

THE FRENCH IN AFRICA

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The French in Africa by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

**THE FRENCH
IN AFRICA**

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THE FRENCH IN AFRICA.

THE French have never been successful in colonizing, and yet there are no people more ambitious of possessing foreign settlements. Whatever they have hitherto attempted in this way, has ultimately terminated to our advantage. In war we have wrested from them colony after colony, which they have not been able to reconquer; and if we were to look forward calmly to the interests of a selfish policy, we would contemplate their efforts to establish their power at Algiers, as so many steps, more likely to involve them in a vast useless expenditure, and in national embarrassment, than to any improvement in their position as a maritime power. The possession of Gibraltar, Malta, and Corfu, will always enable us to keep up a powerful fleet in the Mediterranean. If occasion required, it would not perhaps be impracticable for us to cut off all communication between France and the Barbary coast, and, moreover, to add Algiers itself to our strongholds in that sea. But

these are questions which need not now be discussed. If we had had any ambition to disturb the long-established relations of the Mediterranean states, we had the opportunity of anticipating France in the policy with which she is now inspired, when Lord Exmouth's expedition was projected. But although it is probable that Algiers cannot be long retained by France, and that, even if it be, it can only tend to encumber her energies as a continental and military power—her only natural source of influence—nevertheless, it may become necessary to check proceedings which, though eventually destined to failure, might, in the meantime, operate with an injurious pressure, not only upon our commercial interests, but also upon the commercial and political interests of other countries, with which we are intimately connected.

Thus, when during the revolutionary war the French Republic attempted to obtain possession of Egypt, although it was soon made evident that no force which she could afford to send to that part of Africa, would be sufficient to establish her dominion there, nevertheless we found it expedient to take measures for frustrating her designs. We do not apprehend that similar proceedings are likely to be called for with reference to Algiers. But we cannot, at the same time, shut our eyes to the fact, that it has long been a cabinet project at the Tuileries to obtain a strong and permanent

footing in Africa—to establish, in truth, a sort of Indian empire there, which should embrace all the inland territory and the coasts of that continent, extending from the Gulph of Guinea to the Mediterranean.

Let us hear how this matter was treated, some years ago, by an agent specially appointed to proceed to Africa, and to make researches there, with a view to the accomplishment of this object. The gentleman entrusted with this mission was M. Xavier Golberry, a very intelligent engineer officer in the service of France. He accompanied M. de Boufflers, who was named Governor of Senegal, to St. Louis, the chief seat of that government, in the year 1785. His instructions were to act as first aide-du-camp to M. de Boufflers—to perform the functions of chief engineer of the whole of that government—to reconnoitre its western coast—and to report upon every circumstance calculated to ascertain the greatest advantages possible to be derived from the possession of the Senegal, which had already acquired for France considerable authority over a large portion of western Africa. Indeed, he goes so far as to designate, under the title of "French Africa," a tract of territory extending along the coast from Cape Blanco to the mouth of the Senegal, including, in the interior of the country, a great portion of the desert of Sahara, the whole course of the Senegal as far as it is navigable eastward, and several

alleged dependencies to the south of that river, almost to the verge of the British possessions on the Gambia. Over the whole of this territory, he affirms, the jurisdiction of the Senegal government, or, in other words, of the government of "French Africa," actually extended in the year 1787.

M. Golberry's office was to report, from his own observation and inquiries, how much farther than the boundaries here stated, the jurisdiction, that is to say, the political supremacy, of France, could be established in western and central Africa. The idea of colonization, he says, was altogether out of the question. The great object was to obtain influence, to extend and protect commercial intercourse, and to secure to France the glory of revealing to Europe the mysteries of the interior of Africa, which, previously to that period, had been altogether unexplored. He claims for France a priority of right to all that part of the African continent, by reason of the conquests which the Normans made in the fourteenth century, between Cape Blanco, on the western coast, and Cape Palmas, on the coast of Guinea.

After going into a variety of details, which it is unnecessary here to specify, M. Golberry declares it to be his opinion—an opinion which does not appear to have been fully matured until after the discoveries of Mungo Park were made known to the world—that it would not be difficult for

France, taking the Island of St. Louis in the mouth of the Senegal as the centre of her operations, and the seat of her African power, to spread her political authority over a tract of that continent, extending from the coast of Guinea in the south, to the fortieth degree of north latitude; and from the Atlantic coast to the thirtieth degree of longitude east of the Island of Ferro; that is to say, about a third of the whole superficies of that continent, very much exceeding the number of square leagues contained in Germany, France, Spain, and Portugal, united.

This new "French Africa" would embrace the whole course of the Niger, as described by Park, Clapperton, and the Landers; of the Senegal; of part of the Gambia; a very considerable portion of Nubia, Ethiopia, and Egypt, the whole of Tripoli, the greater part of the regencies of Tunis and Algiers; and, in fact, the whole of central and western Africa, a country abounding in ivory, in gold mines, and forests which produce the best gum in the world—a country capable, according to all that we have learned of it from our own enterprising travellers, of producing the sugar-cane, cotton, coffee, cocoa, indigo, tobacco, rice, spices, and timber of every description. M. Golberry, after setting forth the outlines of his project, proceeds in a very methodical manner to lay down a plan for the organization of a government, which