

Current Topics

Prophetic

That the German Administration long ago clearly and accurately foresaw the possibilities and dangers of failure at sea is rather strikingly shown by the memorandum of the German Navy Act of 1900, in which it was impressed upon members of the Reichstag that:— 'An unsuccessful naval war of the duration of even only a year would destroy Germany's sea trade, and would thereby bring about the most disastrous conditions, first in her economic, and then, as an immediate consequence, in her social life. Quite apart from the consequences of the possible peace conditions, the destruction of our sea trade during the war could not, even at the close of it, be made good within measurable time, and would add to the sacrifices of the war a serious economic depression.' As a long range guess at the course which events might take this is remarkably close to the mark.

To Beat the Zeppelins

The cables hint that the Germans intend in the near future suddenly to launch a great fleet of Zeppelins from Germany and Belgium for a spectacular raid on England: and the experts all agree that the story is quite a probable one. The invasion, we should judge, will be awaited with more curiosity than dread by the great majority of the people. For so far the damage wrought by Zeppelins in England has been negligible, and, more important still, it would seem as if the effective counter-move to the attacks of these air monsters had been discovered. It consists in a strict and rigid adherence to the simple programme of 'Lights Out.' All the evidence goes to show that if this precaution is thoroughly carried out even the mighty Zeppelins are almost absolutely harmless. In the recent raid, described in last week's cables, it was recorded that 'the Zeppelin travelled up the Tyne, but the extinction of lights confused the airmen.' Still more conclusive is the evidence afforded by the experience of Antwerp in the very first month of the war. The first Zeppelin which visited the city damaged many buildings, killed a dozen people, and narrowly missed destroying the Royal Palace, in which were the King and Queen of the Belgians and their three children. On the occasion of the second Zeppelin's visit the lights of the city had been extinguished, and there was a very different tale to tell. 'On the day following the first visit,' says Sir Cecil Hertslet, late British Consul-General for Belgium, 'the General issued strict injunctions that the whole of Antwerp was to be placed in darkness every night at 8 o'clock. The darkness was very real. There were no lights in the streets, the shops were all closed, and the cafés shut. It was as dark as one could imagine Egypt to have been during one of the plagues. The result was that when the second Zeppelin paid the city a visit ten days later it did not succeed in getting to the heart of the city at all. It threw its deadly bombs, but they fell just outside the inhabited part of the city, and no one was killed; whereas on the first occasion eleven people were killed, all of them women or non-combatants. This is, I think, worth mentioning, because it proved the value of darkness as a precaution against Zeppelin raids. The second Zeppelin came over the forts, and it was at once taken up by the searchlights.' Forewarned is said to be fore-armed; and if the 'Zeps.' come in force to England, at least the country will be fully prepared.

Benedict XV. on Preaching

The address delivered by the Holy Father to the parish priests and the Lenten preachers of Rome, which appears elsewhere in this issue, sets forth briefly and simply the essential requirements for effective preaching. His Holiness had in view not that rare and highest type of sacred oratory which implies the possession of special genius, but the plain, practical, everyday preaching which falls to the lot and is well within the scope of the humblest curate or parish priest. The require-

ments outlined by the Holy Father mainly concern the matter and the form of sermons. As to the former, the object being the spiritual profit and not the mere intellectual gratification of the hearers, the staple of the sermon is to be drawn direct and first hand from the pure source and fountainhead of that 'Word of God, written and revealed,' which forms the deposit of the Faith; and the discussion of 'arid questions of philosophy, history, or politics,' is, of course, to be avoided. In regard to this latter point, we think the most exacting censor of present-day Catholic discourses could find little of which to complain. We have listened to thousands of Catholic sermons in many lands, but we have never heard one which, in regard to its subject matter, could for a moment bring the preacher under suspicion of being engaged in holy trifling or mere intellectual display. It is not from Catholic pulpits that hungry flocks are regaled with disquisitions on the ten toes of the beast, the 'little horn' of Daniel, the nine and twenty knives of Esdras, and the question of pre or post millenarian schemes—all of which, it is on record, have formed the subject of discourses elsewhere. Whatever else they are, Catholic sermons are, we should say, invariably and essentially practical.

As to the form, the Holy Father lays it down, first, that preachers should above all remember the care with which they should give to their discourses 'a most clear order in their different parts,' and, secondly, that 'no amount of literary or rhetorical beauty can make up for the failure to drive home the definite and practical application of the truths and principles proclaimed. Both of these requirements imply preparation—not necessarily written preparation, but an adequate amount of preparatory study and thought. The speaker who has not made clear to himself beforehand what he intends to say suffers truths to drop from him pell-mell, forgetful of the fact that one thought fixed on the mind is better than fifty thoughts made to flit across the ear. There will, moreover, in such a case, of necessity be more or less of rambling and repetition, with loss of attention and an inevitable soporific effect upon the congregation. 'We all know,' says a writer in the *Imperial Review*, 'how the noise of running water, or the murmur of the sea, or the sighing of the south wind among the pines, or the moaning of wood-doves, induces a delicious dreamy languor.' It is even so with a congregation, when the preacher

Leaves his hearers perplex'd—

Twixt the two to determine:

'Watch and pray,' says the text,

'Go to sleep,' says the sermon.

The one and sovereign remedy against such a state of affairs, as the Holy Father plainly hints, is definiteness and orderly arrangement, and, as far as time permits, careful and thorough preparation.

Germany and Peace

Press discussion as to what will be or what ought to be the terms of settlement when the great conflict is over has become very keen and very general amongst the belligerent nations: and though such speculation is altogether premature, and more or less futile, at least it witnesses to the almost universal conviction that the end is now within some sort of measurable distance. The spirit of discussion has even extended to Germany, where it has so far found expression chiefly in a demand that when the psychological moment arrives—and that moment is more or less clearly indicated—the people shall be consulted and their views considered when negotiations are entered into. In a review called *Das Neue Deutschland* (*The New Germany*), Herr de Zedlitz, the leader of the free Conservatives in the Prussian Chamber, publishes an article on the manner in which the terms of future peace ought to be discussed in Germany. The article is all the more remarkable in that de Zedlitz is a very well-known personality in the German parliamentary world, and his party is in aim and object the Government party. The article was transferred to the columns of the well-known *Berliner Tageblatt*,