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FRENCH OPINION OF OUR CIVIL WAR

In these days when America is the spectator of world war, it is of increased interest to notice the views of Europe when America was the battle ground itself. An awakening interest in this study has recently impressed upon our public the paramount importance of the English attitude toward the war; and our vast debt to Cobden, Bright, and John Stuart Mill and other English Liberals has stirred the national gratitude. The Liberals of France played an equal *rôle*. Their voice, not loud but deep, operated to curb the opportunism and militancy of Napoleon III and his cabinet of adventurers. The spirit of liberalism was abroad in the world, and Europeans instinctively recognized the Unionists as champions of a common cause wherein all lovers of humanity claimed a stake.

The nineteenth century witnessed the popularizing of liberalism. Only the Titans of the eighteenth century had burst the chains wherewith bigotry had held the world enslaved. In an age of "enlightened despots" the masses had remained in outer darkness. It was not till the nineteenth century that the first fruits of emancipation were garnered into a new social consciousness. The philosophy of voices crying in the wilderness had become the practical creed of the average man. The common man was to animate, if not to dominate, the nineteenth century, and with his newly awakened instincts of democracy, he clung to liberalism. The attitude of the toiler, were he English, or were he French, was to be a most unwonted and astonishing factor in governmental policy. Whether blind or intelligent, this attitude was instinctively liberal.

From the outset, the new spirit pervaded the French attitude toward the American Civil War. But the intense conservatism of the French character, the prestige of the Empire fresh from its laurels in Italy, the recrudescence of popularity of the Orleanists, and the presence of the Roman Church, far more weighty in the councils of the Second Empire than in those of the Third Republic, created a complex of forces all of which influenced, no one of which wholly dominated, national policy. The following

notes may serve as a sort of parallelogram of those forces which guided the American diplomacy of Napoleon III.

The aristocracy of the Faubourg St. Germain may be said to have favoured the Union. The action of the Comte de Paris and the Prince de Joinville in serving with McClellan carried with it the loyalty of the Orleanist party, and drawing-room gossip credited them with more than mere sabre assistance to Lincoln's government. The Prince de Joinville was declared to have swung the balance in favour of surrendering Mason and Slidell to the demands of England, an inestimable service if true. The Princes' military service had a diplomatic importance because the more their popularity increased in France, the more hostile became Napoleon's government toward the side which they espoused. In carrying out the traditions of La Fayette and Rochambeau, the Orleans Princes won a deserved respect both in America and at home; but the Cabinet at Washington recognized the peril of antagonizing Napoleon, and the return of the Princes to Europe was more a relief than a regret. The rising tide of Orleanism was a menace against which Napoleon always stood guard, and his official press relaxed in anti-Union bitterness the moment the Princes withdrew. The Princes were well advised; for their position would have been awkward in the not impossible event of war between the United States and France, had they retained their commissions till its outbreak. Within the Federal lines or in the great world of Europe, it remained true of the Comte de Paris that "a more loyal and ardent *American* does not exist than this King's son."

In as far as popular sentiment could restrain an autocrat, the neutrality of France was due to Liberals. A true instinct told them that popular government was facing its supreme test and that its future in Europe depended upon its success in America. The Liberals were capable of sacrifices for an ideal, and their sympathy, which the South had hoped to win by its free-trade theory, was faithful to the enemies of slavery. Overlook as he might the mote of Northern tariff, no Liberal could ignore the beam of Southern slavery. *Le Pays* alone of all the Paris papers dared to come out unequivocally for the South. Not even *Le Moniteur* and the government-inspired press could defy the Frenchman's inborn, inbred hatred for slavery. The great reviews, *La Revue des Deux Mondes* and *La Revue Contemporaine*, were unfailing in their denunciation of the "peculiar institution."

But most clarion of the literary notes was the ringing testimony of Agénor de Gasparin, the greatest advocate of human rights then living in France, a prophet who dared to rebuke the sins of his people and whose faith in "*la Justice ne peut mal faire*" is ever marching to fulfilment.

If Liberal efforts had been confined to literature, Napoleon might have snapped his fingers at academic theories, but they were not. The years of the Civil War were marked by constantly decreasing government majorities in the Corps Législatif. The Liberal campaign of 1863, Napoleon's last opportunity for plausible interference in America, was particularly energetic with such intellectual giants as Jules Favre, Émile Ollivier, Thiers, and Montalembert for leaders. In 1857 the combined opposition parties had seated only five deputies; in 1863 they named thirty-five. Even more significant was the popular vote. An opposition of 571,000 in 1857 had grown to 1,900,000 in 1863. In the face of Thiers's threat that the people might take their liberties if government continued to deny them, Napoleon ran too great a risk if he were to shock the deepest instincts of his people by pro-slavery aggression.

According to the more advanced Liberal thought, Napoleon had done quite enough injury to humanity by not coming out boldly in 1861 with the assurance that he would never recognize the existence of a people the cornerstone of whose liberty was slavery. That is the doctrine of Paul Boiteau in a very able article, defining slavery as a fundamental issue—states-rights, racial antipathies, even the tariff being empty pretexts. The longer the war continued, he pointed out, the more complete would be the ruin of slavery and of a revolt which was "the most impudent and most odious insult which has ever been cast upon modern ideas of civilization."

The sincerity of French Liberals is the more convincing because they were well aware of the strange blindness of the American public which persistently refused to see the real Napoleon and which openly sympathized with him in his conflict with the best friends we had, the intellectual and moral lights of France. They followed our military conquests with admiration. Their enthusiasm was for our moral victories. No characteristic of the war impressed them more than the dominance of the civil over the military authority; no single incident more than the reprimand to General Sherman for exceeding his instructions in

offering terms to the enemy. In the hour of victory these men of ideals wrought for mercy, and while forty thousand of them were subscribing toward a Lincoln Memorial, their leaders were pleading with President Johnson to "be generous in victory . . . May his [Lincoln's] be the last blood shed." Our debt to these men of thought and men of action is past computing. Our existence as a nation depended upon the self-restraint of Europe, and Europe met the crisis.

One great cause for an increase in the Liberal vote was the discontent of the working classes who had enjoyed too small a share in the expansion of wealth in the decade before 1860. The conflict of interest with their employers had shown the workingmen that their advantage lay in free trade, and in this policy Napoleon had their support as well as that of Liberal leaders. Now it is inconceivable that these workers who understood their own interests so intelligently in the matter of the tariff should have failed to comprehend even more clearly the vital necessity of a free and normal supply of cotton for the enormous spinning industry which flourished about Rouen. Equally patent, if prosperity were to continue, was the necessity of an American market for French goods. Even in April, 1861, St. Étienne was starving because the American market for silk was dead. The Morrill tariff laid a crushing burden upon the wine and distilling interests. Before the war was two years old, the suffering in the cotton-spinning centres of Nantes, Cholet, Clisson, and Rouen was pitiful, worse even than in the Manchester district because French relief methods were less efficient than English. Somewhat later, the misery was so great that no French newspaper would have been permitted to describe it. In face of such widespread distress one would look for ardent labour support for a Napoleonic programme of intervention which should put an end to the American war and restore the equilibrium of the market. Why then was this support lacking or so negligible as not to warrant Napoleon in his project? For one thing, labour was less articulate than now. No united federation proclaimed its will and dictated to governors and congresses. For another, labour sentiment was far from a unit. While the coarse cottons of the North were shut down and famine stalked abroad, the fine cottons of Lille employing more hands and less raw material were abundantly prosperous with 1,200,000 spindles in full operation. A sudden peace would throw two million bales of cotton upon the

market to the complete demoralization of the industry. Besides, peace enforced by a foreign bayonet, or peace based on separation, would be of short duration. Moreover, labour which had resented the Government's act in 1860 of raising the price of tobacco twenty-five per cent. had no reason for the sublimest confidence in Napoleon's schemes for its welfare. Practical men might approve his Mexican plan as a readier source for raw cotton than tampering with the Confederacy. Idealists could not brook Government's interference with a nation of freemen beyond the Atlantic. Labour ignorant and inarticulate could sway the Government no more than so many peasants who always voted a straight ticket. Labour intelligent and progressive felt with the thinkers of the Liberal party that it was a question of humanity and that the sufferer in a cotton famine was doing his part in the great cotton war of freedom against slavery.

The attitude of the money barons was in contrast to that of labour. The Rothschilds were known to be favourable to the South, and it is not beyond probability that the archives of the Belmont family, their New York representatives, may yet shed much light upon the financial mainsprings of the war, South as well as North. The Confederate Cotton Loan of 1863 brought out by the Erlangers was not offered in Germany, where public sentiment ran very high against it; and in England and France, where it was over-subscribed, its apologists declared it was only to pay past debts and not to furnish new sinews of war. This was wise bolstering of Southern credit, which had not gained in Europe by Jefferson Davis's supposed share in Mississippi Repudiation, by the cancellation of Northern ownership in Southern banks and railroads, and by the general repudiation of Southern debts to Northern creditors. The £3,000,000 was floated at the right time. Paying seven per cent. and secured on the precious commodity, cotton, the bonds found a ready sale. Men looked to blockade runners to bring the cotton to market, and to General Lee's sword to make good the bonds. They at one time scored a premium, and even after Appomattox were not without a market.

In Catholic France the Church was bound to be a prime factor in moulding opinion. In this connection, Protestants may safely be dismissed as practically to a unit Liberal and pro-Union. Within the ancient Church, a distinct line of cleavage existed. The Liberal party included many of the most distinguished laity

in France, such men as Augustin Cochin and the Comte de Montalembert being found within its ranks. But upon the admission of Roman Catholics themselves, the hierarchy, the Church as an institution, lent its great authority on behalf of the South. Thus the new Archbishop of Paris, in the first public address after his elevation, attacked England and Russia for their refusal to join Napoleon in mediation, an act which would have been most prejudicial to the Union. Similarly, the Archbishop of Rouen blamed the shortage of cotton to England's refusal to join the Emperor in recognizing the South and breaking the blockade. Pius IX himself wrote to Jefferson Davis saluting him as "Illustrious and Honourable Sir, greeting:" and rejoicing in his "desire for peace and tranquillity," at the same time sighing for similar counsels to sway "the other people of the States and their rulers." The *Tribune's* Paris correspondent calls frequent attention to the Southern sympathies of the upper clergy. His testimony pales, however, before the regretful admissions of the noble Montalembert whose great speech on the "Triumph of the Union" lamented the Catholic opposition to a government under whose flag Catholicism had made such progress "as no one has witnessed anywhere else since the first ages of the Church."

The Roman Catholic press was not backward in its ridicule of the party of Lincoln. *La Patrie* gave its readers quite a treat in its graphic account of that annual celebration known to all Republicans in which the party leaders solemnly burn the Constitution "bequeathed to the nation by the founders of the Republic."

The Church was distinctly cautious. Its partisanship was more the silent weight of disapproval than the active voice of hostility. It could defend itself on one score where American Protestantism was highly vulnerable. It had not been the active apologist for and champion of slavery. Its very silence, however, required explanation when the march of events called for real opinions stoutly upheld. Silence unbroken even to regret the assassination of Lincoln was too great a phenomenon to pass unnoticed. The *Journal des Débats* called for an explanation, which was but lamely rendered by *La Patrie*. One distinguished exception arises among the eighty or more Gallican prelates. M. Dupanloup, Bishop of Orleans, grasped the deeper issues of the struggle. In the Second Inaugural Address of Lincoln,

he recognized a masterpiece, and by his comprehension of the sublime loneliness of Lincoln, he established with the martyr president a certain kinship of soul.

If truth be told, the passive opposition of the Church may be easily overemphasized. Many Roman Catholics voted with the Liberals, while many more were totally indifferent to a question which had for them no vital relation. Whether because of, or in spite of, ecclesiastical direction, the French as a nation and a Catholic nation, too, maintained their traditional friendship for the government at Washington.

However his subjects might sympathize and theorize, Napoleon would finally dictate the national policy with a knowledge of conditions both North and South more accurate, perhaps, than either combatant possessed. His special agent, M. Barrot, and the usual consular service were at his disposal. The diplomatic correspondence with Seward, and the unofficial relations with Benjamin, and the Confederate emissary, Slidell, set before him the widest variances of opinion. His friend and dentist, Dr. Evans, gave him the outlook of a loyal Northern man; his friend and intimate, Slidell, constantly pointed out the righteousness of the Southern cause and its certainty of success. What then would be the Emperor's attitude? He himself expressed it in a nutshell: "*Si le Nord est victorieux je serai heureux, si le Sud est victorieux je serai enchanté.*" Napoleon's instinct was as unerring as that of the most brilliant among his Liberal subjects. Only his was not their point of view. The triumph of the Union would vindicate Republican institutions; its failure would be a moral victory for reaction, and a diplomatic victory for Napoleon's Mexican plans.

Prejudice did not overcome discretion. Napoleon's official relations were always correct. His dealings with the Confederacy were unofficial and could give no technical cause for offence. Napoleon may have promised Slidell an Anglo-French fleet to break the blockade of the Mississippi, but the fleet was never sent. He undoubtedly did offer an unsolicited mediation, but this was never pressed. The interests of his dynasty were paramount with Napoleon. Its continuance depended upon prosperity at home and glory abroad. The American war jeopardized the prosperity. The temptation to intervene was founded upon economic necessity. But economic necessity yielded before political prudence when England and Russia

refused to co-operate. Glory, which was so indispensable to Napoleonic traditions, seemed to combine with practical gain in an expedition to Mexico which would embarrass both North and South, would open an independent source of cotton supply, and would flatter the vanity of Frenchmen as the principals in a world-wide Latin Empire in which Napoleon might emulate his uncle as a king maker.

The greatest weakness of Napoleon's administration was its remoteness from reality. To the last he was a conspirator. His reactionary policy toward the press alienated the sympathy of Liberals. He did not draw toward the throne the real men of the nation. In such a game the glory was his alone; equally his was the responsibility. Had he recognized his own limitations and built up a responsible ministry to carry out a Liberal policy, his mistakes would have been fewer, his stability surer. The *rôle* he elected to play demanded genius of the first order, and genius he did not have.

Since he was powerless to intervene effectively, Napoleon must have derived a good deal of satisfaction from the enterprise of Messrs. Armand and Voruz of Nantes in fitting out war vessels "intended for the Pacific trade," a euphemism for the Confederate navy. The imperial heart showed that it was in the right place when in 1864, on the "fête of St. Napoleon," he promoted M. Armand to a commandership in the "Imperial Order of the Legion of Honour." At the same time he awarded a gold medal to the pilot, and silver medals to his assistants, of the boat which had rescued twelve of the crew of the *Alabama*.

This decidedly moderate recognition of the Confederacy was hardly to the taste of Slidell and his home government; but the *Richmond Sentinel* credited Napoleon with a just comprehension of slavery and attributed his neutrality to the fear of "doing violence to the anti-slavery sentiment of his people." The *Sentinel* was correct. The Liberals of France had held in leash the inclinations of the Emperor.

A campaign of publicity preceded the Mexican expedition. *La France* declared its purpose to be the enfranchisement of "a nation worthy of universal sympathy" and a warning to North America, "You shall go no farther." Soundings were made as to the feasibility of detaching Texas from the Confederacy. But in view of the seventy Texas regiments in the Confederate Army, success seemed unlikely. The plan as carried out involved the

somewhat fantastic scheme of Latin triumph over Anglo-Saxons in the glorious and disinterested service to Mexico of furnishing her an Austrian emperor supported by French bayonets and gold. From the outset difficulties multiplied. The public never felt its Emperor's enthusiasm for the project, and suspicious souls even called it "Duke Jecker's War," nothing but a piece of gigantic brigandage to force Mexico to pay usurious interest on the Jecker bonds supposed to have been bought up by the Duc de Morny. Our Consul at Paris, John Bigelow, attributed the move to Napoleon's desire to conciliate the Church of Rome and the Emperor of Austria; but this view far from coincides with Motley's. He describes the whole affair as intensely unpopular with Austrians and embarrassing to the Government because acceptance of the throne would mean a Hapsburg's vassalage to Napoleon, while refusal thereof would incur his wrath.

Whether prompted by thirst for glory, or contempt for our Monroe Doctrine, by friendship for Morny, or conciliation toward Austria, Napoleon made the great mistake of his reign. The Prussian War he did not want. Its folly was not his. The Mexican fiasco was his own pet fancy. Its consequences be upon his head! Diplomatically it was error one to misjudge the North's ability to conquer the South and restate the Monroe Doctrine. Historically, the lessons of Mexico's War for Independence should have taught Napoleon the futility of European intervention in that land of revolution. Politically Napoleon armed the Liberals with a constant object lesson of military failure and budget deficits on which to sharpen their weapons of satire.

This satire so rashly invited ranged from the delicate keenness of Montalembert—who found the Mexican venture "a God-send to Europe; indeed, a God-send to France" because of the still greater follies it had saved France from—to the coarse bluntness of the pamphleteer's "and hasten the end of this ignominy which calls itself the Empire, of this monster who calls himself the Emperor!"

The effect of the expedition upon French sentiment toward us had one peculiar aspect. It crystallized and focused Liberal sentiment, to be sure, but it constituted a source of irritation with the United States which reminded the stoutest Liberal that he was first of all a Frenchman. As the war drew toward its close, the liveliest fears were felt that our enormous armies

might be turned to Mexico for employment. The Marquis de Boissy phrased a very logical French sentiment when he hoped that North and South might be completely ruined rather than that the French army in Mexico should be made prisoners by the conclusion of the peace. The legislative body loudly disapproved, but the sentiment had been uttered. It was not till June, 1865, that the fear of war with the United States subsided. The worst consequences of the ill-starred venture were thus avoided. Enough mischief had been wrought as things were.

It seems a correct inference from the various points of view which this paper has striven to present that the French people were fundamentally true to their traditions toward America and toward their own traditions of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. The test is in the facts. They did not mediate, they did not intervene, they broke no blockade, and committed no overt act. To expect unanimous sentiment would be preposterous. It should be cause for permanent gratitude on the part of the American people that in their hour of trial, the powers of Europe, obedient to the intelligent liberal sentiment of the world, recognized the right of a Sovereign State to administer its own affairs.

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