

## AFFAIRS IN FRANCE.

**Late Paris Gossip—Alexander Dumas' Letter—Sardon's New Play—Tokens of Its Success.**

From Our Own Correspondent.

PARIS, Thursday, Feb. 8, 1872.

The past few days have been particularly rich in incidents and events, and I hardly know where to begin my running commentary upon them. It is not often that we have so many ideas crowded into so short a space of time. The remarkable letter of ALEXANDER DUMAS, *his*; the excitement over "Rabagas," the new five-act comedy, by VICTORIEN SARDOU; the patriotic subscription for the payment of the war indemnity; the votes in the Assembly against the return to Paris, and the English Treaty of Commerce; the resignation of M. CASIMIR PERIER as Minister of the Interior; the split between the two monarchical factions, and between the half-formed fusion of the Legitimists and Bonapartists; the rumor of a new Russian alliance and a grand aurora borealis—are among the prominent topics which have been crowded into the past three or four days. With all this the bourse has been agitated and uncertain, but, owing to the return of fine weather, none of these things, the five-act comedy excepted, have produced the usual amount of flutter and excitement. Sunday morning dawned warm, bright and beautiful, the sun came out with the strength of Spring-tide, and, forgetting everything else, *tout le monde*, thought only of passing society in review along the Champs Elysées, or of joining the long tram hurrying away to the Bois de Boulogne. During the evening it was warm enough to sit out of doors along the boulevards, and gossip would have had its swing had not a splendid aurora-polaris, to use the latest expression, come to furnish a subject of conversation and curiosity, and to direct attention from the topics of the day. It was a splendid show, rising just over the Arc de l'Etoile, and, in broad, crimson rays stretching up to the very zenith. Nearly everyone fancied that it was the reflection of a vast incendiary beyond Les Invalides, or toward Autruil, and it was only when the reporters, who had hastily left their books to run off after an item, began to return, that we knew the character of this grand display. It was not equal, however, to the grand aurora of 1870, and conversation turned upon recollections of the three October nights when the sky was blood-red from horizon to horizon.

### ALEXANDRE DUMAS' LETTER.

The letter of ALEXANDRE DUMAS arrived at an unfortunate moment for its success. For a long time we have known that DUMAS was preparing a "second letter," which was to exceed the first by many degrees, and in literary and journalistic circles it has long been expected. It came upon the very day of a "first representation," and that, as I have told you, takes precedence of all. A few proof-sheets were sent to the Press as an appetizer for the public, and this instalment was crowded away into odd corners by the first critiques of SARDOU's play. It is impossible for me to give you anything like a comprehensive account of this letter. It is clever, sarcastic, and admirably well written; it abounds in sharp thrusts at his country and countrymen, and in brilliant, sparkling metaphor. It has been polished and repolished for weeks and weeks, and it was meant to fall upon us like a magnificent piece of fire-works at the end of a fête. It would be unfair to liken it to JULES JANIN's "Lundis," for JANIN is pedantic and heavy in comparison with DUMAS. In a word, it was intended for a sensation, and would have made one beyond question, had it not fallen in with the new piece at the Vaudeville. "Rabagas" took the fancy of the crowd and became the "idea" of the moment. Two days later a new instalment of the letter was sent out, but that fell in with the vote against the return to Paris, and now, if the editor of the review in which the letter is to appear, is a wise man, he will withhold his edition until he can reasonably hope for a day of calm. One point only can I notice now. M. DUMAS says that there are no literary men, who can be so-called, in any other country, and that France has long furnished both ideas and literature to the whole world. This is said flatly in so many words, and our literary men, or those we are accustomed to regard as such, can see the estimate put upon them by the author of "La Dame aux Camélias" and "La Princesse Georgee." It may be imagined that M. DUMAS has reference to dramatic writers, in which case he would have a good show of reason for his bold assertion, but, unfortunately, he himself takes care to preclude that interpretation.

### SARDOU'S NEW PLAY.

But "Rabagas," or the reign of the advocates, must take the first place in the events of the day. It is a satire of a very ancient model. Every page of this political satire, given in the form of a comedy, reminds us of ARISTOPHANES. *Rabagas* is GAMBETTA, or JULES FAVRE, or RICARD; say some, he is the modern CLEON; others assert, but all agree in saying, that the advocate of Monaco is a picture drawn from life. After all men have been pretty much the same in all stages of the world, as far as character is concerned, and I do not see why any one should be startled to find that ARISTOPHANES has given us a perfect picture of today, or that CLEON is a portrait of a class of men who have always existed and always may exist. CLEON was the Gambetta and Favre of ARISTOPHANES's time, say 425 years before Christ, and served as a model, just as these well-known advocates have sat to SARDOU for the portrait of *Rabagas*. PLUTARCH, that shrewd observer of men and things, who kept a diary, has left us a small sketch of the Rabagas or Gambetta of those early days. "CLEON," he says, in effect, "without any regard for the decency of public meetings, was the first to give an example of shouting out with all his force, of throwing down his robe behind him, or striking violently upon his thigh, of walking up and down the tribune during his speech: and in that way he introduced among those who administered public affairs a license and contempt for all decorum which caused great disorder and confusion in the affairs of the Republic." It must be added, also, that CLEON set himself up for a General, and vaunted his own strategy. He was for war to the death, and, indeed, he did die like a soldier, under the walls of Amphipolis.

### TOKENS OF SUCCESS.

There is the precedent for *Rabagas* in the hero of ARISTOPHANES and PLUTARCH, and for models, to give the picture a modern dress and air, sat the advocates of the 4th of September. One must confess that it requires uncommon talent to make the old Greek drama succeed at Paris—unless, indeed, we may argue from the success of the German Passion Play that our tastes are reverting to the old standard—but there can be no doubt that SARDOU has met with success. The first evidence of it was the attempt to mob the author, hiss down his play, and create a riot in the theatre. The second was in the deputation to M. THIERS, asking him to suppress the play because it was Bonapartist and offensive to the people. M. THIERS so far yielded to his own anger that he wrote an order of suspension, but he changed his mind after a meeting of the Council. If the people are offended by the political sentiments of the drama, let them stay at home, which *Les Débats* advises them to do. M. THIERS said, however, that the piece would be stopped if the disorders of the second night were repeated, and a large crowd went to the theatre for the purpose of repeating them. But the friends of SARDOU, or of BONAPARTE, or the lovers of fair-play, were too strong for these so-called Republicans, whose feelings had been injured by a satire, and they saw themselves in a dilemma where it was either silence or a rapid and brusque journey down the stairs or out of the nearest window. A large force of Police were in and around the buildings, and dispatches were sent every five or ten minutes to the Chief of Police. Yet the petitions do not cease, and I am confident that the drama will soon be closed by public decree. All of the papers opposed to the Empire fell upon SARDOU in the most terrific manner. The magnificent JULES JANIN, who, since his entrance into the Academy, has assumed a lofty and patronizing style, says: "Go away, little man; we want none of your stale political lessons. You have no longer the art to amuse the

people. We have given you your share of applause, and now you can step aside." Meantime the house is crowded every night, and a large number of young men, no friends of the family of *Rabagas*, go nightly to see the play for the purpose of joining in the free fight the Republicans (singular Republicans these) have threatened to raise. ASHBY.