The Mob at Virden

Virden, with a population of about two thousand, in Macoupin County, Illinois, within half an hour's ride by rail of the capital of the State, and in an important center of the coal-mining industry, was on Wednesday of last week the scene of one of those battles which recall the fights between populace and nobles, or between contending factions of nobles, in the Middle Ages. The white miners employed at Virden struck, and the mining operators endeavored to supply their places by importing a train-load of negroes, who were willing to accept the terms offered by the managers. On Sunday the Sheriff of Macoupin County, foreseeing trouble, telegraphed to Governor Tanner for troops, informing him at the same time that serious disorder was imminent, and that the force of deputies at his command was insufficient. Governor Tanner responded by the question whether the owners of the mines intended to bring in miners from other States to take the places of the strikers, and received the reply that they proposed to operate their mines under the laws of the State; that an armed mob was awaiting the arrival of the newcomers; that the company was within the law and meant to stay within the law, and had a right to be protected. To which the Governor replied that the mine-owners understood the peril, and if they persisted in bringing in miners from the South they would be morally responsible for what would happen. The train, loaded with two hundred negroes from Alabama, arrived in Virden on Wednesday, protected by special mine guards and railway police. Signal shots announced its approach, and a fusillade welcomed the arrival of the train, the strikers and their friends firing into it, and the negro passengers and guards returning the fire. Half a mile from the station stood the mining stockade; on reaching this point, a desperate fire with Winchester rifles and firearms of every kind was opened on the train, which was enveloped in a cloud of smoke. Twelve men were killed and twenty wounded. The town has been put under military control, although not exactly under martial law, and order is being preserved by the presence of Gatling guns.

Governor Tanner’s Extraordinary Action

It is impossible at the moment to decide upon the justice or injustice of the miners’ claims, or to adjust with accuracy the responsibility for bringing on the battle. The reports are conflicting; as usual in such cases, each party denies having fired the first shot; the strikers affirm that their first shots were fired in the air and were simply a signal to others that the train of negroes had arrived—though what business it was of theirs nor what right they claim to interfere with the arrival of negro miners does not appear. As usual, also, some of those among the killed and wounded were entirely innocent of any participation in the disturbance. But it is difficult to see how the Governor can be acquitted of very serious responsibility. There is no law against laborers traveling from one State to another; none against their accepting employment whenever and wherever it is
area of 70,000 square miles and a population of 28,000,000, while Hu-nan has an area of 83,000 square miles and a population of 20,000,000. Kwang-tung has 90,000 square miles and 20,000,000 people. These figures will give some idea of the richness and magnitude of the markets which can be opened to American enterprise through these concessions. Less is known about Hu-nan than any other Chinese province, but Mr. Colquhoun declares it to be a rich province, though the people are said to have an evil reputation for roughness and turbulence. Evidently trade issues of considerable importance depend upon the character of General Parsons's report.

A good deal of excitement was caused in Paris last week, and a good deal of apprehension excited throughout Europe, by the announcement that a military plot against the Government had been discovered, in which Prince Louis Bonaparte was concerned. Prince Louis Bonaparte, it will be remembered, is now the heir and representative of the Napoleonic tradition. He is said to be a very attractive and gifted young man, a Colonel of the Russian Lancers, and a general favorite with the Russian court. His older brother, Prince Victor, not long ago formally resigned the leadership of the Imperialist party in favor of Prince Louis. He is therefore an available pretender to the throne, though his claims are not likely, under any circumstances, to become of serious importance. It is reported, however, that although Prince Louis was concerned in the plot, the aim of the conspirators was not to place him on the throne, but to bring about certain changes in the Ministry. Several generals are declared to be implicated, and General Zurlinden, the Military Governor of Paris, appears to be among them. The Government has taken the matter very quietly, and has shown so little concern that some of the newspapers are questioning whether any such plot has existed. It is undoubtedly true that a good many leaders of the army have been infuriated by the severe criticisms of the general staff and the army spirit called out by the attitude of the army in the Dreyfus matter; and it is not impossible that the loose talk of some of these officers may have given rise to the story of a definite conspiracy. On the other hand, a definite conspiracy, planning to effect a revolution on a definite day, is by no means impossible in the present state of affairs. A military revolution, which, even if it respected the present constitutional forms, should make the Cabinet a mere mouthpiece or tool of the army, would mark the destruction of the French Republic, and would probably endanger the amicable relations of France and England.
Ascertained the cause of the mismanagement, determined to let no guilty man escape, and resolute to find some way to correct the abuses, we believe that the people would gladly have intrusted the work to the President, in spite of the fact that the accused were under his control. But from the first his Secretary of War has denied that there were abuses, and his defenders have either affirmed that all went well, or that whatever was ill was unavoidable; or, finally, that the evil was to be ignored and forgotten because, in spite of it, the victory was great. And now, apparently, the President lends himself to this view.

If this is the view of the American people, we may expect that the next Congressional election will give us an increased Republican majority in the House. If the American people take the other view, if they believe that there have been abuses and great abuses, and if they are determined to probe them to the bottom, the next House will have but a narrow Republican majority, and possibly, in spite of the currency issue, not a Republican majority at all.

In our judgment, the President, in endeavoring to thwart a thorough inquiry by such optimistic generalities, is making the political mistake of his life. We are sorry for it. The country as well as his party will suffer in consequence; perhaps the country more than the party. But it would suffer still more if it left such definite accusations as those of Caspar Whitney, Poultey Bigelow, Richard Harding Davis, and George Kennan, indorsed by such publications as Harper's Weekly, Harper's Magazine, Scribner's Magazine, and The Outlook, to be brushed aside by a serene and blind optimism.

A Brave Minority

In its reports of the successive phases of the Dreyfus case, The Outlook has had occasion to say more than once that, sooner or later, the French intelligence would get at the facts of the case and dissipate the mists of passion and falsehood which have enveloped it. That intelligence has been represented from the very start by a group of men who have been called the Intellectuals—a small minority of college teachers, poets, journalists, novelists, and scientists, who have kept their senses and courageously made their protest against the violence of the press and the insolent and arbitrary attitude of the army. The attempt of the general staff to ride roughshod over the French Government and over all the rules of equity and justice has been met by the unflinching courage of this small group of very influential Frenchmen. Among these Colonel Picquart, who has disappeared from public view, must be given a conspicuous place, for he is not only an officer, but a cultivated gentleman, of fine intellectual quality and of a critical spirit.

The forgery which misled M. Cavaignac was so clumsily executed that only those who were more anxious to find corroborative testimony than to discover the truth could have been misled by it. The editor of the Paris Siècle, a journal which has stood out in conspicuous relief from the other journals of Paris in its dispassionate and courageous treatment of the Dreyfus matter, declares, in a very interesting letter in the Nation, that the Intellectuals were convinced from the very start that this letter was a forgery, and did not hesitate to say so. During the Zola trial, while the generals of the army were making flamboyant speeches, with their hands on their hearts and their eyes turned upward as if in search of that honor which the French staff seems to have lost, Colonel Picquart quietly and coolly declared that the paper which finally led to the suicide of Colonel Henry was a clumsy forgery. No sooner was this document read in the Chamber by M. Cavaignac than a small group of distinguished men began at once to analyze it, expose its absurdities, and characterize it as a gross imposition. One of them—a distinguished historian—said that "it betrayed on its face a forgery of the fourth order." Point after point in the procedure or discussion of the Dreyfus case has been taken up by different scholars, teachers, and men of letters in a cool, critical, and courageous spirit. It is very much to be regretted that M. Brunetière put himself on the wrong side of the momentous question, and seemed for once to lose his critical sagacity and his faculty of dispassionate judgment. He attacked his own class with a bitterness which was, to say the least, unworthy a man of letters; and he has been driven point by point from the positions which he took in a long controversy in the Siècle. The happy phrase which he used in a series of concessions to his antagonists at the close of the discussion, "The road to justice is not through injustice, nor to truth through violence," was, unfortunately, not taken by himself in this matter.

To a small minority of its teachers and
scholars and writers, like Gabriel Monod, Pressensé, and Zola, and a large group of university men—an intelligent and fearless minority—the French people owe an immense debt. The greatest misfortune which France has ever suffered was the destruction or expatriation of that great and noble party of men and women who would have given balance and weight to the whole nation. France is paying to-day the penalty for the practical annihilation of the Protestant temper. That temper has found illustration, however, in the courageous attitude of the scholars, writers, and artists who have resolutely striven to bring the French people to their senses. France has often owed much to intellectual leaders, and never more than to-day; and the outcome of the fight of a few superior minds is another illustration of the power of a right-minded minority.

The Incompleteness of Life

One source of the feeling of depression which sometimes settles down over society and, like a penetrating mist, drives people into their places of refuge and inclines them to sit by the fire rather than to climb the hills or explore the woods, is the reaction from hopes that were set too high. A man's hopes must be as rational as his acts; they must rest on reality and be harmonized with existing conditions. One may dream as he pleases, for dreams may lie outside the sphere not only of the actual but of the possible; a man ought to hope, however, for those things only which lie within his reach. That reach may be immensely extended, and hope involves this enlargement of reach rather than those magic happenings which bring fortune, fame, and influence to our doors. A rational hope ought to rest in the expectation that one may have the strength to pursue and overtake these difficult and elusive rewards, rather than in the expectation that they will seek him out. For hope involves the possibility of realization, and must be shaped therefore, by the molding touch of an intelligent purpose.

Men are prone to disregard this law and to transform their dreams into hopes; and when these dreams are shattered by a rude awakening, they inveigh against the order of life, and permit themselves to sink into the slough of depression. As a matter of fact, they have not suffered any real disappointment; what has happened has not been a denial of their desires, but the disclosure of the unreality of those desires. They never had any basis of reality, and their satisfaction would have involved a violation of the laws of life. If a man hopes for noble successes, and disciplines and educates himself to secure them, and they elude him, he suffers a disappointment which is real and full of an inevitable pain; the man, on the other hand, who hopes for the highest things but takes no step towards them, suffers no real disappointment when they fail him, because he never had the right to hope for them. No man has a right to hope for things which he does not earn, and no wise man strives to earn things which are clearly out of his reach; the blind man cannot hope to paint pictures, the dumb man to sing, or the lame man to run; and no man has ground for disappointment if things which he has not earned, or cannot earn, do not come to him.

True hope is like the light which streams from the lantern one carries in his hand; it lies in advance, but one who is swiftly walking constantly overtakes it.

Most of the reactions which tinge the spirit of society with gloom are irrational, because they have their source in the denial of groundless hope. When Wordsworth first came under the spell of that great revolutionary movement which swept sensitive minds all over Europe into sympathy with France at the close of the last century, he shared the general expectation that the age of liberty, fraternity, and equality was at hand; and when, after the short era of good will and popular fêtes and enthusiastic addresses to abstract virtues, the Terror came, like a swift and awful tragedy usurping the place of a sweet and tranquil pastoral, the poet, and a host of men of kindred purity of soul, lost heart and hope, and went sorrowfully back to the old political and social order. As a matter of fact, there never was any ground for the hopes of those who believed that the overthrow of the old régime meant the sudden perfection of society. These hopes fastened upon the ultimate spiritual results of political education, and the French people were only battering down the doors which had heretofore shut them out of the elementary school of self-government. The hope of sudden regeneration was formed in entire disregard of the laws of growth and