

MESSAGE ON THE MAINE DISASTER.

Washington, March 28.—The President today sent the following message to Congress:

To the Congress of the United States:

For some time prior to the visit to the Maine to Havana harbor our consular representatives pointed out the advantages to follow a visit of naval ships to the Cuban waters, in accustoming the people to the presence of our flag as the symbol of good will and of our ships in the fulfillment of the mission of protection to American interests even though no immediate need therefor might exist.

Accordingly, on the 25th of January last, after a conference with the Spanish minister in which the renewal of visits of our war vessels to Spanish waters was discussed and accepted, the peninsular authorities at Madrid and Havana were advised of the purpose of this government to resume friendly naval visits at Cuban ports and with that view the Maine would forthwith call at the port of Havana. This announcement was received by the Spanish government with appreciation of the friendly character of the visit of the Maine and with the notification of the intention to return the courtesy by sending Spanish ships to the principal ports of the United States. Meanwhile the Maine entered the port of Havana on the 25th of January, her arrival being marked with no special incident besides the exchange of customary salutes and ceremonial visits.

The Maine continued in the harbor of Havana during the three weeks following her arrival. No appreciable excitement attended her stay; on the contrary, a feeling of relief and confidence followed the resumption of the long interrupted friendly intercourse. So noticeable was this immediate effect of her visit that the consular general strongly urged that the presence of our ships in Cuban waters should be kept up by retaining the Maine at Havana, or in the event of her recall, by sending another vessel there to take her place.

At forty minutes past nine, in the evening of the 15th of February, the Maine was destroyed by an explosion, by which the entire forward part of the ship was utterly wrecked.

In this catastrophe two officers and 260 of her crew perished, those who were not killed outright by her explosion being penned between decks by the tangle of wreckage, and drowned by the immediate sinking of the hull. Prompt assistance was rendered by the neighboring vessels anchored in the harbor, aid being especially given by the boats of the Spanish cruiser Alphonso XIII and the Ward line steamer City of Washington, which lay not far distant.

The wounded were generously cared for by the authorities of Havana, the hospitals being freely opened to them, while the earliest recovered bodies of the dead were interred by the municipality in the public cemetery in the city. Tributes of grief and sympathy were offered from all official quarters of the island.

The appalling calamity fell upon the people of our country with crushing force and for a brief time an intense excitement prevailed, which in a community less just and selfishly controlled, than ours must have led to hasty acts of blind resentment. This spirit, however, soon gave way to the calmer processes of reason and to the resolve to investigate the facts and await the material proof before forming a judgment as to the cause, the responsibility, and if the facts warranted, the remedy due. This course necessarily recommended itself from the outset to the executive, for only in the light of a dispassionately ascertained certain-

ty could it determine the nature and measure of its full duty in the matter.

The usual procedure was followed, as in all cases of casualty or disaster to national vessels or any maritime state. A naval court of inquiry was at once organized, composed of officers well qualified by rank and practical experience to discharge the onerous duty imposed upon them, and by a strong force of wreckers, and divers, the court proceeded to make a thorough investigation on the spot, employing every available means for the impartial and exact determination of the causes of the explosion. Its operations have been conducted with the utmost deliberation and judgment and while independently pursued, no source of information was neglected and the fullest opportunity was allowed for a simultaneous investigation by the Spanish authorities.

The finding of the court of inquiry was reached after twenty-three days of continuous labor, on the 21st of March, and having been approved on the 22d by the commander-in-chief of the naval force on the North Atlantic station was transmitted to the executive.

It is herewith laid before the Congress together with the voluminous testimony taken before the court. Its purpose is in brief as follows:

When the Maine arrived at Havana she was conducted by the regular government pilot to buoy No. 4, to which she was moored in from five and one-half to six fathoms of water.

The state of discipline on board and the condition of her magazines, boilers, coal bunkers and storage compartments are passed in review, with the conclusion that excellent order prevailed and that no indication of any cause for an internal explosion existed in any quarter.

At 8 o'clock in the evening on Feb. 15, everything had been reported secure and all was quiet.

At forty minutes past nine o'clock the vessel was suddenly destroyed.

There were two distinct explosions with a brief interval between them. The first lifted the forward part of the ship very perceptibly; the second, which was more prolonged, is attributed by the court to the partial explosion of two or more of the forward magazines.

The evidence of the divers establishes that the after part of the ship was practically intact, and sank in that condition a very few minutes after the explosion.

The forward part was completely demolished.

Upon the evidence of concurrent external cause, the finding of the court is as follows:

At frame 17 the outer shell of the ship, from a point eleven and one-half feet from the middle line of the ship and six feet above the keel when in its normal position, had been forced up so as to be about four feet above the surface of the water; therefore, about thirty-four feet above where it would be had she sunk uninjured.

The outside bottom plating is bent into a reversed "V" shape, the after wing of which, about 15 feet broad and 32 feet in length (from frame 17 to frame 25) it doubled back upon itself against the continuation of the same plating extending forward.

At frame 17 the vertical keel is broken in two and keel bent into an angle similar to the angle formed for the outside plates. This break is about 6 feet below the surface of the water and about 30 feet above its normal position.

In the opinion of the court this effect could have been produced only by the explosion of a mine situated under the bottom of the ship at about frame 18, and somewhat on the port side of the ship.

The conclusions of the court are: That the loss of the Maine was not

in any respect due to fault or negligence on the part of any of the officers or members of her crew.

That the ship was destroyed by the explosion of a submarine mine, which caused the partial explosion of two or more of her forward magazines; and

That no evidence has been obtainable fixing the responsibility for the destruction of the Maine upon any person or persons.

I have directed that the finding of the court of inquiry and the views of this government thereon be communicated to the government of her majesty, the queen, and I do not permit myself to doubt that the sense of justice of the Spanish nation will dictate a course of action suggested by honor and the friendly relations of the two governments.

It is the duty of the executive to advise Congress of the result and in the meantime deliberate consideration is invoked.

(Signed) WILLIAM M'KINLEY.
Executive Mansion, March 28, 1898.

COURT OF INQUIRY'S REPORT.

The following is the full text of the report of the court of inquiry:

U. S. S. Iowa, first rate.
Key West, Fla., Monday, March 21, 1898.

After a full and mature consideration of all the testimony before it, the court finds as follows:

1—That the U. S. battleship Maine arrived in the harbor of Havana, Cuba, on the 21st day of January, 1898, and was taken to buoy No. 4, in from five and a half to six fathoms of waters, by the regular government pilot.

The U. S. consul general at Havana had notified the authorities at that place the previous evening, of the intended arrival of the Maine.

2—The state of discipline on board the Maine was excellent; and all orders and regulations in regard to the care and safety of the ship were strictly carried out.

All ammunition was stowed away in accordance with instructions, and proper care was taken whenever ammunition was handled.

Nothing was stored in any one of the magazines or shell rooms which was not permitted to be stowed there.

The magazines and shell rooms were always locked after having been opened; and after the destruction of the Maine the keys were found in their proper place in the captain's cabin, everything having been reported secure that evening at 8 p.m.

The temperature of the magazines and shell rooms were taken daily and reported. The only magazine which had an undue amount of heat was the after ten-inch magazine and that did not explode at the time the Maine was destroyed.

The torpedo war heads were all stowed in the after part of the ship under the warm rooms, and neither caused nor participated in the destruction of the Maine.

The dry gun cotton primers and detonators were stowed in the cabin aft and remote from the scene of the explosion.

The waste was carefully looked after on board the Maine to obviate danger. Special orders in regard to this had been given by the commanding officer.

Varnishes, dryers, alcohol and other combustibles of this nature were stowed on or above the main deck and could not have had anything to do with the destruction of the Maine.

The medical stores were stowed aft under the wardroom and remote from the scene of the explosion.

No dangerous stores of any kind were stowed below in any of the other storerooms.

The coal bunkers were inspected. Of those bunkers adjoining the for-