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REPLY

BY

LORD DERBY

TO A

Deputation from the Meeting held at Guildhall,

RECEIVED AT THE

FOREIGN OFFICE

ON

Wednesday, September 27, 1876.

1887

GENERAL REPORT

of the

COMMISSIONERS

of the

R E P L Y

BY

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TO A

DÉPUTATION FROM THE MEETING HELD AT GUILDRHALL,
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The EARL OF DERBY said :

My Lord Mayor and Gentlemen,—I have listened to your statements, to the statements contained in these resolutions, and to the speeches by which they have been supported, with all the interest and the attention which they deserve ; and I only regret that my noble friend the Prime Minister has been unavoidably prevented from being here to listen to them also.

You may be quite sure that neither I nor any member of the Government can undervalue the importance of such deputations as this, or under-rate the strength of the popular feeling which has undoubtedly shown itself so strongly in the last few weeks.

You have touched on three points—the desire which is generally and justly felt throughout the country for the adequate punishment of the offenders in the Bulgarian business (“No, no !”), and the desire that reparation should be made, as far as is now

possible, to those who have suffered from the outrages which have been committed.

You have touched also, not only by the mouth of the last speaker, but also in the Address to Her Majesty which was forwarded to me together with the resolutions, upon the question of holding an Autumn Session of Parliament, and, as was natural, you have also gone into the much larger and wider question of the general policy which you wish that the Government should pursue in reference to the whole of the Eastern Question.

Now, Gentlemen, I hope that no one who has spoken here will think me wanting in respect to him if I do not take up one by one the various points which have been touched upon by this deputation.

I think I could very easily explain those words of mine to which Mr. Morley has objected, though I do not remember the particular occasion on which they were uttered, and I have not them by me for reference. I conceive also that not a very fair construction has been put by one speaker upon an expression used last week by the Prime Minister. But those, after all, are small matters. (Cries of "No.") I think it is considerably more important to know what are the views of the Government, and what the course to be adopted by them will be in reference to this great European question, than it is to wrangle over the accuracy or the fitness of some expressions used upon a former occasion. (Hear, hear.)

With regard to the first subject to which you have adverted, I need not say very much in reply, partly because in principle we are all, I apprehend, agreed as to what ought to be done, for it is a simple

matter of justice, and one which involves no difficulty or complicated considerations ; and partly also I am spared the necessity of referring to it at any length because I shall be able in a few days to make public a despatch which has been sent to Sir Henry Elliot, in which you will see fully detailed the view which the Government take, and the demands which they have felt themselves authorized to put forward, with regard to these Bulgarian outrages.

Sir Henry Elliot has been directed to obtain an audience of the Sultan, to lay all the facts fully and unreservedly before him, to denounce by name the persons indicated by Mr. Baring as the principal authors of these crimes, to call for their punishment, and to represent the urgent necessity of steps being taken to relieve the sufferings which have been caused. Especial attention is to be given to the cases—unfortunately, I am afraid, numerous cases—in which it is alleged that women have been taken from their homes. They must be searched for, and, wherever it is possible, found and restored. (Hear.) I should be glad to make that despatch public at once ; but, as many of you know, it is not a usual, and certainly it is not a convenient, practice that papers of that kind should appear in this country before they have been received by the Minister or Ambassador to whom they are addressed, and before he has been able to act upon them. (Hear, hear.) As soon as I hear that Sir H. Elliot has had an audience, that despatch shall appear in the newspapers. Until then I can only ask you to suspend your judgment. You will not have long to wait, nor do I think that between us, or, indeed, between the Government and any section of Englishmen,

there is likely to be much difference of opinion on that part of the question. (Cheers.)

I will only just observe, in reference to the remarks made by one speaker of this deputation, that it is not the business of those who are responsible for the conduct of affairs, and especially of those who are responsible for the conduct of diplomatic affairs, to hold that language on public platforms or at out-of-door meetings which may be reasonably, or at least harmlessly, held by those who are not in a similar position of responsibility. (Hear, hear.) Those whose action in the matter is confined to words are free to use what words they please (a laugh); but those on whom the responsibility for action falls are in a different position, and the standard by which you must judge them is not what they may think themselves free to say, but what they have done. (Hear, hear:)

Gentlemen, I turn to a subject which has been alluded to by the last speaker, and I am very glad that he did allude to it, because it is one, I know, of considerable interest—I mean the question of calling Parliament together at an unusually early date. Now, you will easily understand that I can only undertake to convey to my colleagues what you have said upon that matter. It is not one upon which I should be justified in expressing a personal and individual opinion. It is one which the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, and not I alone, can decide. But there are some considerations which will probably occur to you without my stating them, and to which, therefore, I may refer.

The summoning of Parliament before Christmas is an unusual, and, to many persons, an extremely

inconvenient proceeding. To the best of my recollection it is a thing which has been done only twice in the last twenty years, and on each of those occasions it was done because measures were proposed for which the consent of Parliament was necessary, and which did not admit of delay. One of those occasions was in the winter of 1854, when we were involved in the Crimean War, and when various urgent measures connected with the prosecution of the war had to be proposed. The other instance was in 1867, when we were unfortunate enough to find ourselves engaged in the Abyssinian Expedition, and when, the necessity for that expedition having arisen during the Recess, it was a matter of course that Parliament should be called together to vote the necessary supplies at the earliest possible moment.

But in the present instance we are not at war. We are not in the least likely to go to war. (Hear, hear.) We have not got to ask for supplies, nor have we any Parliamentary measures of urgency to propose. (Cries of "Oh!") I say again, no measures of urgency to propose in Parliament.

You do not apprehend, I suppose, that the regulation of Eastern affairs is to be dealt with by a Bill brought into the House of Commons. (Laughter.)

There are, therefore, only two reasons for which it can be desirable that Parliament should assemble. One is to influence negotiations which are actually in progress. (Hear, hear.) The other is to pass a judgment, favourable or unfavourable, as the case may be, upon these negotiations when they are completed.

Now, in the latter case, I do not myself see why time is of such special importance. If the question is only of approving or disapproving what has been

done in regard to negotiations which are actually concluded, and by the result of which the country is bound, it seems to me, speaking with deference to the judgment of others, that this is work which may as well be done in January or February as in November.

If, on the other hand, the object of summoning Parliament is to give an influence and a direction to negotiations in progress (hear, hear), then you will excuse me for saying that, taking the very earliest date which would now be possible, you would still very likely be too late. (Laughter). I cannot, of course, predict the result of the negotiations which are now pending. But if they go on smoothly, as we hope they will, it is possible and not improbable that all the most material points will have been settled between the Powers before the earliest date at which Parliament could possibly meet.

No doubt it is conceivable that there might arise a state of things so grave and so fraught with danger to Europe that the public would rightly and properly desire that Parliament should be summoned for its discussion, and that the Government themselves would be willing to adopt that course as tending to strengthen their hands. But, though that is a conceivable state of things, it is not one which has arisen; and I am bound to tell you that it is not one which appears to me probable. If I may say frankly what I expect, I do not think you will see either the general peace of Europe disturbed or the whole fabric of the Turkish Empire broken up (cries of "Oh!"); and I think it may be open to doubt whether, in a time of general European peace and of absolute tranquillity as regards all internal affairs, there is any

adequate reason for resorting to a step which has never been taken except in a period of war or of national emergency.

The American War and the war between France and Germany were considerably more important, if I may venture to say so, than what is passing now (cries of "No!")—whether you look to the magnitude of the operations, to the actual amount of bloodshed involved, or to the ultimate results on the destinies of the world. Then, as now, there were very various opinions as to the course which our Government ought to take, yet in neither of those cases was it thought necessary to summon Parliament specially for the purpose of discussing the events of those wars.

Now, Gentlemen, those are points which I throw out for consideration; but I repeat that the matter is not one on which it is possible to decide at this moment; at all events, it is not one with which I alone am capable of dealing, and I end as I began, by saying that this is a matter which I shall refer to my colleagues in the Cabinet.

Now, Gentlemen, as to the much wider question—the question of general policy which you have raised—I am afraid I must begin by saying, with the frankness which I think you will wish me to use, that I cannot agree to the doctrine set forth in one passage of the Address to the Queen—that the ill-usage of Eastern Christians by Mahomedans or by the Turkish Government is due to the fact that English support has been given to the Porte.

I should look at matters from an exactly opposite point of view.

So long as it was thought in Europe, as for some

centuries it was thought, a religious duty to make war upon Turks, so long Christian races which were in any manner subject to Turkish domination might naturally expect ill-usage. But intolerance is not confined to any nation or to any creed, and the less we show of it ourselves the stronger our hands will be and the freer our consciences will be in repressing manifestations of it elsewhere. (Hear, hear.) However, this is a remark which I make only in passing.

I think, if this were the time or the place, it would not be difficult to show that there never has been a moment since the Crimean War when English influence has not been used to detect or point out instances of misgovernment in Turkey. I deny utterly the theory that we have been in favour of the Turks as against the Christians. (Cries of "Oh, oh!") We have been in favour of maintaining the territorial integrity of the Turkish Empire; but, as I have explained, or endeavoured to explain, in this room before to another audience, that is an entirely different matter.

If, as no doubt is true, things have grown worse rather than better within the last year or so, I do not think you have got far to look for the causes which have produced that result. With an insane Sovereign, with a bankrupt Treasury, with a civil war widely extended, and to a considerable extent supported from abroad, with Ministers and officials shifted in the most arbitrary and capricious manner from post to post at a day's notice, it is really not too much to say that the state of Turkey, during the last year or so, has been almost one of administrative anarchy, in which nearly every function of government has been in abeyance.

But the real question is, what do you want us to do? ("Hear, hear," and cheers.) I am very grateful to gentlemen who say they do not wish to tie the hands of the Government, and who disclaim all idea of dictating to us the policy which we ought to pursue. But I may add, in all courtesy to them, that if they were to attempt to dictate to us in detail the policy which we ought to pursue, I should expect them to find the task one of much greater difficulty than that of exposing—what nobody doubts—the many instances of misgovernment and oppression which may be found under Turkish rule.

Various plans have been put before the public. One, which I think I may mention only to put aside, is that which, if I do not misunderstand it, Mr. Lowe put forward, or rather supported, in a recent speech at Croydon. That is the plan of simply washing our hands of the whole affair, and letting the Turkish Empire drift where it pleases.

Now, I think it is quite a sufficient answer to a proposition of that kind to say that if we were to act upon it in practice, and if, as the result of our abstention, an internecine war, marked by every circumstance of cruelty and atrocity, were to follow, the public feeling of the country—the feeling which has been so strongly excited by the events of the last few weeks—would make it impossible for us to persevere in such a policy. (Hear, hear.) I say nothing of what might happen at Constantinople, because I know that, at this moment, for an English Minister to talk of "English interests" in connexion with the Eastern Question, is to use a very unpopular phrase. But the first requisite for a policy is that it shall be practicable, and leaving the Eastern Question

to settle itself is not, as matters stand, a practicable alternative. (Hear, hear.)

Well, then comes a second proposal. It is one which has undoubtedly found wide and general acceptance in this country, and has been eagerly, and even vehemently, supported by many eminent persons. It is to turn the Turks as a governing power altogether out of Europe (cheers), leaving them a nominal suzerainty and fixed tribute, but nothing more. (Hear; hear.)

Now, perhaps, you will hear me with patience while I make one or two comments upon that proposal. In the first place, if the policy which you there indicate is a sound policy, I do not see why you are to be arrested by the arbitrary geographical line you have drawn. If it is a fact that government by the Porte, however modified or however controlled, is utterly and incurably bad (cheers)—if, I say, that is the view you take, I do not understand why you so entirely ignore the claims of those several millions of Christians who inhabit the Asiatic provinces of the Turkish Empire. I do not know why your interposition is to end at Constantinople; and yet nobody, as far as I have heard, has proposed to do anything for those of whom I speak.

But there is something more. You cannot, as reasonable men, suppose that the Government of the Porte will commit political suicide. You cannot suppose that it would willingly and without resistance allow itself to be turned out of Europe. (Hear.) Very well. Then you will be obliged to use force. (“Hear,” and a voice—“We do not object.”) You do not object? (Cries of “No, no,” and a voice—“We do not want any war.”) You do not object?

But who is to do it? (A voice—"Russia.") Who will be with you?

I can tell you who will be against you. There is at least one European Power which I have no doubt would resist, even at the cost of war, the substitution of a Slavonic for a Turkish State. France, Germany, Italy would look on.

Just now, when I said, "Who will help you?" a voice answered, "Russia." Well, the Russian Government has never proposed a change so sweeping, and, although it is rather a delicate matter to speculate upon what the policy and conduct of a foreign Government might be in circumstances which have not arisen, I very much doubt whether Russian policy would be served by a change of that kind.

You must recollect that, whatever we may be, foreign politicians and foreign Cabinets are not impulsive; they are not in the least likely to be drawn into a crusade of this kind unless they see clearly some national benefit which is likely to arise out of it. We should, therefore, according to the proposition which I am now discussing, and which I see finds much favour in this room, be left without an ally, and with at least one European opponent; to undo by force our own work of 20 years ago, with all Europe perplexed at the suddenness of our change, and probably with every Continental politician ascribing to us some deep and incomprehensible plan of national aggrandizement. (Hear, hear.)

I say nothing of other difficulties which would arise from the natural jealousy and conflict of races. I know it is a popular theory in England to suppose that all the Christian races of European Turkey are

a homogeneous whole, and sure to agree with one another, but nothing can be further from the fact. You have a deep religious antipathy between the Roman Catholics, who are rather a numerous body, and the Greek Church; and you have the strongest possible jealousy between the Greeks and the Slavonic races. You have, scattered throughout European Turkey, a minority—but still a powerful and influential, and, if pushed to extremity, a very determined minority—of Mahomedans; and I leave you to judge what would be the result of a civil war carried on over such an area of country—what would be the massacres, what would be the atrocities, what would be the amount of crime committed and of blood shed before the object you desire could be attained. (Hear, hear.) I am speaking, of course, of the change which we are discussing being made by violent means, because I assume it as a thing which requires no proof, that if not made by force it will not in our time be made at all.

Well, for the reasons which I have given, and partly also because it is a difficult thing to bring men in a semi-civilized condition, men of different races and creeds, and wholly new to the duties of self-government, to work together without any central control, I confess that I look upon the plan of complete autonomy—the plan, that is, of creating a fresh group of tributary States—as one outside the range of practical politics. (Cries of “No, no.”) There is not a single Government in Europe, whatever its sympathies and whatever its ideas, which has at any time proposed or entertained that scheme; and if I were now to propose it I am convinced that

we should stand alone. (A voice—"Then let us stand alone.")

Here I may advert to an observation which fell from a respected friend of mine upon this subject. He was for establishing this system of complete autonomy—that is, of complete practical independence—north of the Balkan; but he stopped at that line. Now, I say of that, just as I say of plans which deal only with the Christians of European Turkey, excluding those of Asia, I do not understand if you adopt such a policy, why that particular geographical limit should be drawn.

But, Gentlemen, allow me to point out that there is a very wide difference between rejecting, as I do reject, that particular proposition as impracticable, and saying that things ought to remain as they were and as they are. (Cheers.) It is quite possible, while rejecting the idea of political autonomy, to accept the idea of local or administrative autonomy. ("No, no.") I do not particularly like the phrase. It is not an English phrase. It is very vague and elastic in meaning, and for my part I much prefer the plain English phrase of local self-government. (Hear, hear.) But I take the word as I find it, and I think in that direction we may look for a possible and practical solution. ("No, no," and "Hear, hear.")

Every country has in one way or another to solve the problem of reconciling central authority with local institutions, and I believe the best of the Turks themselves are aware that their system of extreme and despotic centralization—a system carried to its height only in recent times, and imported from

Europe—has been to them a misfortune and a mistake.

I do not conceal from you or from myself that to bring about reforms in the sense I have indicated will be a difficult task, though it will not be so difficult to bring them about as to make them work when they are brought about. (Laughter.) But I believe it can be done, and I am sure it ought to be tried. (Cheers.)

I have referred on former occasions to forms of local government and the kinds of local constitution given to Crete and the Lebanon, though I never referred to them as indicating the exact model which ought to be copied, but merely as giving illustrations of a commencement in that direction, which, as far as it has gone, has worked in a satisfactory manner.

I am quite aware that what I have said to you is very vague and general. But I am afraid it is not in my power to satisfy your very natural desire for a statement which shall be more definite and more detailed. You must recollect that we have six Governments who must be induced to work together. We must have united action, because if we have not union we shall have no action at all (hear, hear); and being, as unfortunately I am, in a position in which every word I utter upon an occasion like this is watched and weighed, you will understand that I am bound to be more than ordinarily careful not to create expectations which, by no fault of mine, and, whatever my personal wish might be, I should find myself unable to realize. (Hear, hear.)

Equal treatment to Mahomedan and Christian; better administration for both; security for life and

property; effectual guarantees (ironical laughter) against a repetition of such outrages as those which all Europe has seen with so much disgust;—these are practical objects, and for these objects we shall labour. (Hear, hear.)

I do not at all wish to disguise the fact that what has happened in Bulgaria has to a certain extent changed the position not only of our own Government, but of every European Government, in regard to Turkey and the East of Europe. (Cheers.)

As regards the two belligerents, Servia and Montenegro, I do not think it necessary or desirable that I should express any opinion as to the merits of the quarrel in which they are engaged. When parties appeal to arms, the solution which follows is to a considerable extent independent of the merits of the original dispute. But looking to the military position, I think that, no decisive success having been obtained on either side (A voice—“Lord Beaconsfield said that Servia was ‘crushed.’”), both parties may fairly and honourably treat the matter as a drawn game, and return to the *status quo*. We could hardly ask for concessions from Turkey for enemies who have been defeated; and, on the other hand, I am sure that the wisest as well as the most generous policy on the part of the Porte, and of those who in any degree control the action of the Porte, is to abstain from pressing for any penalty from an unsuccessful opponent. (Hear, hear.)

I cannot tell you that peace is absolutely decided, but I may say that the dispositions on all sides are favourable; and, for my own part, I not only hope, but confidently believe, that we shall see this quarrel

brought to an end without any further effusion of blood. (Cheers.)

Now, Gentlemen, I think I have stated as fully as, in the circumstances, is convenient or possible my views on the general subject. I will end with only one remark. Do not imagine that you can settle this Eastern Question by merely saying what you wish to be done. The question is not what you wish to be done, but what, in the circumstances, can be done. (Cheers.)







