

A DIPLOMATIC TINDER-BOX.

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THOUGH aversion to secret diplomacy is very generally expressed in these days, public interest in the matter does not often extend further than condemnation of the actual terms. Details and examples of its processes are apt to be dismissed as dry, though they can hardly be seen otherwise than as dynamic and dramatic when the wide extent of their influence and their far reaching consequences are taken into account, and accurate knowledge of them is essential to thorough comprehension of public problems. The case of Morocco exemplifies perhaps better than any other the devious ways of governments when left to their own devices, and continues to be of interest not only as having been one of the deepest roots of the war, but because its ramifications are not necessarily ended.

The following short summary of the case is drawn in substance from the books, pamphlets, and speeches of Mr. E. D. Morel, who made a most exhaustive study of it and exposed it fully in 1912 with the hope of averting war. The honesty of this purpose was generally acknowledged at the time, even by those who differed with his deductions, and his presentation of the facts has never been adequately refuted, however much interpretations of them may vary.

Important to an understanding of the whole problem is a preliminary realization of the fact that remote as Morocco seems it was a matter of direct interest to most of the great European Powers. To Great Britain, as containing a point of strategical importance opposite Gibraltar; to France, as adjacent to her colonial interests in northern Africa; and to Germany for the markets it offered to her increasing trade. To Spain, the fate of so close a neighbor could not be a matter of indifference; and Italy, as a Mediterranean Power, shared this interest to a lesser degree.

The first international convention on the subject of Morocco was held at Madrid in 1880. Up to that time only France and Great

Britain had enjoyed "most favoured nation" treatment in Morocco, but at the suggestion of Germany, supported by Great Britain, this was then extended to all nations. In the succeeding decade German trade increased considerably in Morocco, so that in 1890 a commercial treaty for five years was signed between Germany and Morocco, it having been previously submitted for approval to the other signatory Powers of the Madrid Convention. During the same period the imperialistic party gained ascendancy in France, and being ambitious of eventually gaining complete control of northern Africa, they opposed Lord Salisbury's scheme for a commercial treaty between Great Britain and Morocco, mooted in 1891, though it was approved by the German and Italian Ministers as seeking no purely selfish interests.

From 1894 to 1901 friction continually increased between France and Morocco on the Moorish-Algerian frontier, aggravated by French annexation of several debatable border towns. At the same time throughout these years M. Delcassé gave repeated assurances to the Sultan of Morocco that his government intended to respect the integrity of Morocco. In 1901 M. Delcassé concluded an agreement with Italy in which he undertook to allow Italy a free hand in Tripoli, on condition that Italy would not interfere with French claims in Morocco. At the same time he commenced secret negotiations with Spain whereby France and Spain were to divide Morocco between them. This treaty assumed final shape in September 1902, but in the meantime Great Britain had got wind of the scheme and prevailed upon Spain at the last minute not to agree to it, though her influence in this was not revealed until November 1911.

In March 1904 M. Delcassé assured the German ambassador at Paris that France desired to "uphold the existing political and territorial status of Morocco." In April 1904 an agreement was drawn up between France and Great Britain, and in October of the same year a declaration was made public between France and Spain. In the Franco-British agreement France undertook not to interfere with British plans in Egypt, and Great Britain agreed to recognize France's special interests in Morocco. So much was published to the world at large. In the Franco-Spanish declaration both countries announced that they were firmly attached to the integrity and independence of Morocco. Now subjoined to both these transactions there were secret agreements whereby France and Spain agreed to divide Morocco between them and to share the economic spoils: Great Britain consenting, with the stipulation that Spain should control the coast line of the Mediterranean.

These secret agreements were drawn up by the Foreign Offices of the governments concerned and were kept secret from the parliaments as well as the people of Great Britain, France and Spain, as also from the governments and people of other countries for seven years, for the world only came to know their contents in November 1911. (To quote Mr. Morel exactly: "No more unpardonable betrayal of the public interest, no more indefensible perversion of the public mind has taken place in our generation, and in the French parliament at least, the action of British and French diplomats has been stigmatized as it deserved to be." This he illustrates in *Ten Years of Secret Diplomacy* by extracts from speeches of Baron d'Estournelles de Constant, M. Ribot and M. de Lamarzelle. The matter was never broached in the British parliament.) The fact that there were secret clauses which would not be revealed was made public in the French press at the time, and confirmed by the leader of the French Colonial party, M. Etienne. Germany grew suspicious.

In March 1905, the Kaiser, acting on Prince Bülow's advice, visited Tangier, where he informed the Sultan's representative that he regarded the Sultan as an independent sovereign and that he was determined to safeguard Germany's interests in Morocco. Simultaneously the German Government pressed the Sultan to demand a second international conference, urging that the future of his country was a matter which concerned all the great powers. This proposal M. Delcassé naturally opposed, since he had taken the whole direction of French foreign policy on his own shoulders and had not even taken all the cabinet into his confidence. As the French premier, M. Rouvier, and the rest of M. Delcassé's colleagues finally approved it however, he was forced to resign. Meanwhile the British Foreign Office also opposed a fresh conference and the *Times* adopted a most hostile attitude to Germany for having made the proposal. The British public were of course ignorant of the secret agreements and the German government had had reason to be suspicious of their existence for some time, so that by the end of 1905 when a conference had at length been reluctantly consented to, Anglo-German relations were badly strained and the Entente Cordiale had grown correspondingly stronger.

The Conference of Algeiras took place in February 1906. Representatives of all the powers, including the United States, were present, and an act was drawn up and signed by Great Britain, France, Spain and Germany, the countries with chief interests in Morocco. It was drawn up "in the name of God Almighty" and based upon "the threefold principle of the sovereignty and inde-

pendence of his Majesty the Sultan, the integrity of his dominions, and economic liberty without any inequality." This was the crucial point in subsequent international relations. Had a new page really been turned and a frank open policy followed, the British-Franco-German atmosphere might have cleared and the great war—already looming so threateningly on the horizon—might possibly have been averted.

Instead of this, from 1907 on, the French Government, ignoring the Act of Algeciras, proceeded under one pretext or another to absorb Morocco, encouraged by the British Foreign Office and the officially inspired section of the British press. In the course of the absorption many thousands of Moors were killed, and while the French gradually took up permanent military occupation of more and more towns and districts, the French Chamber was continuously reiterating that it had no intention of interfering with the internal affairs of Morocco.

Early in 1909 discussions began between France and Germany over Morocco, in which Germany sought compensation elsewhere in Africa for the shelving of her Moroccan interests, and these discussions were intermittently kept up until the spring of 1911, being alternately taken up and dropped according to the changes in the French Ministry. Owing to her continually increasing population and relatively small colonial possessions, economic outlets and opportunities for obtaining raw material were increasingly necessary to German industrial expansion.

In the meantime the disintegrating fungus of high finance, which always accompanies Colonial ventures, was doing its deadly work. The Sultan Mulai Hafid and his predecessor Abdulaziz had been encouraged and even pressed to draw loan after loan upon Europe, so that in 1910 Moroccan indebtedness amounted to £6,520,000. In order to meet the interest on this sum Mulai Hafid had finally become compelled to mortgage the Customs duties and all his other Moorish sources of revenue, and he tried as well to raise extra revenue from his subjects by all manner of cruel extortions. This naturally led to internal unrest, and the French administration made this a pretext for sending, in May 1911, a military expedition to Fez to restore order, which was to be recalled when that object was accomplished. Sir Edward Grey publicly approved of this proceeding.

But the French troops remained in occupation, and Spain, determined not to lose the share that had been allotted to her in the secret agreements of 1904, also sent troops to take possession of the

Moroccan coast. Thereupon the Franco-German negotiations were broken off and the German Government despatched a gunboat, the Panther, to Agadir, to indicate more forcibly than by discussion that they also had an interest in the fate of Morocco. This act was promptly denounced in England as a violation of the Act of Algiers, and as almost a *casus belli*. The British press comments on the subject were indeed more violent than the French ones. France looked upon the sending of the Panther less as a hostile act and more as an intimation that Germany intended seriously to dispute the annexation of Morocco, and as a sign that the long continued negotiations between the two countries must be finally concluded. It subsequently transpired that in the negotiations previous to the march on Fez, Germany had agreed to consent to a French Protectorate in Morocco given suitable compensation elsewhere, and the sending of the Panther was therefore a public protest at an act at which she had already privily connived. Foreseeing the settlement this action must lead to, Sir Edward Grey insisted that Great Britain must take part in any Franco-German discussions.

The case in brief was this: reciprocity of trade having been guaranteed at two international conferences, at both of which Germany was one of the signatory Powers, the German Government felt that they were not justified in submitting to the alteration of the status quo in Morocco without either their consent or the receipt of some compensation, where such a change so materially affected their economic interests. They virtually said to France: You have treated with Italy, then with Spain, and subsequently with Great Britain, donating to all these Powers something in exchange for their consent to your setting aside publicly ratified treaties as to Morocco. How will you treat with us?

In answer to enquiries from the French Ambassador in July 1911, the German Foreign Secretary proposed that France should turn over to Germany rather more than half the French Congo, and offered in part exchange two of the German colonies in Africa, Togoland and part of the Cameroons. This conversation was not made public until December of that year, but in the meantime the British press published many heated articles to the effect that Germany was demanding impossible compensation from France and that her real object was to gain possession of Agadir, which in turn was represented as affecting British interests. Though Sir Edward Grey afterwards admitted that France had kept him *au courant* with what really transpired, this version was not contradicted, the affair of the

Panther was exaggerated, and finally such a feeling of hostility to Germany was aroused in the public mind that war seemed imminent.

At the height of this wave of public sentiment Mr. Lloyd George made his famous Mansion House speech, in which he said: "I would make great sacrifices to preserve peace. . . But if a situation were forced upon us in which peace could only be preserved by the surrender of the great and beneficent position Britain has won by centuries of heroism and achievement, by allowing Britain to be treated where her interests were vitally affected as if she were of no account in the cabinet of nations, then I say emphatically that peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure." At the time this speech was made about 80,000 French troops were in occupation of Morocco and had taken possession of its capital, while Spanish troops occupied a large portion of the coast. The Act of Algeciras had become a farce.

Meanwhile France, on whose behalf England was working herself up to fever pitch, was comparatively calm about these German proposals and only seeking to arrive at the best solution of them. The attitude of the German public was that it was a matter between themselves and France, and that no British interests were endangered or involved in any way. Which indeed was so, except for the major interest Great Britain felt she had in preventing any Franco-German rapprochement, from fear of its upsetting the balance of power. At length a treaty was signed between France and Germany on November 4, 1911. Germany agreed to formally recognize a French Protectorate over Morocco on condition that the "open door," was to be assured to the commercial and industrial enterprises of all nations, and in return received territorial compensation in tropical Africa.

In November of that year the Paris press published the secret agreements arrived at seven years previously between France, Great Britain, and Spain, and about the same time disclosures were made in England by Captain Faber M. P., Lord Charles Beresford, Admiral Freemantle and others as to the plans of the British Government for giving military and naval aid to France in the event of war. The truth of these latter statements was denied at the time, though they were subsequently proved correct by Sir Edward Grey's disclosure of the understanding with France in his speech of August 3, 1914. All these revelations strengthened the hands of the Imperialistic party in Germany, and the German people became convinced that their Government had dealt weakly in the matter of Morocco and had lowered German prestige in consenting to be

ignored on a matter affecting all the great powers. War indeed was only staved off in that stormy year of 1911 by the joint efforts of the pacifically inclined parties in all the countries concerned.

But although war was then averted, the international atmosphere had become, and was to remain, thoroughly poisoned by jealousy and suspicion, and friction was intensified to an alarming degree by the steady increase of armaments each power felt it necessary to make. So that, as Mr. Morel says in his preface to *Ten Years of Secret Diplomacy*: "The Moroccan quarrel will, by future generations of English-speaking people, be regarded as one of those episodes which leave indelible traces upon its destinies, forging links of inter-connected circumstances affecting a remote posterity." In such a condensation as this the threads left out are necessarily many, but the more fully the case is viewed, the more of an object lesson it becomes as to what the peoples of the world have to expect if they continue to leave the conduct of foreign affairs exclusively to Foreign Offices and Chancelleries, and submit to being left in the dark about matters so closely and vitally affecting their own interests.