an ingenious means employed for levying them, I know that the invading army was accompanied by civil officials of all kinds, and even journalists, whose duty it was to establish newspapers in the occupied towns, but until I found the fact set forth in M. Delerot's book, I was not aware that the conquerors brought with them professional money-lenders. These obliging gentlemen, with their usual affability, offered to take bills from the various municipalities, and in return to advance them enough money to enable them to pay whatever contributions might be demanded from them. Nancy in a moment of weakness gave her acceptance, the usurer attached to the German armies declaring, no doubt, that he would not press for payment, that the bill could be renewed at maturity, and so on. Versailles, however, held out the Mayor protesting that it was enough for the town to pay away all the ready money it possessed without mortgaging its future. The official bill-discounter pretended to represent "a syndicate of German bankers," but he doubtless drew his money from the military chest.

One can see that M. Delerot has had constantly to swallow his rage in carrying out his determination to present, as much as possible, facts without comments; and the result is a work in which the author could not show himself impartial, but in which he has, in a certain measure, striven to be impartial, and has, in a certain measure, attained his aim. He has nothing but praise to give the Crown Prince of Prussia, and he speaks well of the officers of the Prince's staff, and of the staff of the King, or "general staff of the entire army," whom he was astonished to find retiring at every available moment to the Public Library of Versailles, where they showed themselves indefatigable students. Moltke used also to frequent the library, but not for purposes of study. He went there to forget his anxieties, "to refresh his mind," as M. Delerot puts it, "with the masterly prose of George Sand." M. Delerot perhaps does not know, but certainly would not be astonished to hear, that Count Von Moltke is, in a literary point of view, one of the most cultivated men of the present day. He told Colonel Stoffel, when he was in Paris with the King, during the Exhibition of 1867, that though he admitted he ought to be the last man to complain of such a thing—his Majesty occupied himself too exclusively with the army; "and I am not sorry," he added, "that he has now an opportunity of seeing in the magnificence of Paris that without neglecting his army, a sovereign may interest himself in other elements of greatness."

If Moltke had died ten years ago he would never have been known as a soldier, except indeed to some few students of eastern affairs, who might have remembered his being beaten at the head of an Egyptian army by an army of Turks. But he did not, when he was in Egypt, "occupy himself exclusively with the army." He also studied "other elements of greatness;" and besides the letters on Egypt which Lord Duff Gordon has partly reproduced under the impression that they were the work of "a Prussian officer lately deceased," Moltke is known to have made notes during

his sojourn in the East, on a great variety of subjects. He wrote, too, a description in great detail of the supposed site of Troy, where, *Iliad* in hand, he demonstrates as a soldier and a military engineer that the Troy of the ten-years' siege did, in fact, stand. Moltke's paper on the remaining traces of the siege of Troy (for that is what it amounts to) has been published in English. Not so a very characteristic letter from Moltke to a German poet who had administered to him large, though, all things considered, not excessive, doses of praise in a poem on the subject of the new German Empire. "The poet," he wrote to Oscar Von Redwitz, in thanking him for his book, "must be prodigal. He distributes with full hand diamonds and pearls, the stars of heaven and the flowers of the earth, and in the same way he lavishes praise. This is the sense in which I take it, when your poem likens me to the great men of the past. For those men were great in misfortune, and then especially so, whereas we have met with nothing but success. Now, call that chance, luck, destiny, or the will of God—men alone do not produce it; and such gigantic results are essentially the outcome of circumstances which we can neither create nor control. The excellent but unfortunate Pope Hadrian had these words inscribed on his tomb: 'What a difference does the epoch make in which the activity even of the best man is cast!' Often the greatest work may be wrecked by the same invincible force of circumstances which bears the least great along. If, not from any vain or false modesty, I am obliged to look upon a good part of the praise you bestow upon me as undeserved, I am not the less grateful for it, for verses like yours are indeed more lasting than monuments of brass and marble."

The Berlin correspondent of the *London Times* says of the letters referred to above: "His majesty's remarks are certainly very interesting, and deserve to be re-printed at length. But equally worthy of note is what the emperor said when he heard of their publication. Upon the subject being mentioned in his presence the other day, the emperor, who is very methodical and orderly, and the last man in the world to leave important letters behind him, began to laugh, and said, 'So they have found them at last. I left them on purpose, because I thought they had better remain in the country which originated them.' The letters are all in French, and mostly came from French towns, though some were posted in England, Holland, Italy and other countries. Many are anonymous, and not a few are illustrated by unflattering caricatures."

Madrid, 29th.—Despatches were received by the Government this morning that Marshal Concha was killed yesterday in an attack by the Republican troops upon the Carlist entrenchment at Muro, three kilometers from Estolla. When the National forces learned of the death of their commander they returned to their former positions without disorder, leaving no prisoners in the hands of the enemy. The command of the Republican army will now be taken by General Sobala, President of the Council.

War in the East.—A despatch to the *Pall Mall Gazette* from St. Petersburg, says alarming rumors prevail in that city respecting the situation of affairs in Central Asia. It is reported that the Amir of Kashgor has seized the Russian envoy and, fearing war in consequence of the act, has concentrated 10,000 troops on the frontier.