
France 1870-1914

The defeat of Hanotaux and the coming of the Entente Cordiale with London

by Dana S. Scanlon

The events leading to France's headlong plunge into the web of the Entente Cordiale spun by King Edward VII of England, begin with its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. That war resulted from the combination of the imperial ambitions of Napoleon III, and German Chancellor Bismarck's provocations. This combination ignited the explosive passions and petty tantrums which sometimes pass for nationalism in the French people. These are the tragic flaws in character that time and again has empowered France's historic enemies to destroy the work of the true nationalists, the republican nation-builders. This is what the poet Friedrich Schiller was alluding to when, a century before, he wrote of the French Revolution that "a great moment found a little people."

A great moment would come again in the 1890s, a historic opportunity for the nations of continental Europe to unite to crush the cancer of Venetian oligarchical policies and interests that had taken root in England. Together, France, Germany, and Russia had the power and the self-interest to defeat that cancer. French Foreign Minister Gabriel Hanotaux and Russian Finance Minister Sergei Witte possessed the strategic vision and concrete plans required for a global community of interest based upon economic development. The tragedy of how World War I, the worst possible outcome to the conflict among these nations, came to occur instead, is the part of history addressed in this article.

The Bismarck-Thiers negotiations, Alsace-Lorraine, and Franco-German enmity

When in July 1870, it became known in Paris that Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern, distantly related to the Prussian royal family, was likely to be chosen to ascend the vacant throne of Spain, most of France's political leadership viewed this as an unacceptable Prussian bid for aggrandizement, and reacted accordingly. Elder statesmen such as Louis Adolphe Thiers privately assured Emperor Napoleon III of their support if a conflict became unavoidable. But Thiers, unlike

Napoleon, did not want this war. So it was with immense relief that Thiers learned, on July 12, that the Hohenzollern candidacy had been withdrawn.

Thiers's suspicions that the Bonapartists actually wanted war were immediately confirmed, when the supporters of Napoleon demanded that the king of Prussia make an explicit pledge that the Hohenzollern candidacy would never again be renewed. Thiers saw this as a foolish attempt to humiliate Prussia, and denounced it as a "great blunder" which made war "probable." On the evening of July 14 came the Ems Telegram, in which Chancellor Bismarck added his own insult to the French provocation, giving Napoleon the pretext he needed to launch the war.

Thiers rose in Parliament on July 15 to oppose the war, stating that "it was a difficult duty to resist patriotic . . . but imprudent passions." He was violently heckled when he accused the government of "breaking off relations in a fit of pique." Thiers was pilloried as a tool of Prussia, and chased in the streets by angry mobs.

But within two days of Napoleon's declaration of war, Germany had broken across the frontier and invaded the western provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. By Sept. 2, with the war six weeks old, the French Army suffered its devastating defeat at Sedan and the emperor was taken prisoner. The painful terms of surrender included hefty reparations and the permanent loss of Alsace-Lorraine.

Many years later, writing as a historian, Gabriel Hanotaux defined Napoleon's role as that of a gullible marcher-lord for England. "Napoleon, in insurrection against Europe, thought he would find a point of support in the English alliance. England grew with the aid of the nephew of the Emperor (Bonaparte) whom she had conquered. At the outset she accompanied him in all his adventures, free to quit him when he was once deeply engaged. She knew how to stop him at the decisive moment, and to snatch the fruits of victory from him when the due time came. Thus it was in the Crimea, in China, in Italy, in Mexico. At last, when the Franco-German war put the fate of Europe in suspense, she failed him once again."¹

1. Gabriel Hanotaux, *Contemporary France*, Vol. I, p. 9.

The 'Commonwealth Party' of France

Modern France began to take shape after the immense devastation of the Hundred Years' War with England (1339-1453). This war was initiated by King Edward III of England as a proxy of the Venetian Doge Bartolomeo Gradenigo; the English victories at Crécy, Maupertuis, and Azincourt were in effect Venetian victories over France. France became the first modern true nation-state of Europe in the years following the 1440 Council of Florence.

King Louis XI (reigned 1461-83) became the first republican monarch of France, educated by an ally of the great Christian humanist Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa. He ended the Hundred Years' War, and united the kingdom around around the slogan "one law, one weight, one currency." His creation of one permanent army was the beginning of the end of the private armies of the feudal nobility.

In the years following the reign of Louis XI, the League of Cambrai almost vanquished Venice, and the history of Europe since that time has been a drive by Venetian-centered, and later British-centered efforts, to crush the French nation-state because of what it represented: the living example of the republican or commonwealth

form of government, which based itself on uplifting the population by fostering their uniquely human, creative qualities, and ennobling the human soul by bringing science, technology, cathedral-building, and art into the daily lives of the people, thus enabling them to contribute to the advancement of the nation.

The great figures who shaped France include King Henri IV (reigned 1589-1610), who established religious peace with his 1598 Edict of Nantes, in order to pursue the task of building France's national economy and infrastructure. One of the founders of the school of national economy was Jean Bodin (1539-96), whose political, economic, and religious manifesto could be summed up by his motto: "There is no wealth but man."

The heirs of Louis XI and Bodin include the great Cardinal Richelieu and the Oratorian school founded in 1610, in the tradition of the Brotherhood of the Common Life. Bodin's most important successor was Louis XIV's General Comptroller of Finances Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who founded the French Academy of Sciences in collaboration with Gottfried Leibniz, and promoted an era of unprecedented economic development in France. These were the men who laid the foundations for the Ecole Polytechnique in the eighteenth century, and its successors, which included the West Point Academy in America.

The lives of these men were passionately studied by Gabriel Hanotaux as a young man. He read and studied Jean Bodin. He read Machiavelli's *The Prince*, which was written about Louis XI. He read Plato and Erasmus. He

The Third Republic of France was the daughter of this crushing defeat of France and its emperor. All eyes turned toward the once-denounced Thiers, who was voted chief executive of the new republic. In the peace negotiations that followed, Thiers would try to impress his interlocutor, Chancellor Bismarck, with the historic chance the two neighboring countries had to cement a peace arrangement on the basis of mutual self-interest and collaboration.

This is how Hanotaux described it, in his *History of Contemporary France*, alluding to the difficult factional situation in which Bismarck found himself:

"As for Germany, the question was whether she was going to fulfill completely the lofty destiny which was assured to her by the situation which she had just conquered in the center of Europe. She had just effaced by an unparalleled effort the last trace of the Thirty Years' War; she had recovered the material greatness, the fullness of life, the exuberant vigor which had made her famous in the prosperous years of the Middle Ages. . . .

"With what wisdom . . . was the new Germany going to make use of this unexpected good fortune? Not to perpetuate

the state of wars, to inaugurate a harmonious and balanced life for Europe, to assert himself by reason rather than might, here was an enterprise worthy of a conqueror crowned by fortune. A St. Louis would have attempted it. A Richelieu would have faced it. Bismarck himself had given, at Nikolsburg,² some idea of such an empire over oneself, and of a moderation so full of strength.

"The period of hostilities was at an end. The exact problem which was propounded was the following: What would be the nature of the new relations between the two peoples?"

2. The 1866 Armistice of Nikolsburg concluded the Seven Weeks' War in which Prussia and Italy defeated Austria and most of the smaller German states. In the Prusso-Austrian peace which followed, Bismarck avoided annexations of Austrian territory and thus adroitly avoided a significant revenge complex on the part of Vienna. If Bismarck had been able to show a similar self-control with France in 1871, and had refrained from the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, the pretext for conflict between France and Germany during these years could have been vastly reduced. Bismarck's decision to humiliate France by detaching Alsace-Lorraine stacked the deck against future Franco-German cooperation and vastly facilitated the task of British "divide and conquer" geopolitics.



King Louis XI, founder of the first modern nation-state, the French commonwealth.

wanted to know everything about Cardinal Richelieu and about Louis XIV's reign. He threw himself into these studies with such intensity, that he would later write, "I lived in the seventeenth century before I lived in my times."—Dana Scanlon

Peace or a succession of wars? It was necessary to choose, to take a line. The most commonplace solution, the one which demanded the least intellectual exertion and the least control over self and facts, would be the system of peace under arms.

"This last solution was that of the [German] Headquarters Staff. It had prevailed at Versailles. But a last recourse to the diplomatists was still open at Brussels.³ Unhappily, the deadly germ was already laid. . . .

"The crowning error of German diplomacy and Prince Bismarck under the circumstances arose, perhaps, from the fact that their victory took them by surprise to such a degree, that they were never willing to believe it completely assured and accomplished. Successful by means of war, they no longer had confidence in anything but war. It became their sole instrument. They prepared it without intermission. Their shortsightedness consists in not having foreseen the durability of peace. They made all calculations excepting the most

3. This refers to the preliminaries to the Treaty of Frankfurt, May 10, 1871, by which Germany took Alsace-Lorraine and obliged France to pay a large indemnity.

simple of all."

When these events were taking place, Hanotaux, a crucial figure in the period leading up to World War I—was just a 16-year-old boy. But his future dedication to his nation was already evident. For the young Hanotaux, France's crushing defeat stirred no jingoistic passions against Germany, but rather a passion to learn, to reach into past history to understand what had just happened. "The generation to which I belong," Hanotaux wrote, "was barely emerging from childhood. . . . Its intellect was matured by that cruel spectacle. . . . From that time, pressing questions arose in me: What had been the causes of the greatness of France in the past? What were the causes of her defeat? What would be the moving forces of her approaching resurrection?"⁴

Gabriel Hanotaux's strategic role

Hanotaux's first published article, when he was 24 years old, was entitled "Did the Venetians Betray Christianity in 1202?" The mere fact of his interest in this episode of history demonstrates that he was on the path to studying the critical issues that shaped western civilization. In the newspaper of Third Republic leader and founder Léon Gambetta, Hanotaux wrote articles calling for a resurrection, in the political realm, of King Henri IV's policy of religious toleration, the Edict of Nantes, and for a return to Cardinal Richelieu's European foreign policy. When Hanotaux finally joined the French Foreign Affairs Ministry in 1885, he was already a recognized historian, determined to bring these great ideas from his nation's past to bear in France's foreign policy.

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, France was polarized politically and socially around two major issues: First and foremost was the question of collaborating with Germany in building the peace, or waging a war of "*revanche*" (revenge). Although Bismarck had stupidly seized the French provinces of Alsace-Lorraine in the aftermath of the war, adding to the crushing burden of immense war reparations a painful daily reminder of the lost war, slowly a *détente* was beginning to emerge between the former enemies. Discussions were even entertained about the possibility of a Franco-German customs union.⁵

The second major issue was the religious question: whether there would be a republican-Catholic collaboration in building the new republic, or whether freemasonry's declared war on religion would prevail. An underlying problem

4. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, viii.

5. One of the main proponents of such an idea was a former Alsatian and ex-member of Parliament, Count Paul de Leusse. His pamphlet, published in 1888 and entitled "Peace by a Franco-German Customs Union," was said to have been favorably received by Bismarck, though not by other forces in Germany.

was that while the Catholic Church in France had been a wellspring for the ideas of the Christian Renaissance and the republic, the Catholic hierarchy was intimately tied to the feudal structures of the past, and was a manipulated tool of the Venetian party in France. The hierarchy and clergy were, by and large, not only favoring a return to feudal or monarchical forms of government; they were also in open insurrection against their great pope, Leo XIII.

These were the fault-lines along which France was divided, and which ultimately allowed the oligarchical faction's triumph in 1898. The defining moment of that triumph was to be the collapse of Hanotaux's cabinet and the subsequent ascendancy of Théophile Delcassé as the ruler over French foreign policy.

The religious question colored every aspect of political and intellectual life in France. Hanotaux himself, raised in a Catholic family, reports that he was influenced in his youth by the atheistic sarcasm and cynicism of Voltaire. But unlike many of his contemporaries, Hanotaux's passionate commitment to discovering the secrets of France's greatness led him to overcome that cynical outlook.

In later years, Hanotaux would compare Voltaire's activities in the city of Orleans to the English siege of that city in the early fifteenth century. That siege was broken in 1429 by the heroine of France, Joan of Arc. Hanotaux further characterized Voltaire's writings as "horrid blasphemy inspired by rancid malice from the other side of the Channel."⁶ He described Voltaire's book about Joan of Arc, *La Pucelle d'Orléans* as a piece of "trash." It was typical of Hanotaux that he would rescue Joan of Arc from the depredations of Voltaire with nothing less than his own five-volume study, which laid the groundwork for her eventual canonization in 1920.

France's 'Great Projects'

Why was it so important for France's enemies, now centered in the "Venetian party" transplanted into England, to provoke religious wars in France in the nineteenth century? Why would British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury write in 1887, to his ambassador in Paris, "It is very difficult to prevent oneself from wishing for another Franco-German war to put a stop to this vexation?"

British interests were potentially jeopardized as a result of large-scale development projects being initiated on the Eurasian continent and elsewhere, by France, Germany, and Russia.

Less than a year before the Franco-Prussian War, the French engineer and diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps had completed his project to open the Suez Canal in Egypt—a project first proposed to Louis XIV by Gottfried Leibniz. It was completed despite years of sabotage by Britain's Lord Palmerston. Now, de Lesseps was at it again. In 1873, he

presented a paper to the French Academy of Sciences calling for a huge Eurasian rail project. His proposed "Asiatic Grand Central" was described by Hanotaux: "Starting from Orenburg, on the river Ural, this railroad would have gone as far as Peshawar, on the Indian frontier, joining the Russian system to the Anglo-Indian system of railways, across Central Asia. . . . It would have been a communication between the Trans-Siberian on the one hand, and the Baghdad railway on the other. The object was to join European railways with the Anglo-Indian railways, and beyond with future Chinese railways."⁷

This type of spectacular project, combined with policies to end the feudal-oligarchical systems of government in Europe, could have been the basis for real peace on the continent. Moreover, the projects aimed further, and extended into Africa as well.

After some years serving in the cabinets of Léon Gambetta and Jules Ferry, Hanotaux was brought into the Foreign Ministry as director of protectorates in 1889. He wrote up a memo for his minister, Eugène Spuller, describing a project to build a canal that would connect the Nile River to the Congo River, the world's second largest river system. That was only a small part of his vision for economic development in Africa, which included factories fuelled by hydro-power, railroads crisscrossing the continent to create new "civilizations" around the great lakes of Africa, population growth made possible by the scientific discoveries enabling malaria to be wiped out, and water management projects (see **Figure 1**).

Hanotaux worked closely with his mentor Prime Minister Jules Ferry to establish a colonizing policy for Africa based on these principles. He collaborated closely with Pope Leo XIII's loyal friend Cardinal Lavigerie in building the Cathedral of St. Louis in Carthage, and in projects to sustain the Catholic effort in Africa. Eventually, Hanotaux was promoted to the rank of foreign minister in 1894 by President Sadi Carnot, grandson of the great Lazare Carnot.

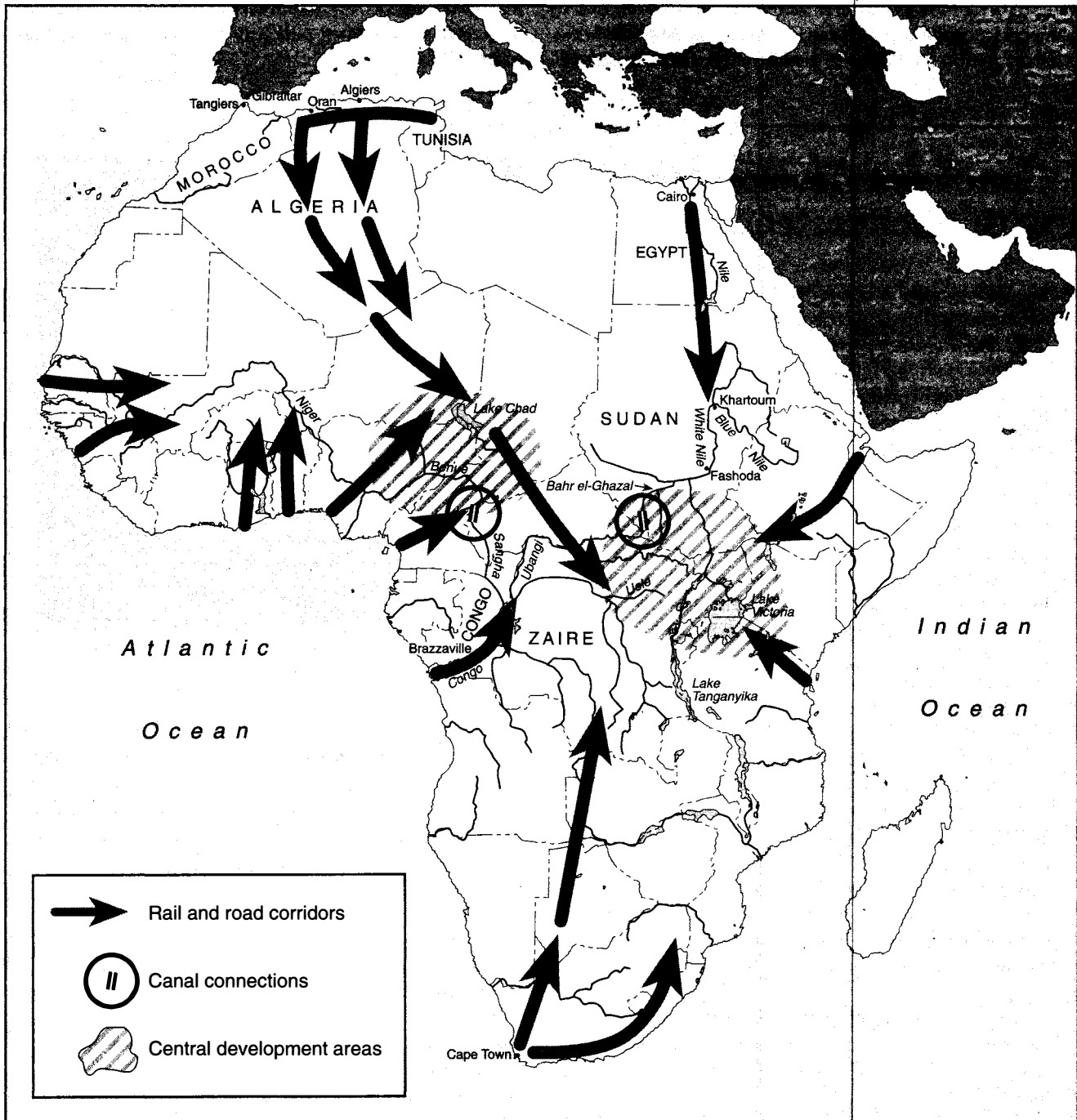
The signs of British restlessness with France were becoming apparent. Both of Hanotaux's mentors were soon to be assassinated: Ferry had been shot in 1887 by a so-called religious fanatic, and died from these wounds six years later. President Carnot was shot two months after Hanotaux became foreign minister, by an Italian anarchist—from the same networks used to assassinate U.S. President William McKinley. Gambetta also died in 1882 under suspicious circumstances, shortly after denouncing England's efforts to seize control of Egypt and the Suez Canal.

As foreign minister, Hanotaux pursued a threefold policy: 1) strengthening the Franco-Russian alliance begun by President Carnot, and advanced thanks to the efforts of Count Witte; 2) continuing the policy of détente with Germany initiated by Jules Ferry; and 3) orchestrating a series of inter-

6. Georges Goyau, *Histoire Religieuse de la France*, introduction by G. Hanotaux, p. 6.

7. *Op. cit.*, Hanotaux, Vol. II, p. 457.

FIGURE 1
Hanotaux's proposed trans-African railroad and canal projects



national agreements to consolidate the French position in Western and Central Africa around Lake Chad and to prevent the British from seizing the entire eastern side of Africa, from

Egypt to South Africa, from the Cape to Cairo, as their exclusive domain.

Already the British had succeeded in virtually stealing

the shares of the Suez Canal owned by the Khedive of Egypt, so that the canal they had so long opposed now was under their control—not as a means of expanding trade, but as a strategic choke-point.

Hanotaux was also, during this period, the close collaborator of one of the few explicit advocates of Friedrich List's cameralist economic policies in France, Prime Minister Jules Méline. As foreign minister, Hanotaux became a master of

what he called "flanking operations" against the British in Africa.

It was in the midst of some of Hanotaux's most delicate and intensive negotiations, aimed at preventing the British from consolidating their position over the entire Nile Valley, that the infamous Dreyfus Affair was unleashed, and sectarian passions once again inflamed the French political landscape.

Hanotaux: Develop Africa with science, technology

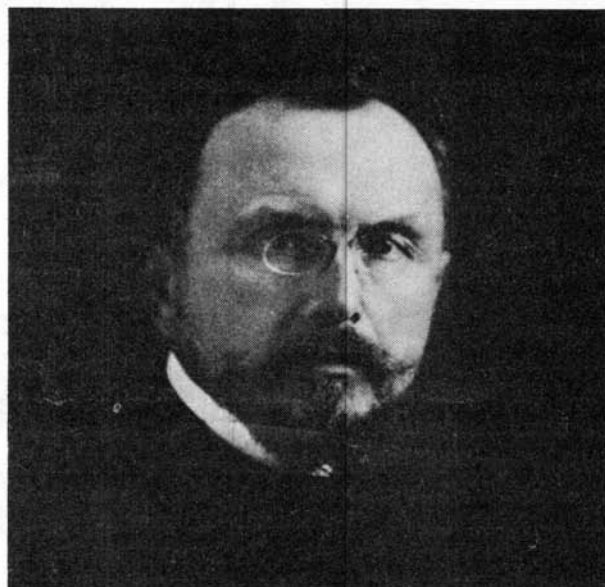
The following are excerpts from a speech by Gabriel Hanotaux in 1902 to the Geographical Society of Oran, entitled, "The Future of Africa":

A new means of action is coming into being: the railroad. This shall be the true conqueror of Africa. The railroad traverses deserts; it crosses over cataracts; it brings together, on the coast, the upper basins of those great rivers; it thus opens up to commerce the vast area of the interior plateau and access to the great lakes . . . which shall see powerful civilizations established on their shores. . . . The day when science will have effectively routed the fly—malaria—one of the greatest benefits which can be spread across the planet by human genius will have been achieved. Half of the African continent will be given back to civilization, to life. . . .

Deep forests will be pierced and immense regions will once again see divine light. The swamps will be drained, the flow of water facilitated. . . . Where water is lacking, it will be captured; the problem of the desert will be taken on, and one day, through appropriate cultivation, it will know a kind of richness and fertility. . . . The harnessing of waterfalls will soon furnish African industry with incalculable and inexhaustible energy resources. It is probable, that near the waterfalls . . . we shall see powerful factories being erected, borrowing from the very river the force necessary for the exploitation of its prodigious resources. . . .

Can we not see advancing, from the coast towards the interior, through a universal effort . . . the lines of railroads which shall soon transform the economic life of the entire continent? . . .

Is not a global program to methodically trace, through an international entente, the directions of a transcontinental railroad, utilizing the great rivers, facilitating navigation, uniting the Nile and the Congo rivers, the Benoue and the Sanga rivers, through a vast system of canals,



Gabriel Hanotaux, who sought to turn Africa into "an immense buzzing hive" of economic development.

supporting the development of the river networks through the development of the rail roads, and thus turning the interior of Africa into an immense buzzing hive where trains and steamships capable of devouring distances will rush towards an immense and central depot, in which the people and merchandise of the universe will converge—is this not the most obvious and imminent of possibilities? . . .

Then, the populations will multiply, manpower will increase. . . .

European penetration has encountered that great and ancient belief of Islam, which, here more than anywhere else, is fully growing and full of vitality; this religion which proclaims the existence of a single God, which attaches to faith in this God all individual and social virtues. . . .

We owe them peace; we owe them justice; we also owe them toleration. . . . But toleration is not enough. We owe it to Islam to understand it. We owe it even more. . . . We owe it respect.

The Dreyfus Affair: destabilization of the Third French Republic

Shortly after Hanotaux became foreign minister, the minister of war, Gen. Auguste Mercier, briefed a secret cabinet meeting on his discovery of a spy for Germany within the French military, and of his intention to open a prosecution of this alleged spy, Capt. Alfred Dreyfus. One lone voice was heard in opposition. Like Thiers speaking out in opposition to Napoleon's decision to go to war with Germany in 1870, Hanotaux stood up and insisted that the so-called evidence was so weak, that "I am opposed to any legal action or even to any investigation," warning that this could lead to "the gravest of international difficulties," "a diplomatic rupture with Germany, even war." When this intervention failed, he went privately to see General Mercier, who was a committed *revanchiste*: "twice I tried to make him listen to reason, to show him the folly of what he was embarking on, but he wouldn't listen to me. . . . Public passions are not released with impunity."⁸

Captain Dreyfus was Jewish. There was no better combination to whip up public passions in France at the turn of the century than to come up with a German spy who was a Jew. Captain Dreyfus was tried in a "rocket-docket," complete with withheld exculpatory evidence, mounds of "secret evidence" that was presented to the jury minutes before they went into seclusion for deliberation, and thus never seen by the defense, and outright forgeries. Stripped of his military rank and shipped off to the brutal conditions of the penal colony on Devil's Island, Dreyfus, his family, and a small group of supporters continued to proclaim his innocence. The Radical Republicans seized upon the case as a *cause célèbre*, and it polarized France as nothing else had, amplifying the divisions we spoke of earlier.

The central players in this drama and their alliances were as bizarre as any in European history:

- Edouard Drumont, editor of the anti-Semitic, Jesuit-financed newspaper *La Libre Parole*, whose main readership consisted of small village priests and former members of the Paris Commune.

- The League of Patriots, the chief organization that had backed the revanchist insurrection of General Boulanger against President Carnot's regime. Fortunately for France, General Boulanger was unable to climb off his mistress long enough to mount his black horse and lead the charge against the republic.

- The leftist Radical Republicans of the Georges Clemenceau variety, who were as deeply committed to war with Germany as the right-wing Boulangists, if not more so. These were the networks of the most militant associates of the Grand

Orient freemasonic lodge of France, whose goals included the establishment of a diplomatic alliance with Britain, an end to the Africa policy of Ferry and Hanotaux, and the purging of the country of Catholic and other religious interests.

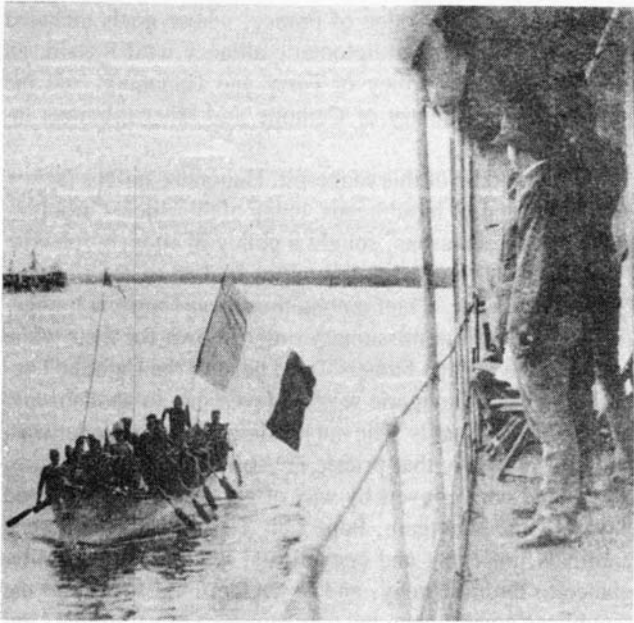
In the middle of this snake-pit, Hanotaux and his faction of "anti-Voltaire" republicans, many of them non-Catholics, some even freemasons, sought a policy of cooperation with Pope Leo XIII and what few allies he had in the Catholic Church in France. Chief among those was Cardinal Laviegerie, founder of the missionary order known for their white habits as the "White Fathers," and head of the Catholic Diocese in Africa. Laviegerie worked feverishly to abolish slavery, and to save souls. The outstanding rule of his order was, and still is today, that priests are forbidden to proselytize; they could only convert by way of good example and good works. Time and again, Pope Leo XIII ordered the French cardinals, in letters and encyclicals, to abandon their allegiance to the monarchy, and to declare their loyalty to the republican government, but they refused. Only Cardinal Laviegerie would do it, and in 1890 he gave a famous speech announcing that he, hitherto a confirmed royalist, would declare his allegiance to the republic, in order to "wrench the country back from the abyss which threatens it."

In this context, the unleashing of the Dreyfus Affair has to be seen, not as an accident of history, brought about by some sociological phenomenon peculiar to France, but as a deliberate effort to destabilize the French republican forces.

As the historical record now shows, the actual perpetrator of the treasonous acts for which Dreyfus was unjustly convicted, was Count Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy, a paid agent of the most powerful British banking house at the time: the Rothschilds. Esterhazy was an intimate collaborator of Edouard Drumont. The two scoundrels conspired together in 1893, so that when Drumont duelled a French military officer whom he had insulted, Esterhazy stepped forward to "second" the Jewish officer. After the duel, Esterhazy (a compulsive gambler who also ran a string of brothels) wrote to Baron de Rothschild, proclaiming himself a friend of the Jews, and asking for financial assistance. He was promptly taken into employment by the Rothschilds, all the time remaining the closest of friends with Drumont.

As a result of Hanotaux's intervention in the secret cabinet meeting called by General Mercier, it had at first been agreed that although Captain Dreyfus would be kept in custody for questioning, nothing would be made public so as not to precipitate events. In stepped Maj. Hubert Henry, another associate of Esterhazy. Major Henry worked in the military intelligence department of the Army. Determined to break the Dreyfus case into the public arena, the conspirators had Major Henry write a letter to Edouard Drumont revealing that a Jewish captain was in prison on charges of treason and "they want to quash the case. Israel is up in arms." The next day, Drumont's *La Libre Parole* carried banner headlines on

8. Maurice Paléologue, *An Intimate Journal of the Dreyfus Case*, p. 17.



France's Captain Marchand (with flag) confronts Britain's Lord Kitchener (right), at Fashoda, Sept. 19, 1898. Marchand's expedition was a prescription for disaster, playing into the hands of the British.

the case and started the drumbeat for a trial and conviction.

The Dreyfus Affair amplified the chronic instability of the Third Republic. The prime minister and his cabinet depended day-to-day on the vagaries of a parliamentary majority. After two years as foreign minister, the cabinet in which Hanotaux served was brought down, and a Radical Republican (freemasonic) cabinet formed. It was that cabinet that approved the fateful mission of Captain Marchand, to cross Africa from the west and reach Fashoda on the Nile, as a challenge to the British. After a six-month hiatus, Hanotaux returned to the Quai d'Orsay in a new cabinet, and immediately preoccupied himself with the events on the Nile.

Paving the way for World War I

Fashoda, 1898

During the months that Captain Marchand was trekking through jungles and swamps to reach Fashoda, Hanotaux continued his efforts to reach an understanding with Germany. The Marchand expedition—despite the probably noble intentions of the captain whose name is forever imprinted on this page of French history—was a prescription for disaster. Months before the Marchand expedition was approved, Hanotaux had negotiated a treaty with England which limited Egypt's possessions over the Nile to Khartoum, thereby achieving the goal of limiting English influence in the region. But the French cabinet refused to ratify this agreement, and almost provoked Hanotaux's resignation.

The folly of sending Captain Marchand on a military expedition to plant a French flag at Fashoda was the pet project of Théophile Delcassé and the Colonial Party of Eugène Etienne. Hanotaux had opposed the mission when first proposed to him by the captain himself in June 1895.⁹ He could have recalled the expedition, and it was probably his fatal mistake that he didn't. In contrast to the folly of the Marchand expedition, Hanotaux's successful diplomacy was built upon a commitment to an Entente with Germany. In early 1896, the records show the fruit of that effort, when the German foreign secretary spoke to the French ambassador in Berlin about "limiting the insatiable appetite of England," adding that "it is necessary to show England that she can no longer take advantage of the Franco-German antagonism to seize whatever she wants."

At that very moment, England was, in fact, planning to seize Sudan, which a nationalist rebellion some 10 years earlier had freed of Egyptian and British control. For the occasion of this reconquest, Britain's Gen. Horatio Herbert Kitchener was made *sirdar*, or commander in chief, of the Egyptian Army.

The drama in Africa dragged on for two years, and finally on June 19, 1898, just weeks before Marchand arrived at Fashoda, Hanotaux received what he had been waiting for: a message from the German ambassador suggesting broad collaboration on a number of issues, particularly with respect to England.

Hanotaux immediately wrote a note to his ambassador in Cairo, hinting that settlement of the "Egyptian question" might be at hand, as a result of German support.

Nine days later, the cabinet was brought down through an alliance of left radicals and extreme rightists, with the League of Patriots' Déroulède leading the charge. Hanotaux left the Foreign Ministry, never to return. And the first act of his successor, Théophile Delcassé, was to turn his back on the alliance with Germany.

In July, Marchand arrived at Fashoda and hoisted his flag. Before the news of Marchand's arrival reached France, Sirdar Kitchener carried out a horrible massacre, killing thousands in the battle of Omdurman, in Khartoum province, on Sept. 2, 1898. He then continued south to meet Marchand, ordering him to remove the French flag and depart. Marchand answered that his orders came only from the French government. But at that very moment, the French government was paralyzed by a succession of crises: a national strike of railroad workers which some accused London banks of financing; new outbreaks of Dreyfus-related scandals; and another cabinet collapse. As news reached both capitals of the Marchand-Kitchener encounter, the British Navy was mobilized and the Channel Fleet was ordered to Gibraltar. British Minister of Colonies Chamberlain was pressing for an imme-

9. G. Hanotaux, *Histoire des Colonies Françaises*, Vol. IV, p. 518.

diate "preventive" war. Finally, on Nov. 3, 1898 Delcassé ordered Marchand to retreat, in humiliation.

The Entente Cordiale, 1904

In the period after this strategic humiliation of France, Delcassé and his backers in the Colonial Party agreed to a convention with England which excluded France from the Nile Valley. In return, France received British support for the French claim over Morocco. This 1899 convention contained the seeds of the disastrous 1904 Entente Cordiale between France and England, which inexorably drew France into the web of Edward VII and his march toward World War I.

When the Entente Cordiale's secret provisions were finally made public in 1911, they were denounced by Hanotaux: "France has not chosen the directions of her foreign policy," he wrote, "but was submitted to them, did not act, but was acted upon. The Entente was a marvelous invention of English diplomatic genius, created to divide her adversaries, creating an area of friction between France and Germany, with Morocco as the piece of bait." Morocco was, for the British, nothing more than a difficult-to-manage piece of real estate, and it was the perfect "bone of contention," as Hanotaux called it, to set up renewed animosities between France and Germany.

Those animosities flared twice to the brink of war, in 1905 and 1911, when Germany insisted on pressing its claim over Morocco. As the rope is to the hanged man, King Edward was always there to provide his "support" for France, in these crises with Germany.

In the final years before World War I, Delcassé pursued his goal of an alliance among France, England, and Russia against Germany: the hostile encirclement policy that hastened events down the path toward war. As the war approached, Hanotaux commented that "the times were as tragic as those that inspired Shakespeare." Yet, he could no more intervene to stop those events than a member of the audience witnessing a tragedy. Certainly, his own weaknesses played a part in what was about to occur on the battlefields.

The downfall of the Méline cabinet in 1898 (with Hanotaux as foreign minister), also marked the beginning of the era of the Radical Republicans winning hegemony over the government. It was the end of the efforts at religious and political reconciliation undertaken by Gambetta, Spuller, Ferry, and Hanotaux on the one side, and Leo XIII and Cardinal Lavignerie on the other. By 1906, under the helm of the Emile Combes government, relations between France and the Vatican—now ruled by the Venetian Pope Pius X—were broken.

As the war clouds thickened in the following years, lone voices of opposition were occasionally heard, and those voices had to be silenced. Such was the fate that met France's leading Socialist, Jean Jaurès, who continually stood up against the anti-German passions that were being manipulated into a frenzy. Like Thiers before him, Jaurès was de-

nounced in the "nationalist" press as an "agent of the kaiser," and Action Française hinted openly of the assassination of the "Prussian Jaurès." He was assassinated on July 31, 1914 by Raoul Villain, a partisan of *revanche*, who was proclaimed a lone, deranged assassin. Immediately after Jaurès's death, his party rallied to the "Sacred Union" for the war. Such were the anti-German passions of the day, that when Villain finally went on trial in March 1919, the jury acquitted him on the homicide charges after half an hour's deliberation. His lawyers had spoken of the defendant as a man who spent his nearly five years of detention dreaming only of how he could have fought against the Germans. Witnesses on his behalf included the former president of the League of Young Friends of Alsace-Lorraine. Jaurès's widow was forced to pay the court costs.

France bled white

The casualties resulting from France's fall into the hands of the partisans of *revanche* were enormous. French fathers, sons, and husbands marched by the millions into the muddy, blood-drenched trenches on the western front: 1.5 million dead, 3 million wounded. The figures are equally staggering for the other European powers, although French losses were the greatest of all if measured in proportion to the population of the country. But it was not only Europeans who went to the slaughter.

As a result of the overthrow of Hanotaux and his collaborators, the door was opened in Africa to the most savage looting and genocide. Much of France's sphere in equatorial Africa had been peacefully won over in the 1880s by the French explorer Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, who told African slaves they had only to touch the French flag in order to be emancipated. As commissioner general of the French Congo, he steadfastly opposed the looting schemes of French companies, linked to London-centered banking interests. Following a slander campaign against him, Brazza was recalled to France in 1898. Foreign Minister Delcassé wrote the decree allowing private charter companies (*compagnies concessionnaires*) to be given absolute monopolistic control over most of the equatorial region, imitating the policies of King Leopold of Belgium in the neighboring regions of the Congo (now Zaire). This meant that slavery had been abolished in name only.

In addition, starting in 1906, French colonial policy in Africa was dominated by the idea of building an indigenous conscript army. Tens of thousands of African men had to be provided each year as trainees to become cannon fodder for the impending war effort. The result was that by 1921, the African population of the French Congo had been reduced by nearly half, from 4.8 to 2.8 million people.

The introduction and triumph of British methods, policies, and programs over the republican ideal in France had cataclysmic consequences, which continue to afflict many portions of the world to this day.