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and THE DRESDEN DAILY.

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THE FRENCH NAVAL DISASTERS.

Little surprise was occasioned by the report that M. Thomson, who for several years has held the portfolio of the French Ministry of Marine, has resigned his office in consequence of the attacks upon him contained in the report of the Commission of Enquiry into the "Jéna" disaster, which in 1907 robbed the French Navy of one of its finest fighting ships. The report was nothing less than a scathing indictment of M. Thomson's administration, and it was supplemented in the Chamber on Monday last by a passionate speech from M. Delcassé, the ex-Minister for Foreign Affairs, who proposed a resolution the terms of which were a censure on the personal work of the Marine Minister. M. Delcassé explicitly accused the Minister of having systematically neglected his duty in rejecting advice proffered him by officials of the "Jéna" and other experts many months before the disastrous explosion occurred. The ex-Foreign Minister detailed the numerous and varied risks of explosion to which the ill-fated battleship was exposed owing to her faulty construction and the deplorably lax arrangement of her magazines, all of which defects, he said, were made known to the Marine Department previous to the disaster. He argued that M. Thomson had been guilty of negligence in setting aside these reports as a matter calling for no immediate investigation, and asserted that this official procrastination was the main cause of the deplorable catastrophe. In M. Delcassé's own words, those responsible for the French Navy really seemed to have accumulated all the causes that might lead to a disaster. They were literally tempting Providence. It was carelessness in responsible quarters that little by little produced in all the departments of the Navy and in all ranks first surprise, then a state of unrest and anxiety, and finally utter discouragement. That, said the ex-Foreign Minister, was the origin of all those disasters that had so deeply moved public opinion, of all those catastrophes that involved so many victims. Within three years there had been more losses in personnel and materiel than would have been caused by a naval defeat. It was the imperative duty of the Chamber to put an end to this miserable state of affairs.

It is hardly necessary to say that the vigorous tone of this indictment created a sensation among the Deputies, and later, when the newspapers came out with the Enquiry Commission's report and M. Delcassé's remarks relative thereto, it was seen that M. Thomson had, by resigning, taken the only possible course. In French naval circles, however, the resignation of the Minister is deeply regretted. Ever since he replaced the notorious M. Pelletan, who apparently undertook the administration of the Navy with the sole object of disorganising it beyond repair, M. Thomson has laboured incessantly to undo the pernicious work of his predecessor. When he entered office it is not too much to say that the French Navy, so far as fighting efficiency was concerned, was in a worse condition than it had ever been. A particularly insidious form of Socialism was rampant among the crews of the ships and the dockyard employés; the men entrusted with the task of designing new vessels for the Navy were absolutely free of official control, and were therefore at liberty to build battleships and cruisers in conformity with their own hare-brained plans. The consequence is that the French Navy is a heterogeneous collection of marine hybrids, few ships being equal in fighting value to contemporary vessels of other navies. Moreover, in some cases the design of a ship was radically altered when she was lying half built on the stocks, and every inventive crank suddenly smitten with a new idea was at liberty to work his will on the unfortunate vessel. M. Thomson soon managed to root out this costly and suicidal system, but not without making for himself a host of bitter enemies. Superfluous officials in all departments of the Navy, who for many years had been fattening upon sinecures, were discharged wholesale. A clean sweep was made of all the men infected with that spirit of idleness and insubordination engendered by the spread of Socialist propaganda throughout the fleet. The extent to which this creed flourished in the Navy under the Pelletan régime is shown by the well authenticated story published in a French service journal some three years ago, to the effect that on board one of the battleships of the Mediterranean squadron was a perfectly equipped



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printing press, operated by several members of the crew, who turned off under the very eyes of their officers thousands of inflammatory Socialist pamphlets, which were promptly distributed among the other vessels of the squadron. Today, however, all this has been changed. Ships are laid down and completed in accordance with the original designs; the rank and file are more amenable to discipline and show increased interest in their work; the officers have become enthusiastic since they discovered their interests had ceased to be ignored. A new spirit permeates the Navy, and for this the French nation has only M. Thomson to thank. Nothing is definitely known as yet as to his successor, but we venture to think the Government will have a difficult task to replace the ex-Minister who has been driven from office by the unscrupulous intrigues of jealous politicians.

GENERAL NEWS.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

London, October 22.

Replying to several questions on the paper today with reference to the proposed European Conference, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the object of the present negotiations between the Powers was to arrive at some agreement as to the programme of a Conference which should put an end to the difficulties arising out of recent events, without causing new uneasiness. "As Turkey," said the Minister, "has been most prejudiced by what has occurred, the British Government trusts that the first object of the Powers will be to secure compensation for Turkey, to support her interests, and to strengthen the new Turkish Government whose administration is having such a beneficial effect throughout the Ottoman Empire. The approval of the Turkish Government is a necessary preliminary condition of the adoption of any Conference programme; and, as the views of Turkey on the suggestions that have been made have not yet been expressed, I can give no further information. The proposal of a Conference proceeded in the first place from Turkey, but the idea of a Conference was mooted on several sides 'at about the same time.'"

A member on the Government side of the House having asked whether the Secretary of State would explain clearly the proposals put forward by the British Government, Sir Edward Grey answered that it would be premature to make any disclosures as

to the proposals favoured by a single Power. (Hear, Hear.) The object of the communications which have been exchanged between the Powers was to guard against the publication of views prevailing with regard to the various proposals.

AMERICAN POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S VISIT.

(From our own correspondent.)

London, October 22.

It is reported here that Mr. Henniker Heaton, the energetic and successful advocate of universal penny postage, had the intention of giving a dinner at the House of Commons shortly to Mr. Buxton and the Hon. G. Von L. Meyer, United States Postmaster-General, in celebration of the inauguration of penny postage between this country and the United States. Owing to the inability of Mr. Meyer to visit this country at present, however, the celebration has had to be postponed until next year. In a letter to Mr. Henniker Heaton, dated Washington, the 7th inst., Mr. G. Von L. Meyer wrote: "It would give me the greatest pleasure to visit England and the House of Commons, but I regret to say that it will be impossible for me to leave my post this winter. I hope to be able to avail myself of the opportunity of visiting your country some time next year."

Since the first of this month when penny postage to the States came into force, the number of letters addressed from England to all parts of the United States has increased by leaps and bounds, and there is good reason to believe that within a short time the Treasury will not only be able to cover the temporary deficit caused by the reduced rate, but in consequence of the enormous increase of postal traffic will reap the benefit of an increased revenue. A movement has been set on foot by several prominent men in this country to obtain the consent of the Government to an issue of stamps bearing the head of Mr. Henniker Heaton, in lieu of the ordinary picture of the sovereign. It is feared, however, that legal technicalities forbid the realisation of this unique project.

COUNT TOLSTOY'S GRATITUDE.

(From our own correspondent.)

London, October 22.

Count Leo Tolstoy has addressed a communication to the editor of the *Times*, in which he thanks his many friends in England for the kind letters and greetings which have reached him in great numbers. He writes: "From the last days of August to the present time I have been, and still am, receiving from most various sides such flattering greetings that I feel it necessary to express my extreme gratitude to all those persons and institutions who have addressed me so amicably and kindly... I thank all my friends and acquaintances, both in Russia and abroad, who remembered me on my birthday. I thank all those whom I do not know personally, of every various social position, including prisoners in gaols and exiles, who have greeted me with equal cordiality. I thank all the youths, maidens, and children who have sent me beautiful presents. I heartily thank all who have greeted me, especially those (the majority) who, quite unexpectedly to me and to my great joy, have expressed in their addresses full agreement, not with me, but with those eternal truths which, as best I could, I have tried to express in my writings. Excusing myself for my inability to reply separately to each institution and person, I ask all to accept this announcement as an expression of my sincere gratitude to all who during these days have expressed their kind feelings towards me, for the joy they have given me. (signed) Leo Tolstoy."

BRITISH SHIPBUILDERS REFUSE CREDIT.

Glasgow, October 22.

Reuter states that the contract between the Russian Government and the Grangemouth and Greenock Dockyard Company for the construction of five war ships, each of 8,000 tons displacement and to cost about £400,000, has been broken off, although it was all but completed, and transferred to the Schichau yard at Danzig, because the Russian Government had insisted that it should not be called upon for any payment until 1911.

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