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LEO XIII. to the N.Z. TABLET.

THURSDAY, MAY 26, 1904.

## TWO TERRORS OF NAVAL WAR



I do not know how it may fare with Port Arthur if it should ever be subjected to high-angle fire from the powerful siege guns of to-day. The comparative bloodlessness of the siege of Paris perhaps gave rise to the legend that it takes a ton of lead to kill a man in war. It really took about two hundred weight of good German metal for every person struck in Paris during the siege. At Fort Vanvres the besiegers volleyed off four and a quarter tons of lead for every defender that they sent to the world beyond the veil of death. The full

possibilities of war are never realised on land by the followers of

'That noble trade  
That demi-gods and heroes made—  
Slaughter, and knocking on the head.'

We must seek it among the men that go down to the sea in ships of war. According to Bloch, the nerves of modern soldiers are weaker than those of the hardened veterans of the olden time, and this defect is aggravated by the system of short service and the increased dangers of war. The nerves of men in war-ships must be in something like a continuous state of high tension when traversing seas that, like those which wash the shores around Port Arthur, shelter the two great anarchists of naval conflict—the torpedo and the sunken mine. Evidence of the swift and fearsome power of destructiveness of these engines of war is amply furnished by the battered Russian and Japanese fighting craft that lie sheer hulks with their keels in the mud of Korea Bay.

The day seems still far-off when (as Admiral Werner predicts) aluminium will be so plentiful and cheap that war-ships will be built of that wondrously light metal. and when it will form a casing of armor against which the impact of exploding mines and torpedoes will be no more than the rattling of stones against a fortress wall. But the advent of aluminium fighting ships would be by no means likely to put an end to the war of wits between the iron-master and the chemist—between the manufacturer of armor and the inventor of ever newer and more racking explosive combinations. Naval constructors long fancied that they had baffled torpedo attack when they invented the cumbrous thing called a torpedo-net. With their nets down o' nights they lay them down in peace to sleep, rocked in the cradle of the deep, till one fine day the flying submarine death sharpened its nose and cut through the frail obstacle as a rapier would through a lady's gossamer veil. They felt that they could sail a battle-ship worth £1,500,000 over a sunken mine, so long as her water-tight compartments were in working order and her boilers and engines were protected above and below water by special armor, and comfortably packed round about with sheltering layers of coal. But the fate of the 'Petropavlovsk' and the 'Hatsuse' has proved that an emphatic modern mine, well and truly laid, is no respecter of water-tight doors or protected boiler-plates, and that it can send the biggest war-vessel afloat to the bottom in ten minutes, with its full complement of twice four hundred men. What with sunken mines, swarms of swift torpedoers, and submarines, the prospect of big armor-clads in future wars is by no means a cheerful one. And by reason of its large crew and enormous cost, the destruction of a single battle-ship—so easily accomplished—is a serious blow to any nation. The present war may, perhaps, strengthen the hands of those specialists who advocate the construction of swift, light cruisers with powerful armaments, and of torpedo boats that cleave through the water, loaded with sudden death, at the rate of the Sydney express.

Butler says of the 'English Merlin' that

'Of warlike engines he was author,  
Devised for quick despatch of slaughter.'

But the duels of nations, as of French editors, is a matter of thrust and parry. In naval warfare, every new warlike engine 'devised for quick despatch of slaughter' was met by the invention of fresh means of defence. From the days of the 'Monitor' till now there has been an unbroken tug-of-war between the thrust of projectile and the parry of armor. When Great Britain placed upon the seas a formidable navy armed with heavy guns and clad in a thick frieze-coat of steel, some of her rivals cudgelled their brains to devise means of tickling the weak spots of war-ships with heavy mine-explosions. The result was the invention of a crude