

SHOCKING BALLOON DISASTER.**FOUR GERMAN AERONAUTS KILLED.**

Today we have to chronicle the third serious accident which has happened to German aeronauts in a fortnight, and the story told by our telegrams is even more terrible than the narrative of the ill-fated Pommeru, related in these columns exactly two weeks ago. This time no fewer than four persons met a shocking death, none the less awful for being instantaneous. On Saturday afternoon the balloon Delitzsch ascended from Bitterfeld with four people in the car, Messrs. Karl Luft (this being his 25th trip), Leuchsenring, Hocker and Graupner (the two last-named being from Leipzig). The start was made at 6.15 p.m., in magnificent weather, and there was every prospect of a most successful voyage. The sequel is told in the following despatch from Eschwege:—

A villager of Reichensachsen was awakened at one o'clock on Sunday morning by a loud detonation, and thought that something in the vicinity had been struck by lightning. As he remarked nothing, however, he again fell asleep. At 6 a.m. he arose and went to the stables, and on the way was horrified to see the hull of a balloon entangled in a cherry-tree, while the car lay on the ground in fragments. Near the spot were the bodies of the four aeronauts. An examination showed that all had met a terrible death, the agony of which was stamped on their faces. The limbs were contorted as if by cramp, and each hand was tightly clenched. It appears that after leaving Bitterfeld the balloon passed over Halle, Delitzsch, Niedereichstädt, Kölleda, and Sömmerda. At midnight it passed Eisenach at an altitude of 440 metres. At this time it must have met with a thunderstorm and have been driven to the west. While over the village of Reichensachsen the balloon was struck by lightning and plunged to earth with great velocity. The car must have struck the ground with terrific force, according to its shattered condition, while the bodies bear fearful injuries. Two were hurled some distance from the car, and the other two were huddled up inside it.

A later despatch throws doubt on the lightning theory and offers an alternative solution to the cause of the catastrophe. It reads as follows:

ESCHWEGE, Monday.—An examination of the hull of the balloon Delitzsch made by members of the Bitterfeld Airship Society gave certain proof that the disaster was not caused by lightning. The balloon, it is assumed, owing to a thunderstorm raging in the Werra valley on Sunday night, was caught in a strong air current and pressed downwards. The occupants attempted by throwing out ballast to escape from the thunderstorm region, but the powerful counter-resistance of the atmospheric current put such a pressure on the envelope that it exploded. In support of this theory the absence of the ventilator cap is adduced, and if this cap can be found it is believed that the actual cause of the occurrence can be established with exactitude. Instruments in the car show the balloon to have been at an altitude of 2,600 metres when the mishap took place. The envelope is to be again examined today. The corpses of the four aeronauts have been transferred to their relatives for interment.

AN IMPERIAL POLICY.

Representatives from the British Overseas Dominions have inaugurated a series of meetings which are designed to set before British electors the arguments for an Imperial policy as they show to the Briton abroad. A letter which has been posted to all the electors of the various London districts on behalf of the Imperial delegation will give an idea of what is aimed at. It reads:

"Will you come to the . . . (place of meeting) on . . . (date of meeting) and hear the case for an Imperial policy as explained by citizens of your Empire from the Overseas Dominions of Canada, Australia, and South Africa?"

"We do not presume to interfere in your domestic politics, but we wish to put before you the facts as to how an Imperial policy affects your safety in these islands, your employment, your wages, your taxation, the price of your food.

"Come whatever your politics."

The speakers at the first meeting were Mr. Frank Fox (Australia), Mr. Mulloy (Canada), Mr. P. J. Hannan (South Africa), and the Hon. Daniel O'Connor, ex-Postmaster-General New South Wales.

To a press representative one of the delegates gave this explanation of the movement: "Speaking for my own country in particular, and I think I can safely say speaking for the Overseas Dominions generally, there is a strong feeling that the times are critical for the Empire, that the Empire must be consolidated or it will perish, that we must stand together or we will hang together. The Imperial policy to be advocated at our meetings is simple enough. It holds that you must strengthen this, the home centre of the Empire, because if it falls all must fall; that you should encourage the growth of population in the Dominions of your Empire by confining your custom to them as far as possible for the food and raw

materials that you need for the two reasons: (1) that that is the only way to make quite sure of your supply of food and raw materials in time of war, and (2) that every citizen of your Empire whom you are employing under your flag is a sure friend, and every foreigner you are employing to grow food or raw material for you is a potential enemy.

"It is a non-party movement, but we do not hope or design to please all parties. Simply we will state the truth as it seems to us, the view of Imperial policy that one gets at the outer rim of the Empire; and who is offended, who is pleased, is immaterial.

"Yes, it is rather a delicate matter in one sense, since our speaking may easily be misrepresented as an unwarrantable intrusion in British domestic politics. But with a little thought the conclusion should come that if Imperial unity is to be real, then all the citizens of the Empire should have the right to speak on Imperial politics in any part of its dominions. Personally, nothing would please me better than to see the Unionist Party, the Liberal Party, and the Labour Party all agreed on a policy of sound Imperialism. I suppose then you could invent some new party issues to squabble about. The security of the Empire should not be a party issue.

"We hope to make this Imperial Delegation a real and a permanent force. At present four speakers will take the platform. Two more arrive from Canada within a week, and we are enlisting the aid of citizens of the Empire who come to London for the holiday season. We hope to cover every corner of the United Kingdom, and then to turn attention to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa."

THE HISTORY OF THE POSTAGE-STAMP.

"Who invented the postage-stamp?" is a question often asked, says a writer in *Chambers's Journal*, and to find its answer we must go back to the Seventeenth Century. In 1653 the Comte de Nogent and the Sieur de Villayer obtained from Louis XIV. the privilege of establishing post-boxes in various quarters of Paris. A printed "instruction" was issued to the public, stating that their correspondence would be transmitted if they "put with their letters a piece of paper which is to bear the words *port payé*, because no money will be accepted; the said piece of paper is to be attached to the said letter, or put round the letter, or slipped inside the letter, or in any way they may find convenient; in such wise, however, that the clerk may see it and remove it easily." If a specimen of this *billet de port-payé* or postage-paid note were unearthed at the present day it would be worth many times its weight in gold, but no copies are known to exist; and this is not to be wondered at, since each *billet* was removed in transmission and presumably destroyed. We do not even know, continues the writer, what it was like in shape, and can only guess that it may have been a narrow strip or band of paper somewhat like the stamped newspaper-wrappers in use in our own time. It bore a certain inscription and a private mark of De Villayer's, and there is little doubt that to De Villayer himself the credit of its invention is due, De Nogent's connection with the post being merely a nominal one. Indeed we learn from Saint-Simon that De Villayer was "a fellow full of singular inventions, and had plenty of cleverness," and was also the inventor of "those flying chairs that move by means of counter-weights up and down between two walls to the floor required"—in other words of what we now call lifts. But nowadays postage-stamps mean to most people the little gummed labels affixed to our letters; and so, if the question with which this article begins is asked the inquirer most likely intends to say: "Who invented the adhesive postage stamp?" In February, 1837, Rowland Hill proposed the use of "a bit of paper just large enough to bear the stamp, and covered at the back with a glutinous wash, which the bringer might, by the application of a little moisture, attach to the back of the letter." No evidence that will bear the slightest scrutiny has been produced to support the various prior claims to the invention of the adhesive postage-stamp; and even should such a claim ever be established it could not, adds the writer in *Chambers's Journal*, in the slightest degree lessen Rowland Hill's reputation, for it was only the adoption of his great plan of a uniform rate of postage, coupled with prepayment, that rendered the general use of stamps, impressed or adhesive, practicable for postal purposes.

:: DRESDEN ::

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LATEST AMERICAN MAIL NEWS.**TO THE UNITED STATES.**

April 23.—Philadelphia, from Southampton, mails due in New York April 30. Mark letters "Via England," and post on Thursday, April 21.

April 24.—Carmania, from Queenstown, mails due in New York May 2. Mark letters "Via Colon—Queenstown per Cunard Line," and post on Thursday, April 21.

SPECIAL NOTICE.

Letters for the above steamers should be posted, in any boxes in Berlin or Dresden, not later than 1 o'clock p.m. on the day given.

Letters bearing a 10-pfennig stamp per weight of 20 grammes are only valid for transit by a German steamer sailing direct from a German port. They will not be sent by an English or French steamer.

TO CANADA.

Same as to the United States, but no 10-pfennig rate!

It may be mentioned that an "Empress" steamer of the C.P.R., or a steamer of the Allan Line leaves Liverpool for Quebec and Montreal direct every Friday. Letters intended for Canada by this direct route should be posted in Berlin and Dresden not later than 1 o'clock p.m. on Wednesdays, and be marked "via England," if marked at all. The "Empress" steamers deliver the mail in Quebec and Montreal on the following Friday, the "Allan" steamers on Saturday.

NEXT AMERICAN MAILS DUE IN BERLIN AND DRESDEN

Today (Tuesday), by the S.S. Adriatic, left New York April 9.

Tomorrow (Wednesday), by the S.S. Mauretania left New York April 13.

On Friday, April 22, by the S.S. La Provence, left New York April 14.

BRITISH AND AMERICAN REPRESENTATIVES IN DRESDEN.

THE BRITISH LEGATION: Wiener Strasse 70. British Minister Resident, ARTHUR C. GRANT-DUFF, Esq.

THE BRITISH CONSULATE: Altmarkt 16.—British Consul: H. PALMIÉ, Esq.

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