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EDITORIAL COMMENT.

The Franco-German Zeppelin " Incident."

With the recent " incident " of the straying of a German Zeppelin dirigible across the French frontier and its passive landing in the midst of a manoeuvring cavalry regiment, now happily closed to the satisfaction of both parties, it is difficult to look back upon it and say with any certainty which side of it appeals the most—the humorous or the tragic. Certainly it has both aspects, and it is perhaps natural that the former should at first make the strongest impression on the mind of the detached spectator who has no particular interest in the incident save as a mere matter of every-day news. For long enough the Germans have patted themselves on the back in the belief that they were ahead of the whole world in their knowledge of the dirigible, its construction and its capabilities. They possessed secrets which they believed were priceless, and they left nothing undone to retain those secrets safely locked up to the east of the Vosges. Not only were those secrets jealously guarded by those who were perforce made acquainted with them, but the most touching appeals were made

through the Press of the Empire to the sense of patriotism of the people not to even whisper the word " Zeppelin " in the hearing of strangers, lest perchance some one of the invaluable secrets might be given away to the potential enemy. And by the cruel irony of fate, before the ink was dry which conveyed the last of these appeals to the nation, the very latest of the Zeppelins, embodying all that is known in Germany of the science of aerial navigation by lighter-than-air craft, was quietly and gracefully handed over to the French for inspection at their leisure. Surely, nothing quite so humorous—viewing it from that standpoint—has happened for many years! No wonder the German Press is in hysterics of grief over the " aerial Jena," as it has been not inaptly called!

But let the Germans take heart from sober reflection. We imagine that the German General Staff is under very few delusions as to the amount of secrecy which exists with regard to the design of the Zeppelin. While it is very possible that the French air corps has learnt something from the courteous visit of " Z 4 " to Luneville, it is equally certain that the German Press has rather exaggerated the ignorance of experts outside Germany of the details of Zeppelin construction. Possibly some few secret details have been given away, but the matter is probably not a quarter so serious as Press opinion in Germany appears to imagine. The real lesson for the Germans to bear in mind seems to us to be that they should take care next time not to stray too far from home in foggy weather!

Apart from the humour of the incident, it has its very serious side, and particularly for ourselves, who were not directly concerned in it. And we are something more than pleased to notice that the lesson has been taken to heart by the responsible Press of this country. Not so very long ago—a matter of weeks, perhaps—the incident would have furnished a text for gibes at the dirigible in general and the Zeppelin in particular. It would have been pointed out how foolish are the Germans to continue to build aircraft that wreck themselves every time they are taken out in a stiff breeze and that stray over frontiers in the fog and come down to Mother Earth like winged partridges, to quietly present the hated enemy with all the secrets of their construction. But nowadays a more judicial state of mind prevails. The Press of the country has come to realise that where a new science like aerial navigation is concerned experience has to be bought, and that in the repeated wrecks of their big airships the