FRANCE AND HER ALGERIAN PROBLEM

'European domination of Northern Africa will stand or fall as a whole. . . . We can no more afford to be indifferent to the relations of France with her Moslem subjects than she can disregard the trend of our policy in Egypt and in India.' [1]

MRS. ROY DEVEREUX, who wrote those words, is the author of a recent study on Algeria which has been very much appreciated in France, not only for its friendly spirit but also for the courteous and valuable criticism it contains. I had to object, a few months ago, in this Review,[2] to the way in which Mr. E. D. Morel was attacking the French Congo as well as the French policy in Morocco. Far from addressing the same rebuke to Mrs. Roy Devereux, I think that her French readers cannot be too grateful to her for the critical remarks she makes about the condition of the natives in Algeria. Her book is sure to help us in acknowledging our faults. It is also bound to enlighten the British public as to the difficulties France is encountering on the other side of the Mediterranean, and the pressing nature of the problem she is trying to solve.

Two main reasons account for the present acuteness of the native question in Algeria. There is, first, a general one which England is also experiencing in Egypt. The Moslem world is everywhere awakening to reflection. Although the average Algerian native is less cultivated than his Egyptian colleague, he is beginning to talk French, to read the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and to ask for a certain number of liberal reforms. Such a movement may be deplored by those who believe in autocratic methods: it is, however, a fact the consequences of which cannot be avoided. The second reason is peculiar to Algeria. Conscription was introduced last year, for the first time, among the natives. A mild sort of conscription indeed: 2214 men only have been enlisted under the new decree. But I need not explain why, in face of the coming increase of the German army, conscription of the natives in Algeria has come to stay; in fact, it will certainly be applied very soon on a larger scale. As a result of the new measure, the natives sent to Paris

[1] *Aspects of Algeria*, by Roy Devereux (London: Dent and Sons), p. 157.
[2] 'The Truth about the Franco-German Crisis of 1911,' *Nineteenth Century and After*, June 1912.

last summer a number of delegates, who declared that they cheerfully accepted the obligation to serve in the army, but claimed, in return, definite political compensations. The feeling has been growing among the natives since then, that in return for the military duty they were called upon to perform, they ought to receive certain rights. No thinking Frenchman would dare to reject their request. It is not only a question of justice but also one of safety, as nothing would be more unpleasant, in case of a European war, than to have Algeria up in arms against France. Thus it has become more urgent than ever to deal with the possible defects of the present *régime*.

These defects are to-day freely acknowledged by a large portion of French public opinion. It would be childish to try to conceal them. Still, I do not think it possible for a foreign student to understand them properly, without realising the capital difference which exists between Algeria and Egypt, a difference which can be summed up in a single word: the Colonists.

When Great Britain undertook to guide the Egyptian Government, she never intended for one moment to bring British settlers into the country. There were, of course, many Europeans already there, but most of them were living in the towns, and even to-day their number is insignificant as compared with the eleven millions of Moslems and Copts who live in the Nile Valley. On the other hand, the British Dominions, where the natives are either absent or of an inferior type, were already a natural and sufficient outlet for British emigration. England thought, therefore, that her only duty in Egypt was, according to her promise, to teach the Egyptians to govern themselves. Her main preoccupation was to do away at once with all the disreputable features of every Eastern government; she waged war against the famous 'three Cs' (Courbash, Corvées, and Corruption), against financial disorder, and every form of anarchy. As early as 1883 Lord Dufferin granted the natives the right to elect representatives to the Provincial Councils, the Legislative Council, and the Legislative Assembly. Two years later Lord Cromer established the principle that in all fiscal matters the natives and the Europeans were to be treated on a footing of equality. More recently, in 1910, the power and importance of the Provincial Councils have been considerably increased. In one word, Great Britain has had only one object in view—namely, to promote the welfare of the natives.

On the contrary, the object of France in Algeria, since 1830 almost, has been twofold. She made up her mind not only to give the natives a better government but also, and even before all, to make Algeria a French province by implanting on her

soil a large French population. The first man who clearly defined that policy was Field-Marshal Bugeaud, who governed Algeria from 1840 to 1847, and who gave such an impulse to the development of the country that when he departed 100,000 French colonists had already settled down in Northern Africa. This immigration policy was abandoned for a time under Napoleon the Third : the Emperor dreamed of an Arab kingdom of which he was to be the king, and in which the French element was only to play the leading part, as the British element does to-day in Egypt. But the old conception of Bugeaud was revived after 1871, and is now more popular than ever. The reason for this change is obvious. After the loss of Alsace-Lorraine the whole nation thought, with Prevost-Paradol, that her last chance was there : she must make Algeria a part of France, and therefore, while educating and benefiting the natives, she must foster, by all legitimate means, the growth of a European population which was to increase her own strength at home.

Keeping in mind this double purpose, it is easy to understand why the work performed by France in Algeria is in many ways so remarkable and in others so strangely defective. Roughly speaking, the colonial side of the work compares favourably with anything that has been achieved in any other part of the world by other civilised nations. Out of 752,043 Europeans who are living in Algeria, the last census of 1911 showed that no fewer than 562,531 are of French nationality. Many of them are, of course, naturalised, but I do not think that anybody who has visited the United States or Canada will consider that the number of foreign immigrants in Algeria is increasing at a dangerous pace. Another important fact is that 141,970 Frenchmen are living out in the country (agricultural statistics of 1909-1910), 72,304 being landowners. The network of French colonisation is spreading further every day, sometimes by leaps and bounds, as it happened recently on the Sersu high plateau. Some Algerian plains, such as the Mitidja, or the region of Sidi Bel Abbès; or, again, the Summam Valley near Bougie, are as well cultivated as are the most prosperous French provinces. The public works carried out by the Government are equally admired by all foreign travellers. I will only mention the fine roads which run by every village or French farm from the sea down to the desert, some of them climbing over the Atlas Mountains, as between Fort-National and Michelet. In fact, no European country is better equipped in that respect. As for the economic development of the country, the statistics speak for themselves. Until about the year 1900 Algerian wealth had been increasing rather slowly. Since then, however, capital has been flowing in, and the foreign trade, which was standing at

about 20,000,000*l.*, has more than doubled in twelve years, reaching last year a total of 50,000,000*l.* sterling. Success in that direction is undeniable.

Unfortunately the same cannot be said of the native side of the work. A wholesale condemnation of the policy followed by France in regard to her Moslem subjects would, of course, be unjust, and I do not gather from Mrs. Devereux's book that she intends to go as far as that. When Bugeaud declared that he had the welfare of the natives at heart, he, as usual, meant what he said. His followers were true to his programme. France has done much for her subjects: only she has not done enough.

There are, indeed, many proofs that the Algerian natives have benefited largely from the establishment of French rule. The mere fact that their number is rapidly increasing (reaching to-day nearly five millions), shows that their general condition has much improved. But other signs are more conclusive. An important number of Kabyls, and even of Arabs, are buying up land on such a scale that some colonists are asking themselves whether the whole land will not after a time become the property of the natives. It is interesting to note, at any rate, that many native landowners are taking to modern agricultural methods. Out of 108,653 European ploughs which existed in Algeria in 1910, 34,420, or about one-third, were in the hands of the natives. Recently, I visited a native farm in which every sort of American machine was used by the farmer, who had bought the whole property and outfit from a colonist. If one takes the trouble to remember that the native population of Algeria is, on the whole, of a lower intellectual level than that of Egypt, the educational work of France appears, I think, to have been considerable. It has been especially beneficial to the large bulk of the population by the development of mutual benefit societies, which have lately taken an enormous development from north to south. There were in existence in 1910 208 *sociétés indigènes de prévoyance*, with a membership of 540,580 natives. Their receipts in 1909-10 totalled over 1,000,000*l.*, their reserve funds over 800,000*l.* Owing to this institution, without mentioning others, famine has practically disappeared, even in such a bad year as 1912, when, under normal Eastern conditions, thousands of natives would have died of hunger.

Other facts might be quoted in order to show that a great deal has already been done. It is, however, more important to confess the defects which we want to remedy. These defects fall under three headings: fiscal matters, justice, and political representation.

I do not hesitate to say that, in my opinion, the present system of special taxation and 'corvées' in Algeria is unjustifi-

able. Its origin is clear. As it was considered, from the first, that the colonisation of the country should be favoured by all means, the best governors never even thought that the first duty of a civilised government was to divide the burden of taxation equally between colonists and natives. They believed sincerely that it was enough not to increase the taxes already established by the Turks. Hence the fact that, while European agricultural land does not pay a farthing to the Algerian Treasury, the native landowners pay various taxes (achour, zekkat, hokkor, and lezma), which together bring in a sum varying each year from 16 to 18 million francs (from 640,000*l.* to 720,000*l.*). Some French Algerians have themselves pointed out that nothing can justify the fact that, in face of such a heavy burden supported by the native agriculturists, the European vinegrowers, who in 1911 exported wine amounting in value to over 8,000,000*l.*, should be exempt from any kind of taxation. But this is not all. Besides these so-called Arab taxes, the Algerian Moslems are liable to other obligations, which practically amount to another form of taxation. In certain towns they have to furnish night patrols, or to redeem themselves by paying each month a sum varying from one to two shillings. In the neighbourhood of the forests they have to perform the 'corvée' of fire watchmen, which corresponds to an additional taxation of about 80,000*l.* a year. Then there are the so-called *prestations supplémentaires* (extra days of prestation) due when they want to lead their sheep into the woods. Many of the petty chiefs, called cheikhs, who are in charge of the distribution of the taxes, exact a supplementary sum which they keep for themselves. The worst of all is that, in order to be exempt from this heavy burden, it is sufficient to be a European or an Algerian Jew, as in fiscal matters all the Europeans are treated as if they were French, and all the Jews were made French citizens by a single decree forty years ago. In these circumstances it is easy to guess what must be the feeling of the Moslems, who still pay a tribute as if they were a conquered race.

The judicial system applied to the natives does not seem to be much more satisfactory. It is known under the general name of *indigénat*. For slight offences the natives may be fined 15 francs, or imprisoned for five days, by the French administrators who are in charge of practically the whole country outside of the towns (in the *communes mixtes* as opposed to the *communes de plein exercice*). For more important misdemeanours, or for crimes, they are referred to special courts: *tribunaux répressifs* and *cours criminelles*. Lastly, under the name of 'internement' they may be deported, or even imprisoned in a special penitentiary, by order of the Governor-

General. The disciplinary powers given to the administrators may be necessary in an Eastern country; in fact, the Egyptian Mudirs have the right to inflict the same penalties; but the special courts are blamed by the Algerian Frenchmen themselves as being often ruthless and unfair. As for the 'internement,' that Algerian form of the 'lettre de cachet' which was abolished in France at the time of the great Revolution, it is difficult to see how it can be justified any longer, since Great Britain is doing without it in Egypt, where she has to deal with a native population twice as large as that in Algeria, and with a nationalist agitation which culminated in the murder of Butros Pasha. It is in fact amazing that England should have adopted the French code in Egypt while France has clung to Egyptian methods in Algeria.

Finally, there is the question of political representation. In no other direction has the intention of making way for the European colonists been more noticeable. The general principles involved in the present organisation were, of course, sound: the uneducated natives were to be left under the control of the French administrators; in the towns and their immediate surroundings, where they were supposed to have reached a higher degree of civilisation, it was decided that they should elect representatives to the municipal council, and thus have an opportunity of receiving a kind of political education; a few natives, partly elected, partly chosen by the Administration, were to represent the Moslems in the *Conseils Généraux* (corresponding to the Egyptian provincial councils), in the *Délégations Financières* and the *Conseil Supérieur* (two bodies corresponding roughly to the General Assembly and the Legislative Council in Egypt). Thus the native element was to be represented in all the political councils of the colony. This scheme was perfect in theory. Unfortunately it turned out quite different in practice. The difference between totally uneducated and partially educated natives is a very artificial one; there are, indeed, a great many natives of the better class in the so-called *communes mixtes*, which include about 80 per cent. of Algerian civil territory; these people elect no representatives at all; they were even deprived, as early as 1868, of the right they had under Turkish rule of electing a village assembly (*djemaa*). As for the elected municipal councillors, who are chosen by a ridiculously small electoral college (including only landowners, farmers, civil servants, and a few others), they must be content with being mere phantoms: their number can never exceed the fourth of the French councillors nor be superior to six; moreover, they cannot take part in the election of the mayor, who is not only in charge of the financial administration of the commune but is invested

at the same time with a considerable power over the native population. As for the Moslem members of the higher councils, they are so few in number and so much in the hands of the Administration that they have received the nickname of Beni-oui-oui, which implies that they say Aye each time they are asked to vote for a measure favoured by the Governor-General. The result of all this is that the natives feel that their interests are never properly cared for; that, for instance, they have no means of making their grievances known when they are bullied by some cheikh, or by a French Administrator; that the money they provide is used by the mayors for the exclusive benefit of the colonists. In one word, the whole system of political representation appears to them as being a mere humbug, devised in order to cheat them.

Even were the spirit of discontent not growing at a disquieting pace among the Arabs as a consequence of these three abuses, it would not be possible any longer for the French democracy to uphold such a vicious organisation. As a matter of fact, it has lasted so long only because French opinion was not aware of its existence. A British observer must always remember that it is only very recently that the French nation, as a whole, has begun to take a real interest in her own colonies. However, one of the happy consequences of the Moroccan crisis has been precisely to make French Northern Africa popular in France. The French public is at last awake to the fact that other nations, with Great Britain at the head, have set a better example in dealing with their Moslem subjects, and that France herself used different methods when she organised her Tunisian protectorate. There are, indeed, many reasons to believe that the summer of 1913 will not pass without the Chambers taking action; definite promises have been given to that effect by the Government; a growing number of French deputies are declaring themselves in favour of immediate reform. The question is, however, what is to be done? Before trying to answer, I should like to point out the main difficulties which stand in the way of the French reformer and make the Algerian problem so much more difficult than the problem which Great Britain had to solve in Egypt.

The most evident one is due to the special characteristics of the Algerian Moslems. Writing in his last report of 1910 about the failure of the liberal policy in Egypt so far as the Legislative Council and the General Assembly were concerned, Sir Eldon Gorst said: 'In my opinion, the principal and sufficient reason has been that from first to last the adoption of this policy has been attributed both by the Egyptians and by the European colonists to weakness, to an attempt to pacify the nationalist

agitation by ill-timed concessions and to an intentional diminution of British authority.' An impression of the same sort would be much more disastrous in Algeria. Though the intellectual class does not show the anti-European tendencies which are commonly displayed by the Egyptian nationalists, there is not the slightest doubt that the Algerian Moslems are more warlike, more apt to throw themselves into the risks of a rebellion, more difficult to subdue, once they are up in arms, than are the Egyptian people. The country lends itself to guerilla warfare much better than does the Nile Valley. The Berbers have at all times been hard to manage, harder to conquer. The powerful religious associations, of a more or less pan-Islamic trend, which group the Moslems by thousands from one end of the country to the other, might make use of the first sign of weakness in order to persuade them that the time has come to throw the 'Rumis' into the sea. It was after the liberal reforms attempted by Napoleon the Third that these very associations started the great revolt of 1871, the most dangerous one experienced since the days of Abd el Khader. More recently, the short Margueritte affray showed some twelve years ago that any foolish marabu can induce these credulous people to proclaim the Holy War. Caution is therefore required before launching any reforming scheme which might give the natives the impression that France, owing to her decreasing population and to the increasing pressure of Germany, was losing her strength. A wholesale change of the condition of things in Algeria would involve great risks.

In the second place, the difference, already pointed out at the commencement of this article, between Egypt and Algeria makes the French task still more complicated. Even after renouncing the old conception which gave everything to the colonist and scarcely anything to the native, we cannot ignore the fact that there exists in Algeria a French colony which is the stronghold of French domination, and which has to be treated as such. We have to be fair at the same time to the Moslem and to ourselves. One or two instances will suffice to show how, under these circumstances, any political reform is a more delicate thing in Algeria than in Egypt. No difficulty was experienced three years ago in extending the power enjoyed by the Egyptian Provincial Councils, because they were only composed of Egyptians. On the contrary, the Algerian *conseils généraux* are composed of a majority of Europeans and a minority of natives; it is impossible to increase the power of the native element without injuring the French element and without adding something, at least for a time, to the various causes of friction always at hand in a mixed assembly. Then

the Legislative Council and the General Assembly are both purely consultative bodies; on the contrary, the *Délégations Financières* are a kind of Colonial Parliament which has the right to reject and to modify the budget; to give the natives a proper representation inside that body is therefore to invest them at the same time with a real power which might be turned against the general interest. The only British colony which might truly be compared in that respect with Algeria is the Dominion of South Africa: the difficulties which you have experienced in Cape Colony with the black electors are, however, less formidable than those which are awaiting us in a country where the natives are all white men—*i.e.* of a superior race, and Moslems, therefore less manageable.

Under these circumstances, any rash action would do more harm than the continuation of the present abuses. Though there is little doubt that French opinion will not be satisfied until fiscal equality is established, until the exceptional judicial system is abolished, and until the natives are properly represented, it is to be expected that the French Government will proceed very cautiously in that new direction. It is, indeed, possible to foresee what will be the first steps taken by the Mother Country, and where she will think it wise to stop for the present.

Strangely enough, the fiscal reform is the only one which has been already entered upon, and which will require the greatest amount of patience. During the summer of last year the *Délégations Financières*, though they are controlled by the French element, voted the principle of a land tax on all European agricultural property. It is rather interesting to note that the French colonists have recognised the necessity of proclaiming such a principle a year after the South African Government announced, so far as can be gathered from the budget speech delivered by the Hon. H. C. Hull on the 10th of March 1911, that they were going to apply 'uniform methods of taxation to the white and native races throughout the Union.' But the Algerian colonists have not gone as far as that. The land tax they are prepared to accept is a 3½ per cent. tax on the renting value, which is nearly five times less than the present land tax to which the natives are liable. They will evidently resist to the utmost any attempt on the part of the Mother Country to establish full equality between them and the Moslems. Of course, the French Government has the means to compel them, as Algeria enjoys only a limited self-government, and has to submit each of her budgets to the approval of the Chambers in Paris. Brutal compulsion on the part of France would, however, be an obviously unsound policy. The Mother Country will very

likely content herself with asking that the proposed European land tax be applied without delay, and it is only by degrees that the new tax will be brought to the level of the native one, until a general form of taxation will be devised for the whole country without distinction of race or nationality.

As for judicial reform, it will have to begin at the top and leave things as they are at the bottom. The famous *internement* must go; Parliament has only to express its will, and the Governor-General will have to give up the right of exiling or imprisoning a native without granting him a hearing. The native courts may also be abolished by a single stroke of the pen, for other courts already exist to which all native cases may be referred at once. The case is different, however, with the disciplinary powers of the administrators. The numbers of the *juges de paix* and the police forces would have to be increased considerably throughout the country; the administrators would lose a great deal of their prestige, and would find it more difficult to maintain order in their *communes mixtes*; finally, there is no apparent reason why they should not continue to wield the same authority which a Mudir enjoys in Egypt, and which may, for a long time to come, be necessary in an Eastern country. The probable solution will be that the administrators will keep their powers, but will be submitted to a closer control on the part of the superior administration: a number of special inspectors will be created for that purpose.

The political reform may be more drastic. It is not without reason that the educated natives, as well as liberal opinion in France, consider that it should be undertaken before all others. It is the key to every other change. Once the natives have representation, which they lack almost entirely at present, they will themselves be in a position to work for the betterment of their condition. They will be able to ask to some purpose for a better distribution of taxes, as well as for a better use of municipal, provincial, and colonial funds. Their protestation will be heard whenever they feel that they are the victims of unfair treatment. Moreover, as it is to be supposed that there will always be some wrongs left, it is important for the popularity of French rule that the Moslems should be obliged to accuse their own representatives rather than the French Civil Service. Two main political changes will therefore be insisted upon. First of all an electoral body worthy of the name must be constituted at once; the right to vote must be granted, not only as at present to a few landowners and farmers, but to all licensed tradesmen or artisans, and to all the natives who have gone through the French primary schools; in order to protect the electors against any kind

of pressure, they must be freed from even the mitigated form of *indigénat* to which the great bulk of the native population will be submitted in the future. In the second place, the influence of their elected representatives will have to be strengthened in all the assemblies by increasing their number and by giving them —a concession distasteful to the colonists—the right to vote for the election of the mayors. As for the special representation of the natives in the French Parliament, which is advocated by some, it will probably be put off till a later date.

Such a programme may appear at first sight to be a very moderate one. I do not think, however, that anybody who has had any experience of colonial conditions would advise France to go farther for the present. At any rate, these cautious reforms would be important enough. They would mark a new departure in the policy which France has been following for over eighty years in Algeria. According to Bugeaud's conception, which was at the root of that policy, the natives had no rights at all; they had been conquered: France's only duty was to be 'good to them.' The new conception is very different, and one which, I believe, is bound to be more in harmony with Great Britain's own traditions. It implies that France has to grant definite rights to her subjects as well as to her citizens. The Algerian Moslems are to enjoy fiscal equality, justice, and sufficient power to defend their own interests and take part in the administration of the colony.

The political reform advocated to-day, and which the French Parliament will very likely approve with an almost unanimous vote, would suffice by itself—without counting the other envisaged reforms—to open the new era. To what goal will that liberal method lead French Northern Africa? There is, of course, a risk that a nationalist movement, which is scarcely noticeable to-day, may come out of these reforms and be a menace to the peace of Algeria. But without indulging in undue optimism, it seems to me that things may turn out quite differently. Of course, a native party is sure to be formed and to be in conflict with the party of the colonists. Party warfare is, however, less harmful to the general wellbeing of a country than the secret discontent which exists to-day among the Moslems. Moreover, the Algerian natives will look more and more to France as their natural protector against the colonists. That feeling is already plain to-day: the very intellectual element which works in Egypt for independence is advocating in Algeria the development of French schools and of French conscription. As the number, the wealth and the power of the colonists are steadily increasing, the Moslems will each year find it more necessary to cling to France,

if only France is wise enough to make her action felt in their favour without harming the legitimate interests of the European population. Thus there is some chance that the future policy of France may be successful. Its aim must be to maintain the balance between the two races which are condemned by fate to live side by side in the new France beyond the sea.

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