THE ARTS OF DESTRICTION.

From the Pall Mall Gazette. The Middle Age Italian stories of deadly poisons manufactured by ancient men in glass masks, and of ladies destroying their rivals by the perfume of a fan, a nosegay, or a pair of gloves, have often been regarded as mere exaggerations, the fruit of a panic occasioned by a large addition made to the number of known poisons in the first age of mo-dern chemical discovery. But we believe that this incredulity is not shared by all the great chemists of our day. They say that chemical research, instead being guided by the wish to penetrate the secrets of the natural world, or to find out remedies for disease, or even to hit upon the philosopher's stone, were directed solely by the ambition to effect the subtle destruction of human life, there is no reason why, if not among solids and fluids, at least among vapors, it might not easily find the means of doing all that the Italian poisoners are said to have done. Fortunately for the human race, poisoning has never been viewed with more than very moderate approval. Whatever were the faults of the mediaval Italian States, they certainly went near to stamping out this particular crime. The fears and hesitations of the Apothecary in Romeo and Juliet are among the last traces of a contest

in which the law had the best of it. The next fifty years will apparently be a period during which the skill, patience, and wealth which bitherto have been mainly devoted to developing the arts of peace will be applied by the most civilized races of the world to improving the arts of destruction. As this process will be carried on not amid the execrations but amid the applause and interest of mankind, it is impossible that we should not ask ourselves what may be expected from it. Its commencement, it should be remembered, is extremely recent. The lest half century has by no means been distingwished by sustained attention to this special branch of art. During more than thirty years of it the chief European nations declined rather than otherwise in knowledge of the practice and appliances of war, and even those who appeared to have become stronger for military purposes owed their strength, like Prussia, to the mere multiplication of men and guns in their standing armies. But a new era began with the Crimean war, and it is startling to think what has been accomplished since the men of the nineteenth century began to give themselves up with real earnestness, though at present doubtless with what will soon appear to have been merely infantine clumsiness, to the invention and improvement of mechanical contrivances for wholesale staughter. The identity of national name in the men who fought the battle of Jena and in those who fought the battle of Gravelotte blinds us to the fact that they belong to different military eras; but a gulf separates war waged with muskets and round shot from war conducted with breech-loaders, conical bullets, mitrailleurs, rifled cannon, and shell. We are told by some, it is true, that the proportion of killed and wounded to the whole force employed is not greater than it used to be. The calculation may be suspected of fallacy, as not taking into account the peculiar composition of modern armies; but, at all events, it is not to the point-for the question is not, Where are we? but, What are we coming to? The treasures of destruction lurking in nature and capable of being disinterred by the hand of man would appear to be practically infinite. Looking to one branch alone in this class of discoveries, we find that gunpowder, which was supposed to be unique in its properties, belongs to a whole family of sister compounds, each more explosible and deadly than the other. One cannot reflect on the transformation which harmless substances have undergone without recalling "Jack Cade's" lamentation that the skin of an innocent lamb, being scribbled over, should undo a man. Cotton, which furnished their evangel to the apostles and stipendiary preachers of the Anti-Corn Law League-cotton, the spinning of which was to be the principal occupation of the blessed during the Manchester millennium-cotton, being dipped in certain useful acids, turned out to be so explosive that its very destructiveness prevented its being freely employed; but now, by a process described the other day in these columns which looks like a cruel perody on the manufacture of paper, the limitations on its fatal usefulness may be removed, although by a distinction quite immaterial to the bappiness of mankind it must now be exploded by the tap of a hammer, whereas it once went off with a spark. In fact, the future of Europe would appear to be a future of folminates. Can anything save us from this? Is it possible we may be saved by the very thoroughness of the facilities for universal homicide? In the dramatic piece recommended by Mr. Sneer to Mr. Dangle, it was intended by the mere force of humor to make housebreshing so ridiculous that bolts and bars would be shortly useless; and the late Mr. Donglas Jerrold seems certainly to have supposed that by the help of a thin and soid wit he could make war too absurd for men ever to fight again. For our part, we think that if war ever becomes ridiculous it will be through the scientific form of humor called the reducity ad absurdum. Suppose (what at present seems perfectly possible) naval engagements were to begin with the simultaneous foundering of half of each fleet through the explosion of torpedoes movable or im-

laugh? One thing in war has been placed at last beyond doubt. It is an industry, like any other industry, eapable of improvement or retrogression under precisely the same conditions. Mankind have outlived many illusions on the subject. Once they thought the issues of war were so tremendous that they must be specially determined by the Deity, and the doctrine is written both in the Old Testament and on the Moabite Stone. But the apothegus which was once held to be the very quintessence of cynicism, that the Divine favor goes with the big battalions, is shown by the present war to be a literal statement of a commonplace truth. Again, it was part of the popular creed about war, and doubtless still is to a great extent, that victories are won by personal valor. The Germans are supposed by some to have beaten the French not only because they had the better military mechanism but because they were braver men. There can be no completer analogy than between the great military epochs of war and the industrial epochs marked by great exhibitions or expositions. The exhibition of 1851 showed that the English manufacturers were very inferior to the French in certain branches of production. These manufactorers passed the next ten years with the

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movable. Suppose the greatest part of each

of two contending armies were, on the firing

of the first shot, instantly to succumb to a

shower of deadly hail; or, again, suppose war

to resolve itself into a system of perpetual

dodging into harbors or behind fortresses.

Would the human race be suddenly overcome

by a sense of the ludicrous, and the great

tribunal of war break up amid a general

stimulus of conscious defeat goading them, and at the exhibition of 1862 they proved to have distanced their French rivals, who had suffered from the lassitude of conscious superiority. But yet a third trial occurred at the Paris Exposition of 1867, and it appeared that the French had very nearly made up their lost ground, and that the once successful English were on the point of again being left behind. In a precisely similar way, victory is succeeded by inertness in war, and defeat produces ambitious effort. Frederick the Great, the progressive practitioner of war in his day, beats the French at Rosbach. Napoleon, the great military inventor of the next age, wins Jens against men who were walking in the old paths under the old laurels. And now Moltke, applying the accumulated results of the thought, toil, and skill of the Prussian military caste, crushes an entire army under the nephew of Napoleon, which was not only sleepy after its triumphs in the last great war, but had been specially debilitated by the modern art of puff. Praying for military success stands therefore on pretty much the same footing as praying for the discovery of a new mordant or a new ingredient to improve the translucency of glass. Mere muscle and mere courage are gradually becoming about as useful as the strength and vigor of a railway navigator in the operative of a cotton factory. But brain, money, and numbers, with the forces of nature to help them, are giving each nation in turn the power of tearing the others to pieces.

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