

### THE FRENCH LAW OF RECRUITING.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* has the following on this subject:—

"One of the most remarkable things in the new French law of recruiting, is the power it gives the Minister of War of driving through it, not merely a 'couch and six,' but a whole brigade of cavalry and artillery, with entire divisions of infantry. The law seems in many places contradictory when it is only ambiguous; and the enormous loopholes left in it everywhere are not the result of negligence but of design. It would be incorrect to say the law is unintelligible; but it is certainly obscure. As a matter of fact it is not very generally understood; and it is much easier to get at its meaning by observing the practice of the French authorities in carrying it out than by consulting the text of the law. If any one understands it, General Charetou, the author of the interesting report on the subject which Major Brackenbury has lately translated, ought to be the man. But, like the all but perfect student of the Hegelian system, he 'does not quite understand it.' Thus he lays stress upon the supposed fact that the men of the second portion of the contingent will all, before passing into the reserve, have served one year with the active army; whereas in practice, the military authorities are converting into a general rule the permission accorded to them by the law of sending these men to their homes after six months' service. The satisfaction expressed by commanding officers at the attainments of the promising youths who have only been six months with the colours means, I think, that they are very glad to be able to get rid of them so soon, which they could not legally do if six months' training did not suffice to teach the lads their work. The principle of universal service is formally recognised in the law. But the framers of the law evidently thought very little of it; and the present Minister of War, equally with M. Thiers, showed himself as strongly opposed to universal service as he was in favour of service for a large but limited number of men during a period of at least five years. The clauses which render every Frenchman liable to military service, but at the same time restrict the service of an undefined portion of each annual contingent to a period of from six months to a year, are concessions to the general outcry among legislators and writers for the introduction of universal military service. But these clauses are being observed so as to interfere as little as possible with the principle of long service, in which alone the French Government puts faith; and the youths whom the ballot does not take at the age of twenty for five years' service, will be run through the army in two lots, each being retained for the minimum period of six months.

"Again, it must not be thought because the law speaks of a service of five years that all the men marked by the ballot as belonging to the 'first portion of the contingent' will of necessity remain for that time with the colours. The Minister of War may, if he thinks fit, send them home after three years; and it is not improbable that in the infantry this practice will be adopted. In the cavalry and artillery, however, the men will all be kept for the full period of five years, and no 'men of the second portion of the contingent' will be allowed to have anything to do with these arms, which are reserved exclusively for long service men. Even 'one year volunteers' are not admitted into the cavalry unless they are already good riders, nor into the artillery unless they are at least 'accustomed to horses.'

"We have heard it said—have, indeed, seen it argued in print—that to require Volunteers to be able to ride before admitting them into the cavalry is a serious infraction of the principle of equality, since, as a rule, only rich young men have horses at their disposal. They thus possess advantages as equestrians over poor young men which a just Government ought, it is maintained, to ignore. The military authorities, however, persist in thinking that a horse-soldier ought to be able to ride; and, in default of the 'one year Volunteer' possessing that accomplishment, will not undertake to teach him the whole duty of a cavalry man in six months, which is about the time for which the so-called 'one year Volunteer' will be wanted. Although, then, 'one year Volunteers' will not be absolutely confined, like 'men at disposal,' to the infantry, they will practically find themselves driven very much to that arm.

"Since we are on the subject of one year Volunteers, we may as well say something about the difference in position between those in the French and those in the German Army. 'Principle of equality' required that the French Volunteer should share the soup and the 'rat' (a sort of Irish stew à la Française) of the common soldier; and, such being the case, nothing, it would seem remained for him but to accept it. A well-to-do young man, however—indeed any young man whose parents are able to keep him going for six months during a critical period of his life—can take as little as he pleases of the poor fare to which the French soldier is so unwisely condemned, and as much as he pleases of any other fare within reach. The unhappy French soldier is badly fed, and he receives one sou a day for pocket money. But one year volunteers may often be seen dining at a table d'hôte like everyone else. Which proves once more how difficult it is to establish equality except on the basis of communism."

### FORTHCOMING TORPEDO EXPERIMENTS.

The *Oberon*, War Office experimental vessel, for practice against her double iron bottom with sunken mines of gun cotton, lies moored off the Monckton Fort shoal, outside Portsmouth Harbour, in deep water, where the necessary preparations are being completed for the next attack upon her which will be of a more formidable character than either of the previous attacks made. The starboard side only of the *Oberon* has been operated upon by the four experiments made, at horizontal distances between the mines and the *Oberon's* side of 100ft., 80ft., 60ft., and 50ft. At 100ft. and 80ft. distance the explosion of the mine of 500lb. of the Waltham Abbey disc gun cotton failed to damage the bottom in any way, or the condenser which was placed on the starboard side of the ship's hold, with its valves open to any sudden movement of the sea water upon the explosion of the mine, as would be the case with an ironclad moving past a sunken mine with her engines at work. In the third experiment, at 60ft. distance, there was found, upon the vessel being subsequently examined in dry dock, a partial flattening of some of the plates of the outer skin of the double bottom, and the condenser had evidently been shaken up somewhat roughly. No positively serious damage, however, was discovered in either the double bottom or the condenser, and the inner skin of the former was found to be

as free from injury and as sound in every part as when first put together at Chatham Dockyard. In the partial flattening of some of the plating of the outer skin of the double bottom, and from the disturbance to which the condenser had been subjected, it was evident that the line had been passed with in which an ironclad could pass a mine exploded against her under similar conditions of the strength of the mine, distance, &c., and it was, therefore, determined to lessen the distance between the mine and the ship by only 10ft. The experiments were made on the 20th of September; but after the mine had been fired the *Oberon* still floated, and, although she had received a tremendous shaking, no damage of the most trivial character could be seen as she lay afloat. She was docked the same day, and when the water had been pumped out, a searching examination of the side of the ship operated against for the fourth time disclosed the facts that the outer skin plating at the greatest bulge of the double bottom had been driven in upon the inner skin, with twenty of the vertical bracket frames supporting the outer upon the inner skin crumpled up in fact, and practically destroyed. Upwards of a hundred rivets were started in the plating immediately above the place where the greatest force of the mine had been expended. The inner skin of the double bottom absolutely remained free from the slightest injury, although in several instances the angle iron attaching the frames to the skin was found twisted or broken. There are no doubt other facts and deductions drawn from the experiments by the War Office committee, including the figure obtained from the pressure gauges, &c., which are most important and interesting; but the general public will care very little for such details, and may well be content with a knowledge of the force employed, and the manner of its application, in these experimental attacks upon a representative double bottom of our ironclad ships, and with the principal results attending them. Our *Oberon* experiences, therefore, so far may be accepted as having indicated clearly, in the first place, the distance within which an ironclad can pass a sunken mine charged with 500lb. of gun cotton without serious damage to the outer skin of her double bottom and to her machinery; secondly, they would also appear to establish as a fact, what has for some time been held in theory, that the outer skin of a vessel's double bottom, with its vertical bracket frames and angle iron, may be crumpled up or swept away by a torpedo or by grazing over a rock or shoal without necessarily inflicting serious injury upon the inner skin or hull proper of the ship. We are aware that Mr. Barnaby, the present chief constructor of the navy, has given much thought to the matter, and that in his designs for double bottoms of ships he concentrates the strength upon the inner skin and intentionally weakens, by comparison, the angle iron of the frames supporting the outer skin. Mr. Barnaby is also understood to prefer giving an increased thickness to the metal of the inner skin, and to the loading of the cells of the bottom with ballast. The present condition of the starboard side of the *Oberon* renders any further experiments upon it out of the question, and the attack now coming off will be made upon the port side of the ship. The depth of water in which the *Oberon* is moored, the distance between the mine and the vessel's side, and the power of the mine will be different to the like conditions carried out in the previous experiments. The