

## BAZAINE TRIAL.

*Correspondence and Local Statistics*

On the eve of the opening of this *cause celebre*, I think that an outline of the circumstances under which the late Commander in chief of the Army of the Rhine is brought to trial may not be unacceptable to your readers, and may prove a not unfitting introduction to the ample reports which the *Standard* will publish of the proceedings before the court-martial about to assemble at the Palace of Trajan.

You must bear in mind that the prosecution was not initiated by the Government. Indeed, it is only fair to do M. Thiers this justice, that he has clearly perceived the awkwardness and inexpediency of raking up all the stories current about the campaign of Metz and the negotiations which preceded the fall of the "Maiden City." It was Marshal Bazaine himself, who, goaded by incessant attacks, availed himself of his right and demanded a court-martial on his conduct. The attacks upon him, did not proceed merely from the Radical press, whose outcry for his execution without a more than formal trial was one of its most conspicuously disgraceful features. Officers who had served under Marshal Bazaine thought it consistent with military discipline to publish books and pamphlets, in which they brought against their former commander in chief accusations of downright treachery. It is now nearly a year and a half since the marshal surrendered himself as a prisoner; but it is a mistake to suppose that the getting up of the case for the prosecution required all that time. Fortunately for the marshal, M. Thiers, who entertained a strong opinion of the mischievous character of the whole proceedings, put off the trial give time to public exasperation, to stimulated by inflammatory publications to cool down; and this delay has certainly given Marshal Bazaine the chance of a fairer trial than he would otherwise have had.

After the Parliamentary revolution of the 24th of May, and the accession to office of a Government which had no interest in conciliating the Radicals, and could afford to disregard their irritation, there was no longer any cause for delaying the trial which Marshal Bazaine had courted, and a court-martial was appointed to hear the case. The Presidency has, as you are aware, been conferred on the Duke d'Aumale, a choice which will secure the interests of justice, at the same time that it will afford the prisoner every guarantee that he could possibly desire. The court will assemble on the 6th of next month; the proceedings are likely to be protracted in the extreme, as, though there are formal charges brought against the marshal, the real issue raised is whether he did all that was to be expected of a commander in chief from the date of his taking the command of the army on the 13th of August, 1870, until the capitulation of Metz and the army around it on the 31st of October.

In plain language, the accusation against the prisoner sounds appalling. It amounts to this:—Was Marshal Bazaine justified in surrendering an army of upwards of 170,000 men? But merely in that light the case seems plain enough, and the prisoner would appear not to have a leg to stand on. But a succinct narrative of the circumstances which preceded and attended the capitulation places his conduct in a less unfavourable light. The evidence to be adduced at the trial will decide whether he is not more to be pitied than blamed. It is to enable

your readers fully to understand the bearings of the evidence that I lay the following narrative before them.

First, it may be interesting to them to know who Marshal Bazaine is. Francois Achille Bazaine was born in 1811. He enlisted as a common soldier in a line regiment in 1831. In 1832 he was made a sergeant, and one year later was promoted to a sub-lieutenancy in the Foreign Legion. In 1835 he got his commission as lieutenant in the 13th Regiment of the line, and soon after was detached to the Christino army in Spain, where he fought the Carlists by the side of many countrymen of our own in the British Legion under the late Sir De Lacy Evans. In 1838 he was made a captain in the 4th Regiment, and greatly distinguished himself in Algeria. His administrative abilities were as conspicuous as his gallantry in the field, and he was appointed superintendent of one of those *bureaux Arabes*, which of late years have been so severely, and in many cases so, justly criticised. His promotion continued to be extremely rapid, for in 1850 he was made Colonel of the Foreign Legion, and the outbreak of the Crimean war in 1854 found him a major-general. During the siege of Sebastopol he more than sustained his reputation for cool intrepidity and skill. After the fall of the Russian stronghold, he was made a lieutenant general on the very same day as Generals Vinoy and DeFaily. Many of your military and naval readers will remember that he commanded the French portion of the expedition against Kinburn. During the Italian war he commanded a division in Baraguay d'Hillier's *corps d'armee* and took a leading part in the battle of Magliano. He is best known, however, by his command of the French army in Mexico, a command which exposed him to not a little professional jealousy, and which on his return obtained for him the marshal's baton. It was, however, an unlucky expedition for Marshal Bazaine, for though he lost no reputation as a soldier, yet the tragedy which followed the departure of the French troops, and sundry incidents, magnified by malignity, no doubt, which marked his intercourse with the unfortunate Austrian Archduke, created a marked impression against him; and though a marshal of France, he has been, so to speak, under a cloud ever since. Not that posts of honour and emolument were denied him, but he was under a cloud for all that, and he seems to have felt it very keenly. One of his most bitter assailants (Colonel d'Andlau, in his work, "Metz: Campagne et Negotiations") says in so many words that Marshal Bazaine had been promised an independent command, and that he bitterly complained of what he considered a breach of faith to all who approached him, and considered it as a continuation of the ill-will that had been shown him on his return from Mexico. Colonel d'Andlau says that the discontent he experienced had a great influence upon him, and consequently in the conduct of the military operations down to the fall of Metz. However, on his arrival at Metz, in addition to the 3rd Corps, he was also placed in temporary command of all the troops between the Vosges and the Moselle, viz., the 2nd Corps (General Frossard), the 4th Corps (General L'Admirault), the 5th Corps (General DeFaily), and the reserves of cavalry, artillery, and engineers, forming an aggregate of thirteen divisions of infantry and six of cavalry. This was possibly done to soothe him, but Colonel d'Andlau tells us the measure could not produce any satisfactory result; he was allowed no initiative; has

authority, purely nominal, was barely recognized by the other generals in command of *corps d'armee* who maintained that the Emperor alone was their superior, and continued to correspond directly with his Majesty. He was not even consulted as to the first movement the army was ordered to make on the 23rd of July, and the very next day he received notice by telegraph that the Emperor would be represented at Metz by the Quarter-master General of the army, General Lebœuf. "It was impossible to suppose that a man whose position required at least a show of regard, should be otherwise than hurt at such treatment. He, moreover, showed what his feelings were by leaving Metz within an hour of General Lebœuf's arriving there, instead of waiting to see him." This comes from a writer notoriously biased against Bazaine. We may, therefore, take it to be true. It certainly was hardly to be expected that being, or fancying himself, ill used, he should have interfered, or obtruded advice which would have probably been disregarded, however sound it might have been. Another circumstance occurred very shortly afterwards which was not likely to induce the marshal to depart from his reserve. The Emperor, after wasting a great deal of time, made up his mind to take possession of the valley of the Sarre, and occupy the town of Saarbrück. Marshal Bazaine was informed that he and his *corps d'armee*, with the corps of General Frossard and two of DeFaily's divisions, were to participate in the operation, and that he (Bazaine) was to have the command in chief. He immediately drew up a plan of operations, and laid it before the Emperor on the 1st of August. But, during the night, the Emperor changed his mind and ordered that the operations should be confined to a mere demonstration against Saarbrück, the honours of which were evidently to be reserved for General Frossard. The provisional command in chief conferred on Bazaine was implicitly revoked by the intimation that the Emperor and General Lebœuf would be in the field in person, and give orders, if any were required. Marshal Bazaine, in consequence, abstained from putting in an appearance, and thenceforth confined himself to obeying the orders he received. The week was not over when the French army sustained two defeats, which virtually decided the campaign, and convinced the Emperor that strategy was not his strong point. His favourite general (Frossard) was badly beaten at Spicheren on the very same day that MacMahon's corps was routed at Reichshoffen. This was on the 6th of August. Common sense, common prudence, as well as the rules of war, ought to have commanded the immediate retreat of the Metz army on Chaions to rally the *debris* of MacMahon. But the Emperor could not, apparently, make up his mind to give up his chief command, or to incur the obloquy which the Paris Boulevarders would have heaped upon him had he ordered a timely retreat. The troops were harassed by useless marches and counter-marches on the Nied, and five valuable days were thus wasted, indeed worse than wasted. On the 11th, however, the army was concentrated under the guns of Metz, on the right bank of the river, and on the 12th the Emperor appointed Bazaine to the command in chief, and assigned him as quartermaster-general a man of talent, between whom and the marshal there seemed to be a deadly feud, and on the 13th the marshal took possession of his command.