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COLONIAL FRANCE TO-DAY

“Everywhere in our [French] Colonies we have formed excellent native troops. In Algeria you have seen them. It is the same in Senegambia and the Soudan. They are loyal and admirable soldiers with whom I have made all my different expeditions. In Indo-China we have also had good results—notably with the Annamites and Tonquinese.”—Extract from a letter by the eminent soldier and explorer COLONEL MONTEIL of the French army.

Desire for Colonies, Why Unsuccessful—Excellence as Missionaries, Italian Emigrants.

SINCE the Franco-German War the French nation has sought consolation in colonial expansion, and the French flag now flies over an immense area of northern and tropical Africa, Tonquin, and parts of Polynesia.* France now, as in the days of Champlain, shows no lack of venturesome spirits, and the annals of modern exploration contain few names more glorious than that of Colonel Monteil. But, though France in her colonies shows to-day greater liberality than in the time of Louis XIV., she yet reflects the failings of the mother country to an

* Colonial France means more than three and a half million of square miles, with more than 55,000,000 of inhabitants. This luxury cost France in 1898 more than \$20,000,000. Germany owns about 1,000,000 square miles of colony with nearly 10,000,000 population, and this cost her in 1898 about \$5,000,000. These sums may be regarded as the price per year of such colonial glory—for in neither case is the trade involved commensurate with the military and administrative cost.

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extent which depresses her own most serious writers on the subject.

Leroy-Beaulieu, speaking of French Guiana and the penal colony which recently contained Captain Dreyfus, noted that in the forty-six years from 1817 to 1863, the Government had changed the official head of the settlement on an average more frequently than once in two years. Out of a budget of 1,000,000 francs, less than 100,000 was spent for the colony, all the remainder going into the pockets of officials.

In a population numbering only 20,000 altogether, 1,000 were Government officials—and this not counting soldiers and sailors.

“Not only was there no municipal or provincial representation; there was no press, and even the right of petition was refused to the inhabitants.” (*De la Colonisation*,” p. 523.)

Next door to French Guiana was British Guiana flourishing under a healthy representative administration while Cayenne pined away under the suffocating influence of too much officialism.

The excellent roads which the French have built in Northern Africa, and, above all, the vast sums expended on railway construction and military effectiveness, prove that France is thoroughly in earnest from an administrative point of view. The general commanding the division of Oran told me that he regarded the railway as the main civilizing instrument of France, that we must have patience and faith in the future, that savage tribes who now prowled on the flanks of caravan columns would ultimately give up nomadic life and till the soil, when the locomotive should have

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demonstrated that brigandage was no longer profitable or even possible.

The French nation has shown itself strangely susceptible to far-reaching projects and ideals far removed from mere gain. To the more sober Anglo-Saxon they sometimes appear visionary. It was at the despotic court of Louis XV. that republican philosophy became first fashionable in Europe—it was in the salons of the aristocrats that the guillotine of the Revolution was whetted.

Napoleon I. dazzled a people whom he enslaved by phrases and the dream of universal empire, while in our day Republican France hails the Russian Czar as protector. She develops vast military energy and popular enthusiasm in acquiring colonies which produce no revenue, but flatter the rising generation, who think that the size of a country is the measure of its importance. The French are proverbially reluctant to leave their country, even as tourists. Yet in no other country does the public mind occupy itself so much with the military and official side of colonization. The Frenchman, impatient of military routine at home, has but to plunge into the African wilderness, and plant the flag of his country in some lonely place, to be immediately recognized by the press as a notable person. Should it happen that the flag was inadvertently stuck into soil already occupied by England, and should his action be resented in London, he returns not merely a hero, but something of a martyr as well. On his way to Paris deputations from the various towns greet him with wreaths and brass bands. The press finds in his glorious failure a text from which to preach upon the

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greed of "perfidious Albion," and thus new fuel is added to the popular fires of colonial zeal.

Northern Africa is dear to the Frenchman, for it represents the soil on which his armies have fought from the Pyramids to the Pillars of Hercules. He has done much for Egypt; notably was it a Frenchman who built the Suez Canal in 1869. But it was English shipping which made it profitable, and it was ultimately England to whom Egypt owed the capture of Khartoum, and good administration throughout the valley of the Nile.

Algiers is but a few hours' sail from the South of France, and Tunis not much further. Here is the field in which we might look for a prosperous French peasantry under climatic conditions but slightly different from those prevailing in Provence or Gascony. Yet to-day it is not the Frenchman, but the Italian and the Spaniard who furnish the language of the white man for this part of the world. There are French cafés in the towns, and the little round tables are occupied by French officials; French uniforms are on all sides, and the French flag waves over the Government buildings. That flag is a blessing to the country so far as it means good roads, efficient police, courts of justice, harbor works, and other necessary expenditure. But from a colonial point of view Spain and Italy are the countries directly benefited rather than France.

Italy to-day has no colonies, yet she is one of the most prolific of countries, and sends forth annually thousands of her hardy people to New York, Buenos Ayres, and Northern Africa, to say nothing of the large number who find temporary employment in France,

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Switzerland, Hungary, and Austria. Many of her statesmen deplore this state of things, and dream of a better day when Italy shall have a colony of her own inhabited solely by Italians and governed exclusively by the home government.

It was this false point of view which encouraged that disastrous attempt against Abyssinia in 1896. It was the same false philosophy which made Bismarck discourage Germans from emigrating to America. Fortunately for Italy she has to-day neither the money nor the power to attempt Bismarckian schemes of colonization, much less to compete with France in the military administration of distant countries. She must perforce witness ship after ship load of her hardy peasantry sailing away to distant countries, carrying not merely their little savings, but their strong arms and future hopes.

Italy to-day pines for colonies and regrets that she cannot prevent emigration by the same measures which James I. used to discourage Puritans from leaving England.

But that which official Italy does not do to-day will in less than fifty years prove a greater blessing than anything we can possibly imagine her to have done through the instrumentality of her army or navy.

The Italy that is reproducing itself under the French flag in Africa, under the American flag on the banks of the Hudson, or in far-away settlements of South America—that is an Italy which in the next generation will help to build up the commerce of the mother country to a degree little dreamed of by those who now look upon every emigrant as a loss to the country of his birth.

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France is doing a great work in the civilization of the world, notably among inferior races. Her missionaries are more successful than ours, and, whether in the backwoods of Canada, among the negroes of the West Indies, or in the Far East, the Frenchman has to a remarkable degree shown a capacity to live the life of the subject race, and acquire personal ascendancy over him.

The history of the French in India has been frequently noted by English historians as a notable instance of failure on the eve of a great triumph, for at one time France, with a handful of clever negotiators and enterprising soldiers, had apparently mastered the land of the Great Mogul.

Yet the French administration in India crumbled to pieces under the quick strokes of a handful of Englishmen with the same startling completeness which characterized her loss of Canada at about the same time (1759). And the reasons were roughly analogous—persisting to this day. The Frenchman is a brave soldier, and his fellow-citizens have a passion for detailed administration. They conquer and they govern, but they do not colonize. When they govern they govern too much. They are suspicious of native initiative and distrustful of colonial self-government.

It does, indeed, seem as though history rejoiced in paradoxes, when we have to note that the Scandinavians, the Germans, and the Italian people, without colonies worth mentioning, send forth annually a powerful stream of humanity to enrich other countries—and that France, with her vast colonial possessions, should show herself capable of producing nearly everything but colonies.