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THE
EASTERN QUESTION.

A SPEECH

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

BY THE

RIGHT HON. R. ASSHETON CROSS, M.P.

(Secretary of State for the Home Department),

ON

MONDAY, MAY 7TH, 1877.

CORRECTED ON AUTHORITY.

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MAY, 1877.

The following is a copy of Mr. GLADSTONE'S Resolutions. —

1. That this House finds just cause of dissatisfaction and complaint in the conduct of the Ottoman Porte with regard to the despatch written by the Earl of Derby Sept. 21, 1876, and relating to the massacres in Bulgaria.

2. That, until such conduct shall have been essentially changed and guarantees on behalf of the subject populations other than the promises or ostensible measures of the Porte shall have been provided, that Government will be deemed by this House to have lost all claim to receive either the material or the moral support of the British Crown.

3. That, in the midst of the complications which exist and the war which has actually begun, this House earnestly desires the influence of the British Crown in the counsels of Europe to be employed with a view to the early and effectual development of local liberty and practical self-government in the disturbed provinces of Turkey, by putting an end to the oppression which they now suffer, without the imposition upon them of any other foreign dominion.

4. That bearing in mind the wise and honourable policy of this country in the Protocol of April, 1826, and the treaty of July, 1827, with respect to Greece, this House furthermore earnestly desires that the influence of the British Crown may be addressed to promoting the concert of the European Powers in exacting from the Ottoman Porte, by their united authority, such changes in the government of Turkey as they may deem to be necessary for the purposes of humanity and justice, for effectual defence against intrigue, and for the peace of the world.

5. That an humble address, setting forth the prayer of this House according to the tenour of the foregoing resolutions, be prepared and presented to Her Majesty.

The Amendment moved by Sir H. DRUMMOND WOLFF, which was carried May 14th by 354 to 223, runs as follows :

That this House declines to entertain any Resolutions which may embarrass Her Majesty's Government in the maintenance of peace and in the protection of British interests, without indicating any alternative line of policy.

SPEECH

OF THE

RIGHT HON. R. ASSHETON CROSS, M.P.

Mr. Cross.—I am not going to dwell on the somewhat unhappy wrangle which occurred at the beginning of the evening with respect to the form which this debate should take. I feel, however, bound to say, that under all the peculiar circumstances of the case, seeing that the right hon. gentleman the member for Greenwich, who, throughout the last autumn, led a great agitation on this subject, at last had declared that the time had come when he could not, consistently with the course which he then took, remain silent with respect to it any longer, and, in consequence, had placed a series of Resolutions on the notice paper, on which he distinctly intended to invite the opinion of the House—not separately, but as a whole—the country, from one end of it to the other, will, I think, learn with astonishment to-morrow morning that the right hon. gentleman has changed his course at the last moment, and has abstained from inviting that opinion. (Hear, hear.) Therefore, whatever may be the view taken as to the moving the previous question—and I, for one, would have preferred meeting the motion of the right hon. gentleman with a more decided opposition—I believe my hon. friend the member for Christchurch has done well, when a person occupying the high position of the right hon. gentleman at the last moment strikes out the pith of his Resolutions and changes the front which he presented, not only to this House, but to the country, in giving the House an opportunity of expressing its opinion that it will decline to entertain the question of any Resolution which might embarrass Her Majesty's Government in the maintenance of peace and in protecting British interests, especially when such Resolution indicates no alternative line of policy. (Cheers.) The right hon. gentleman spoke of all the meetings which have been held in the country, not only during the autumn, but in the past week. Now, as to those which were held in the autumn, I can only say that I, for one, should have been ashamed of my countrymen if public expression had not been given from one end of the land to the other of their utter detestation of the horrors which had been committed in Turkey. (Cheers and counter cheers.) Do you think that because we happen to be Ministers we are not Englishmen? THE ATROCITIES IN BULGARIA. Do you think that because we, happening to be Ministers of the Crown, pursue a line of policy

which you do not like, we have not the feelings of Englishmen? (Cheers.) Do you suppose that we twelve men are the only persons in the country who have not been alive to the horrors which have been going on in Turkey? (Cheers.) If you think that, or if you have let the country think that, you are grievously mistaken. And I am bound to say that you have misled the country, and led it to think that because we have pursued the policy that we considered right and just, we are more callous than you to the horrors of all that has been going on in Bulgaria. The right hon. gentleman says "No, no," but it is true. (Cheers.) I think these allegations against the Government are perfectly false. (Continued cheering.) But when you come to the meetings that have been held during the last week, they are not the spontaneous feeling of the country. (Cheers.) It is a matter of notoriety that they are meetings held for the express purpose of backing up those Resolutions which the right hon. gentleman disdains to put before the House. (Cheers, and cries of "No.") Yes, and if the opinions of those meetings are to be gathered as the opinion of this House apparently is to be gathered, if all the horrors perpetrated in Turkey are to be paraded before the country, if they are to be spoken of by the most eloquent man who can be found, if you propose Resolutions containing some policy to stop these horrors, and if at the same time you strike out the pith of those Resolutions, I do not wonder at your getting any expression of opinion at such meetings. (Cheers.) The right hon. gentleman has said that the policy of the Government has been ambiguous. I hope to show before I sit down that it has been as clear as possible, and has proceeded in one straight line. The right hon. gentleman said that no policy could be more deplorable than the policy of the Government during the last eighteen months. Eighteen months! And in his very next sentence he said that when we went to the Conference at Constantinople the country had confidence in the Government. (Cheers.)

Mr. GLADSTONE.—Confidence in Lord Salisbury.

Mr. CROSS.—I am coming to that. I thought that the right hon. gentleman stated that when the Conference went on the right hon. gentleman and his friends held their hand. Will the right hon. gentleman allow me to ask this question? When was the meeting of the Conference at Constantinople? And when was the meeting of the so-called Conference at St. James's Hall? Did they not stay hands? (Cheers.) How long did they stay their hands? If you compare dates you will find that there was very little time between the two to stay their hands in. The right hon. gentleman says that he had confidence in Lord Salisbury and the proposals he made at the Conference. Now, if there has been one thing against which English-

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men ought to protest, it is when an attempt is made to separate one member of the Cabinet from the others. (Much cheering.) Yes! this attempt to separate Lord Salisbury from the other members of the Cabinet led some people to believe that the Cabinet were not united until the publication of the Blue-books, when all these castles in the air fell to pieces, and it was shown that every word uttered by Lord Salisbury expressed the firm declarations of the united Cabinet that sent him out and gave him his instructions. The right hon. gentleman has said there was a power behind Lord Salisbury which had previously determined that he should not succeed. I tell the right hon. gentleman that a person holding his position in this House, unless he has some evidence to bring before the House, ought not to make such a statement. (Loud cheers, during which Mr. Gladstone pointed to the Blue-books lying on the table before him.) I repeat, that unless he has some evidence to prove the fact, he has no right whatever to make that statement. Nay, more, I will prove to him before I sit down that the statement is untrue, and that no such charge can be made or ever ought to have been made. (Cheers.) The right hon. gentleman says we had determined that the Conference should fail, and that it must needs have failed because we told Turkey that we were not going to enforce the decision of the Conference by arms. Now, I want to ask the right hon. gentleman if any gentleman who has taken any part in these meetings has ever put to the people of this country this question straight out—"Will you go to war?" (Cheers.) And that is the question which you shirk to-night. (Cheers.) That is the one thing that you do not dare to put to the country and to this House. Are you prepared to go to war against Turkey as an ally of Russia? (Cheers.) The right hon. gentleman will have an opportunity of answering me. Let him answer that question if he can—not in a dozen or even a hundred sentences—but by a simple "Yes" or "No." (Cheers.) It is a simple question. It is a vital question. It is a question that admits of no deviation. It can only be answered in a monosyllable one way or the other. (Cheers.) Are you prepared to engage the country in a war with Russia as an ally against Turkey? We did not get at the answer to that question in a long wrangle of an hour and a half, when we heard that the third and fourth Resolutions were to be withdrawn. The right hon. gentleman at considerable length went into the declarations of the Ministers and their supporters. To my mind it is perfectly marvellous, if you consider the enormous number of pages in the Blue-book and the speeches that have been made, that you cannot pick out one single sentence to show that we could have done anything that we have not done. The right hon. gentleman says that the Press, which has sup-

ported the Government, has to a certain extent prepared the country for war I want to know how, when, and where? (Hear.) And what war? The right hon. gentleman has spoken in reference to British interests, of the enormous territory we have, and says that when we speak of British interests being affected we can find them anywhere whenever we want an excuse for war. I hope to tell the right hon. gentleman before I sit down what those British interests are. Then he went on to say, and for the best part of an hour—I assure the right hon. gentleman I listened to him with attention and admiration, and agree in a great deal he said—he went on to speak of the massacres that had been committed. Well, nothing would induce me to say a word here or anywhere else in defence of the acts of the Government of Turkey, which he has condemned. (Cheers.) I utterly abhor them from the bottom of my soul, and I speak not only for myself, but for every member of the Cabinet. (Renewed cheering.) I will not separate myself from the Government any more than will Lord Salisbury. The Government is one on that point; and I believe that if a Liberal Government had been in power, with the right hon. gentleman at its head, they could not have felt more utter detestation of those acts than we have. (Cheers.)

There is another point on which I must say a word, though it is going back to an old story—I mean as to the Treaty of Kainardji. The right hon. gentleman has on every occasion referred to that Treaty. His conscience is not easy on the subject of the Crimean War, and he always seems to me to try and invent some way of escaping from responsibility in reference to it. Well, to-night, again, the right hon. gentleman has fallen back on the Treaty, and quoted the authority of a great historian in support of his view. But it happens that the historian was not attempting, in the passage which he quoted, to describe accurately the precise extent and effect of that Treaty; he was endeavouring simply to give prominence to the fact that the extraordinary fate was reserved for Turkey at that moment of being compelled to admit for the first time the intervention on the part of her Christian subjects of a Power which she had reason to believe was her deadly enemy. (Hear, hear.) If you wish to understand what the meaning of the Treaty was, not as an abstract question, but as a practical one, surely you should see what was the conduct of the Ministers who dealt with it in 1856. The right hon. gentleman has said that much correspondence passed on the question, and he referred to one person who, as he stated, knew more of Turkey, and had more influence in Turkey, and understood the question better than any other man—namely, Lord Stratford

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de Redcliffe. The Ministers of the day very properly took the advice of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe on this very point, and in his reply he wrote:—

“As the Treaty thus evoked to serve as the basis of another more stringent and comprehensive one is doubtless within your Lordship’s reach, I will only observe with reference to it that of the four Articles which alone, as I am assured, have any bearing on the subject, the 7th allows of a limited Russian interference only for one particular church and its ministers, and of no direct protection at all; the 8th relates exclusively to pilgrims; 14th accords to Russia the right of protecting one specified church in this neighbourhood; and the 16th applies exclusively to Wallachia and other Provinces restored to Turkey by the Treaty.”

Well, again, what said Lord Clarendon, who will surely be admitted to be a high authority:—

“The whole question as regards Russia turns upon the interpretation of the 7th Article of the Treaty of Kainardji by which Russia engaged to protect the Christian religion and all its churches throughout European Turkey; but so carefully did the Porte guard itself against any right of interference on the part of Russia, that by a subsequent portion of the Article that interference was expressly limited to the right of making representations with respect to a church in Constantinople and to take those representations into consideration. But it is this unlimited interpretation of the Treaty which has been throughout insisted upon by Russia, and for which she is now prepared to go to war.”

He had yet another document to quote to the right hon. gentleman, and it is an extract from the views communicated by the Plenipotentiaries of France, Austria, and Great Britain, to Prince Gortchakoff in Dec., 1854. They say:—

“La Russie, en renonçant à la prétention de couvrir d’un protectorat officiel les sujets Chrétiens du Sultan du rit Oriental, renonce également par voie de conséquence naturelle, à faire récrire aucun des Articles de ses Traités antérieurs, et notamment du Traité de Koutchouk-Kainardji, dont l’interprétation erronée”—(cheers)—Yes, that is the point—“a été la cause principale de la guerre actuelle.”

That was an exact description of the case. Well, the question came to be debated in the House of Commons in 1856, and during the discussion an hon. member spoke as follows:—“It is said that what the Sultan gives to-day he may revoke to-morrow, and that the Treaty does not give to the Allied Powers that right of interference which some hon. members think necessary for the security of the Christian subjects of the Sultan.” And what was Lord Palmerston’s reply? “I do wish,” he said, “those who hold that opinion to remember for a moment the cause of the war. It was that the Emperor of Russia sent Prince Menchikoff to Constantinople with a

demand which, if agreed to, would have given to the Emperor a right of interference in favour of the Christian subjects of the Sultan which was held by the Government of the Sultan, and by the English and French Governments, and admitted by the greater part of Europe, to have been a practical transference of sovereignty over 12,000,000 of the subjects of the Sultan to the Emperor of Russia. (Cheers.) The war took place in consequence of the resistance of the Sultan to that demand; and if the Treaty had placed that Firman of the Sultan under the guarantee of the Allied Powers in a greater degree than the Note of Prince Menchikoff required that the protection of Christians should be placed under the Emperor of Russia, the only effect of a war commenced to maintain the independence of the Sultan, and to protect him against an authoritative interference of foreign Powers in the relations between him and his subjects, would have been to multiply by five the evil which he had previously resisted, and to give to all the Allies those very powers to resist which they took up arms to defend the Sultan. Therefore a war begun to maintain the independence of the Sultan would have ended in utterly destroying that independence." The course thus condemned by Lord Palmerston is the very course which the right hon. gentleman wishes us now to take. He wants us to act in concert with Europe in the direction of coercion. The right hon. gentleman shakes his head, but it is true nevertheless. I want to call the right hon. gentleman's attention to this, for it is the contention of Her Majesty's Government, and it was the contention of the Government of which Lord Palmerston was a member, in 1856, that the fact of the Firman having been adverted to in the Treaty, and the issue of it having been recorded in the Treaty, would give to the Allied Powers that moral right of diplomatic interference and of remonstrance with the Sultan which, says Lord Palmerston, "I am perfectly convinced would be quite sufficient to accomplish the desired purpose." Who, I would ask, is responsible for anything that may be deficient in the way of power to do what hon. members opposite want? It is surely the Government which was in power in 1856, and if the Government of that day held the opinion which the right hon. gentleman who has brought forward these Resolutions now holds, they would have insisted on the insertion in the Treaty of a much stronger article than that which was inserted. (Hear.)

The right hon. gentleman further objects to the notion that the Treaty of 1856 was carefully revised in 1871, but he seems to forget that he was solely responsible for the last-named Treaty. He says further that the Treaty was passed in a hurry, and

that England and Prussia, who were parties to it, had no time to think of it; at all events that Prussia was so much engaged in the French war that she did not even take the trouble to answer Prince Gortchakoff's note. So far as Prussia or Germany (call it which you will) is concerned, I am quite sure the right hon. gentleman's memory is at fault. He seems to forget that the Conference on which the Treaty was based was held in London at the express instance of Prussia, that it was Prussia which took the leading part in these negotiations from the beginning, and that at its close Her Majesty's Government, of which the right hon. gentleman was then the leader, thought fit to express thanks to Prussia for the part which she had taken in the business. I hope we shall hear no more of the statement in reference to the Treaty of 1871 that Germany had no time to consider it. (Cheers.) The right

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hon. gentleman has thought fit to say that the policy of Her Majesty's Government in reference to this matter has been unambiguous, but nothing could be wider from the truth. He has said that the policy laid down by Lord Salisbury at the Conference was right, but that that was not the policy of the Government, and he has chosen to refer to some words which I used in the autumn, and to which I still adhere, as does also the Government. How does the case stand? If any hon. member will look at the proceedings which took place before the Conference he will see how far we deserve the charge of the right hon. gentleman. He says that we put a stop to all the good that could have resulted from the Conference by telling Turkey that we would not enforce the decisions of the Conference by war. Let me remind him that the whole gist and basis of the Conference was that we would not interfere with the independence or integrity of Turkey. Does the right hon. gentleman mean to say that when Europe had gone into the Conference on these terms she should have taken advantage of the position so gained, and then have turned round and said to the Turks, "If you don't agree to our terms we will go to war with you"? (Cheers.) I say that if we had departed from that basis we should have been guilty of a gross breach of faith. (Cheers.) The words I used in the autumn, and to which the right hon. gentleman has alluded, are true, and will be substantiated in the documents now upon the table of the House. What were the instructions which were given to Lord Salisbury before he went to the Conference at Constantinople? In the instructions given to Lord Salisbury before he left for Constantinople it was laid down that:—

"Pacification cannot be attained by proclamations. Powers have

a right to demand in the interest of the peace of Europe that they shall examine for themselves the measures required for the reform of the administration of the disturbed provinces, and that adequate security shall be provided for carrying those measures into operation."

And that security was eventually laid down in the proposition for an International Commission, and in the provisions as to the appointment of the Valis. When the right hon. gentleman says that our policy has been ambiguous, I reply that if ever a policy has been marked by two distinct landmarks, it is that of Her Majesty's Government. What are those two distinct landmarks—and don't put them upon Lord Salisbury, because they are the embodiments of the opinions of Her Majesty's Government, and are to be found in the instructions given to him before he left this country. The first of these landmarks is as follows:—

"Her Majesty's Government cannot countenance the introduction into the Conference of proposals, however plausible or well-intentioned, which would bring foreign enemies into Turkey in violation of the engagements by which the Guaranteeing Powers are solemnly bound."

That is to be found in the instructions which were settled before Lord Salisbury went abroad, and it is one in which I entirely agree. The next landmark is also one in which I entirely concur, and it is as follows:—

"Her Majesty's Government are resolved not to sanction misgovernment and oppression, and if the Porte by obstinacy or apathy opposes, the responsibility of consequences rests solely with the Sultan."

It has been said by the right. hon gentleman that the Government has sanctioned the maladministration and oppression going on in Turkey. Let us look to the facts. The Conference came to an end, and let us hear what were the last words which Lord Salisbury used on that occasion, not as speaking for himself alone, but as the mouth-piece of the Cabinet:—

"My duty is to free Her Majesty's Government of all responsibility. Great Britain is resolved not to give her sanction either to maladministration or to oppression. If the Porte, from obstinacy or inactivity, offers resistance to the efforts now being made to place the Ottoman Empire on a more sure basis, the responsibility of consequences rests solely on the Sultan."

(Cheers and counter cheers.) That was the policy of Her Majesty's Government, and the question is whether they should have gone further or not. But after the Conference was brought to a conclusion Russia was still not at all satisfied. Russia had then massed her forces upon the frontiers of Turkey, and she determined to take further steps in the matter. In the Circular which Prince Gortchakoff sent

throughout Europe he still felt how necessary it was to maintain, at all events, the appearance of European concert, and therefore he made in it a remarkable statement which I wish he had always kept in view and had acted up to—namely, that European concert should be preserved.

The right hon. gentleman, in referring to the Protocol, seems to forget that Russia was not the assenting party to it, but was the originator of it. THE LONDON PROTOCOL A RUSSIAN ONE. It was not a European, it was a Russian Protocol. (Cheers.) Russia at that time stood in full armour upon the frontiers of Turkey, and under such circumstances disarmament by Turkey was impossible, because the attitude of Russia had excited not only the apprehension but the fanaticism of the Mussulman population of Turkey. I believe that it was the attitude of Russia at that time that was the obstacle to the internal pacification and reform on the part of Turkey. (Cheers.) In all these circumstances Her Majesty's Government consented to sign the Protocol, not perhaps believing that it would effect much, but at all events, as it was there stated, in the interests of peace. (Hear.) What was the conduct of Turkey after that? Turkey was not asked to be a party to the Protocol which was a document drawn by the Powers themselves, and in which they agreed to give her time to see what she could do in the way of reforming her government, reserving to themselves the right if she did nothing in that direction of future interference. Well, Turkey protested against that document, claiming to be treated as an independent Power, and protesting against what she considered to be a humiliation of her as a sovereign country. In doing that I think she was unwise (cheers), that she was blind—utterly blind—and foolish. (Cheers). She is now suffering for her folly, and I have not a word to say on her behalf. (Cheers.) Yes, but still the Protocol had held out to her that Europe would allow her time to see whether her promises would be fulfilled (cheers), and yet, almost immediately after that Protocol had been signed, Russia throws it at her and holds it to her head as though it were a loaded pistol, and requires her at once to reply to it. Russia said there was no guarantee that reform would be carried into effect, that all chances were closed against conciliation, and that there was no alternative but coercion. I entirely deny that. Russia insinuated that she was doing a work on behalf of Europe. Now, Her Majesty's Government felt bound to protest against that. LORD DERBY'S ANSWER TO PRINCE GORTCHAKOFF'S CIRCULAR. (Cheers.) I do not know what grounds Russia had to suppose that she was charged by Europe to carry out the objects of the Conference or the

Protocol. (Hear.) I maintain that Her Majesty's Government replied, not only with justice, but with dignity, to the letter which Russia sent. We said:—

“Her Majesty's Government cannot, therefore, admit, as is contended by Prince Gortchakoff, that the answer of the Porte removed all hope of deference on its part to the wishes and advice of Europe, and all security for the application of the suggested reforms. Nor are they of opinion that the terms of the Note necessarily precluded the possibility of the conclusion of peace with Montenegro or of the arrangement of mutual disarmament. Her Majesty's Government still believe that with patience and moderation on both sides these objects might not improbably have been obtained.”

(Hear.) Then we go on to say:—

“But the course on which the Russian Government has entered involves graver and more serious considerations. It is in contravention of the stipulations of the Treaty of Paris of March 30th, 1856, by which Russia and the other signatory powers engaged each on its own part to respect the independence and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. In the Conferences of London, 1871, at the close of which the above stipulation with others was again confirmed, the Russian Plenipotentiary, in common with those of the other Powers, signed a Declaration affirming it to be an ‘essential principle of the law of nations that no Power can liberate itself from the engagements of a treaty nor modify the stipulations thereof unless with the consent of the contracting parties by means of an amicable arrangement.’”

I ask the House, I ask the country, whether Russia has performed her duties under that Treaty of 1871? (Cheers.) Her Majesty's Government would willingly have refrained from making any observation on the subject, but as Prince Gortchakoff seems to assume, in a Declaration addressed to all the Powers of Europe, that Russia is acting in the interest of Great Britain and other Powers, they felt bound to state, and I feel bound to state openly here, in a manner equally firm and public, that the Russian Government is not acting in concert with the other Powers. (Cheers.) If any Power has more than another prevented united European action, that Power is Russia. (Cheers.) Russia and Turkey are at war—war in a part of Europe which is the most inflammable you can conceive—in that part of Europe where every Power has an interest, and I am sorry to say an almost antagonistic interest. Of that war we feel the effects in this our own country at the present moment in the rise in the price of bread. (Hear.) War having broken out, the landmarks of the policy of the British Government are as clear as they were before. They have nothing to do with the war. Great Britain has declared absolute and strict neutrality. What the result of the war may be God only knows, but all the efforts of the British Government

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must clearly be as far as possible to localise the war—to reduce its area to a *minimum*. The hon. member for Birmingham and the right hon. gentleman the member for Greenwich have talked about British interests, and the hon. member for Birmingham has challenged Her Majesty's Government to point out what are the British interests which can possibly be drawn into this war. The policy of Her Majesty's Government is one of strict neutrality between the parties. We warned them as long ago as May, 1876, that they had nothing to expect from us. We warned them at the Conference, and since there has been no loss of time in the issue of our declaration of neutrality. So far, therefore, as it is a Russian and a Turkish war we have nothing to do with it. In the war between Russia and Turkey we are absolutely impartial. There is the first clear landmark. Whether that war will produce the results which it is supposed will be produced is another matter. Although our efforts will be directed to prevent that war from spreading, it is impossible for any one to say where it will stop. I am afraid that Russia, by the action she has taken, has assumed a most serious responsibility. Other nations may soon be drawn in—other interests may soon be involved. And there are interests that may be touched which technically it may be within the rights of belligerents to attack, but which practically are altogether outside and foreign to the objects and purposes of this unhappy war. There are English interests, there are European interests, there are Indian interests, there are world-wide interests which may be concerned. We do not want additional territory—we want nothing. We wish this war had BRITISH INTERESTS DEFINED. not broken out. Batoum and other places have been spoken of, but there is the Suez Canal, in which not only England, but the world, is seriously concerned. Why the Suez Canal should be attacked by Russia in any shape I cannot imagine. (Hear.) Whether attacked by Russia or by Turkey, that is a question of not only English, but European interest. It is the road from the West to the East of the world. Take another place in which not simply England, but the world is interested. I mean Egypt. Alexandria is for practical purposes an English, a French—nay, a European town. No place can be of more commercial importance than Alexandria. Is Europe to allow Alexandria to be destroyed or Egypt to be occupied? Well, what am I to say about the Treaties as to the Straits of the Dardanelles and the possession of Constantinople? Is it necessary for carrying on the war between Russia and Turkey, and for the protection of the Christians in Turkey, that Constantinople should be either attacked, approached, or occupied? I say "No." These are questions which no country in Europe

could regard with indifference; and when I mention them I hope they are so remote that they will not practically arise. But they are questions which must be considered by any British Government, and which any Ministry, even if the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Gladstone) himself were at its head, would not dare to neglect, or if it did, the country would very soon send it an answer which it could not mistake. (Cheers.) And that is the second clear landmark. However, I hope, as I have said, these things are in so remote a future that we

need not contemplate them. Let me quote the words which the Emperor Alexander used on the 2nd of November last to our Ambassador. His Majesty said, "He had on several occasions given the most solemn assurances that he desired no conquest, that he aimed at no aggrandisement, and that he had not the smallest wish or intention to be possessed of Constantinople." Let us see that His Majesty keeps to his words. (Cheers.) He continued:—

"All that had been said or written about the will of Peter the Great and the aims of Catherine II. were illusions and phantoms. They never existed in reality; and he considered that the acquisition of Constantinople would be a misfortune for Russia. (Hear, hear.) There was no question of it, nor had it ever been entertained by his late father, who gave proof of it in 1828, when his victorious army was within four days' march of Constantinople."

Our Ambassador further wrote that His Majesty pledged his sacred word of honour in the most earnest and solemn manner that he had no intention of acquiring Constantinople, and that if necessity should oblige him to occupy a portion of Bulgaria it would only be provisionally, and until peace and the safety of the Christian populations were secured. If the Emperor keeps his word, thus solemnly pledged, British interests will not be concerned. (Hear, hear.) But a victorious army is a difficult thing to deal with, and a country once aroused is not always so easily quieted. (Hear, hear.) All I can say is, that, as far as Her Majesty's Government are concerned, they sincerely trust that no action of Russia will ever require them to protect those interests which lie outside of this war; but that if those interests should be affected, of course it cannot be expected that either Europe or England will not interfere to protect them. (Cheers.) I am sorry to have detained the House so long, but I must say one word before I sit down on the Resolutions of the right hon. gentleman. (Hear, hear.) I am bound to

MR. GLADSTONE'S RESOLUTIONS. confess that when I read them the first time I could make neither head nor tail of them, and the debate during the early part of this evening showed

that others shared my difficulty. ("Hear, hear," and a laugh.) Some have said that the two first Resolutions have nothing in them, and I caught from the right hon. gentleman that he himself had very much that opinion, for he thought Her Majesty's Government might accept them; and yet he said they were brought forward practically because he thinks the policy of the Government so entirely false and erroneous that he felt bound to protest against it. ("Hear, hear," and a laugh.) Now, I could quite understand a resolution being moved by the right hon. gentleman declaring that we are bound to interfere in consequence of what has gone on in Turkey and to join Russia in the present war. If that is what the right hon. gentleman means, why in the name of goodness does he not say so? (Laughter and cheers.) I have never yet seen an account of any one of the meetings held in the country at which that issue has been put straight before them. Do you mean war or do you not? (Hear.) That is the question. The right hon. gentleman said we have used every possible expression we could use, that we have remonstrated and expostulated, and pressed and protested; and he suggested to us a blank form in which you could put in any word you want. The word that he wants us to use is war.

MR. GLADSTONE'S POLICY A
WAR POLICY.

(Mr. GLADSTONE was understood to intimate dissent.) The right hon. gentleman shakes his head. If that is not it, what is it? (Hear, hear.) I can tell you what it is. It is as clear as daylight. What he means is this:—"If you will only say you will go to war if they don't do these things, although you don't mean to go to war; if you will only bark loud enough, though you don't mean to bite, Turkey will give way." Well, I call that conduct utterly unworthy of us. (Cheers.) Yes, you tried that policy on in the case of Denmark. I do not like the position of the boy who writes up "No Popery" and then runs away. (Laughter.) If you mean to go to war, say so. When that issue is put plainly before the country I know what the answer of the country will be. But the right hon. gentleman goes on to say that what he wants is practical self-government and local liberty. He speaks of these things as he might of a cargo of rice or a bale of merchandise, that you could tumble out at once into the middle of Turkey. (Hear.) Why, practical self-government and local liberty are the growth of years. All we can do is to sow the seed of them, but depend upon it the fields in which that seed will not grow are fields which are ploughed up by war and watered with blood. (Cheers.) The one result of war would be this, as was said in reference to Greece, there would be a generation of men missing, old men and boys alone would be left to till the soil. Now, let me ask in that case what is the good of

these Resolutions? The whole sting of them is gone. The one thing on which the right hon. gentleman comes before the country he has taken away from the judgment of the House, and he has left something which hon. members below the gangway opposite say is not worth debating. I entirely agree with the hon. member for Christchurch when he says, "Is that all you have to offer us after the speeches you have made? If you do feel bound to put something before the country, let us, at all events, decide that something. Don't bring that something before us and then wipe it off the slate." (Cheers.) If you are displeased with our policy, turn us out; but first show us what policy you have to offer in place of ours. Do not imagine that the country will think of the hundred votes you may obtain in the division. They will only see that you have decided nothing, and that what you wished to carry into effect you have not had the courage to put before the House. Looking at the whole question and at the time which hon. gentlemen opposite have chosen to bring it forward, I must say I think their object has been not so much to unite Europe or to unite England as to unite the Liberal Party. (Cheers.)

LIBERAL NOT NATIONAL UNITY
THE OBJECT OF THE OPPOSITION.

As the right hon. gentleman seems to think the policy of the Government ambiguous, let me before I sit down once more state clearly what it has been and what it is. It has been that they will not in any way sanction oppression or tyranny in any part of the world where they have the power to interfere. It has been to preserve inviolate our treaty engagements, and to set an example which, if followed by other nations, would materially add to the happiness of the world. It is, deeply as they regret the war, to maintain the strictest neutrality between the contending nations. It is, outside the necessities of this actual war, to maintain, as they ought to maintain, and as any British Government would maintain, those interests of England which ought to be maintained. They have no thought of fear; they have no thought of gain. Before the face of this House, of England, of Europe, of the world, they are conscious of the honesty of their own purpose. They are conscious of their own earnest desire for peace; they are conscious, if need be, of their strength. They have, I hope, the wisdom not to use that strength improperly, and wherever and whenever the opportunity may offer to stop this war, to heal these wretched divisions, to improve the condition of these Christian populations in a way which will really improve them—and that way, in my opinion, is not by war—to localize, to minimize, or to wipe away the effects of this war, there the Government will give their services. (Loud cheers.)



