

A KICK AT THE SICK LION.

The curtain has fallen upon the drama of Metz, and Marshal Bazaine, like well-worn actor, leaves the stage. It were, perhaps, premature to say that he retires for ever from public view, for who can so "foresee the future" as to say with assurance what may or may not happen in a country so distracted as France? We are not going to speculate on a subject where all speculation would be in vain, yet we may fairly say that the consideration with which Bazaine has been treated since his conviction furnishes the best text for a commentary on the case, and the probabilities of the future. There are those, however and they are, of course, represented by the leading journal, since Bazaine is fallen, who only see in him as he passes into seclusion a "degraded man." The picture of the sick lion is a most disgusting one. "No charms of nature and no domestic diversions will be able to silence in his mind the perpetual contrast between what he is and what he might have been. All the possibilities of those three months at Metz, all the occasions for a great resolve, all the respect he might have won, and all the disgrace he has incurred, cannot be a perpetual torment to him amidst the monotony of an existence without public duties or interests. Even if in the excitement of his trial he has persuaded himself, as he says, that his conscience is clear, the verdict of the court-martial will none the less have inflicted its sting, and in long hours of solitary reflection he will be unable to silence its recorded reproach. If the President, as some think, has been merciful, he has none the less been compelled to inflict on his former comrade a punishment which in some respects must be worse than death."

Having thus satisfied the æsthetic demands of its readers a bit of touching portraiture, the *Times* puts the issue as follows:—"Had he been able to escape from Metz and place but the skeleton of an army at the service of his country, he would have won an imperishable claim to its gratitude; had he been overpowered in a desperate struggle by superior force, his renown would still have shone brightly in the annals of glory." It is on this point that we wish to say a last word. It was Bazaine's opinion that he could not fight his way through the German lines with a force that would have been of any service compared with the service of detaining 200,000 men of the enemy around Metz; and it was the opinion of the Council of War at Paris that he did good service by so detaining them. This being so, the other alternative of throwing himself against the enemy with the certainty of being overpowered, but at the same time of winning a name of renown in the annals of glory, is precisely one that we are bold to say a general in the position of Bazaine ought not for a moment to have entertained. This preference of Frenchmen for empty "glory" is that one of their characteristics which has ever been the most loudly condemned in England.

When the single minded and gallant soldier Leo—with whom we do not for a moment propose to compare Marshal Bazaine, or any other modern French commander—knew that the way of escape was completely barred to him, what happened? Colonel Chesney shall tell us in one of the most pathetic passages ever written in a military biography. Leo was confronted, like Bazaine, by the inevitable necessity of a disastrous capitulation, and like him had only one other alternative. "For a moment those who looked on him saw him

almost overcome; and the first words of complaint ever heard from his lips during the war broke sharply forth, I had rather die a thousand deaths!" Musing sadly for a few seconds, as his men's favourite cry broke on his ear, "There's Uncle Robert!" in deep sad tones he said to those near him, "How soon could I end all this and be at rest!" 'Tis but to ride down the line, and give the word, and all would be over." Then presently recovering his natural voice, he answered one who urged that the surrender might be misunderstood, "That is not the question. The question is whether it is right. And if it is right I take the responsibility." Then, after a brief silence, he added with a sigh, "It is our duty to live. What will become of the wives and children of the South if we are not here to protect them?" So saying he sent in his flag of truce without further hesitation to Grant. The coming action was stayed on the instant, and the struggle of the Confederacy was virtually over."

Again, when the heights all around Sedan were manned with the German batteries, ready to open fire, and an hour or two more would have sufficed to reduce the place to a heap of unrecognisable ruin, brave old De Wimpffen had no idea of surrendering but proposed that the Emperor should place himself in the midst of a column of men, who would endeavour to cut their way through in the direction of Carignan. This was the blind and reckless instinct of the gallant soldier, thinking only of that same "glory" of which the *Times* speaks. The Emperor declined to save himself at the cost of such a fruitless sacrifice of life, and thought it equally honourable to surrender to an overpowering force. After this, General de Wimpffen assembled a council of war, composed of about thirty-two general officers, to consider the situation, when it was decided, only two dissentient voices objecting, that as any fresh struggle would but entail the useless sacrifice of many thousands of men, the capitulation should be signed. We may safely conclude from these notable instances that the pernicious notion of the *Times* that it is one of the duties of a commander-in-chief to raise for himself a monument of so called "glory" on the bodies of men uselessly slain, receives no countenance from the cooler judgments of military men themselves, who are the best judges in such a case. When De Wimpffen proposed to sacrifice a column of men for the glory of carrying off the Emperor, it was in the heat of battle, and an hour afterwards, in the midst of his most experienced generals, he decided otherwise. Leo, feeling for a moment the temptation like De Wimpffen, decided for himself in accordance with the inspirations of humanity and sound policy.

But the *Times* suggests, if it does not absolutely affirm, that if Bazaine had passed the German lines with only the skeleton of an army the service to his country would have been so great as to deserve its gratitude. But is this really so? Let us consider what might possibly have happened had the investment of Metz been voluntarily abandoned by the Germans, and if Marshal Bazaine, known to be devoted to the Government by which he had been sent into the field, had commenced—as he then must have done—his march on Paris. Was there no danger that the Republican levies of Gambetta would cross his path, and, if so, what would have been the consequences? Let us hear the *Times* once more: The restlessness, the lack of any institution or authority capable of commanding unreserved

devotion, which is the chronic disease of France, is seen in its worst symptom in "Bazaine's fall." Why, the gravamen of the charge against Bazaine is, that he preserved his devotion to the Empire to which he and his soldiers had sworn allegiance! Had he possessed the versatility of a Trochu, the restlessness of a Gambetta, or that fatal suppleness of character which has characterized so many Frenchmen high in authority, he might indeed have immolated his army instead of surrendering it. But after all, if the destruction of the Commune, and the resuscitation of the French army since the close of the war, have been of any service to France, it is worthy of consideration how far the country was indebted for these results to his conservative policy.

But the *Times* goes on to say: "Assuming, as we must, the finding of the court-martial to be true, it is France which is the real victim of Bazaine's career." In the first place, why must we assume the infallibility of a court composed of half a dozen obscure generals headed by an Orleanist prince? Frenchmen are themselves divided in opinion as to the justice of the verdict, and why must Englishmen be of one mind on the subject? We have the evidence before us, and the old British love of fair play compels us to be guided, not by what other people have decided, but by what that evidence points to, and what must be the logical conclusion from it.

The truth is—and it cannot be too strongly insisted on—the situation in the then state of France was one of unprecedented difficulty. Those who contend for the observance of a hard and fast line between military and political circumstances in this particular instance forget that these two elements in the constitution of a State were at that time everywhere mingled in a state of chaotic confusion; and Gambetta himself, the most violent accuser of Bazaine, more than any other man in authority, subordinated military to political considerations in his administration of the army and his distribution of commands, if not in his strategy. This part of the question is one upon which the lapse of time may be expected to throw much additional light. It extends from the situation of Metz to the whole conduct of the war, and the appointments made by Gambetta in the south and east of France. However, *Ve victis!* the last kick at the sick lion is given by the leading journal.

The *Anglo-Brazilian Times* claims the acquaintance of a living Brazilian who was born on the 29th May, 1695, and who is consequently in his 178th year. Don José Martino Coutinho is, we are assured, still in possession of his mental faculties, and the only bodily ailment he complains of is "stiffness in the leg joints," which, for a gentleman of his years, is hardly to be wondered at. In his youth Coutinho fought as a soldier in Pernambuco against the Dutch, and remembers the most notable facts in the reigns of Don John V., Don Jose, and Donna Maria I. It is added that he can count 123 grandchildren, 86 great grandchildren, 23 great great grandchildren, and 21 great great great grandchildren, which is, perhaps the astonishing part of the story.

A fire in Constantinople, on Monday night, destroyed over one hundred houses, including the residence of the Grand Vizier. Spain has provisionally recalled her diplomatic representatives from Berlin, Vienna and several other European capitals.

In Alsace the French candidates for the German Reichstag have been elected by overwhelming majorities.