

IN SPEAKING to you as English Liberals I shall scarcely perhaps need to excuse myself if I confess that I have from the first looked upon this Eastern Question chiefly from the point of view of its bearings upon English interests. I do not mean to say that I looked coldly upon peoples, who as I thought were struggling for their liberties against foreigners, tyrants and barbarians, or that I thought it unimportant for the world at large that the wrongs of poor people, of oppressed people, should be righted after many years: on the contrary I thought this all important both to England and to the world at large, and indeed for this very reason I could not help for ever asking myself how shall *we* deal with the matter; what will England do; will she be blind, will she be foreseeing, will she be foolish, will she be wise?

And if these questions were weighty and worthy of consideration at the time when we first got to know of the gravity of the Bosnian Insurrection, how much weightier have they now become when, if all England does not deceive itself, that is threatened which my Lord Derby called the other day the greatest of all English interests: peace. Sirs, I could scarce have believed till lately that any considerable number of people in England would for a moment have thought of entering lightly upon any war, even the most obviously necessary one: but in these days the utterances of a part of the press, and, I am grieved to say it, the talk of many people I meet, have driven me into acknow-

ledging that there are men not a few in this country who can read history and write newspaper articles, and whom therefore we must set down I suppose as belonging to the intelligent classes, who desire war for the sake of war: gentlemen, I have heard a great deal of indignation wasted upon those who were for peace at any price: what indignation can be too great to bestow on those who are for war at any price?

Now if we found it difficult to imagine that such a party could exist, it was perhaps still more difficult to imagine that it would have adopted the tactics that it has adopted. That it should have gathered to it selfish interests, aristocratic prejudice, love of arbitrary rule, hatred of insurrection against that rule, contempt of all people not born within the compass of the narrow seas, that it should have openly formed an alliance in short with all that is reactionary in the country; this we might be certain such a party would do: but that it should supplement this necessary part of its duties by seeking allies even in the Liberal party, and baiting the trap for them with plausible fallacies appealing to their love of liberty and hatred of absolutism, is a piece of impudence which one would scarcely have expected even in the party which Lord Beaconsfield has chosen to make his own.

On one or two of these points I wish to speak to you before I recur to that threatened danger to English Interests, which I must again confess lie chiefly at my heart this evening. These are the people who are always crying out at us to remember Poland, to remember Hungary: we are not likely to forget either, I think: nor is Russia. I will not make it an excuse for her that few nations of Europe are clean-handed in such matters: I will say rather, that her crimes have already overtaken her and found her out, since even the very residuum of our reactionary party can dare to taunt her with them now: I believe that if it had not been for these crimes of hers all Europe except for national jealousies, some reasonable, some unreasonable, would

have praised her present enterprise. I would rather accept the blame in full, and admit that it is natural for men to doubt her conduct: and then I would bid England look to it lest she in turn, when she is about some worthy and laudable enterprise, be taunted with helping Turkey to reenslave Servia, Bosnia or Roumania, as Russia helped Austria to reenslave Hungary.

The plain truth is that it was once the policy of England to help absolutism to put down insurrection just as it was of Russia: and this outcry of the greater part of the Tory party for the bolstering up of falling Turkey is two-thirds of it dregs of this policy: so much for their sympathy with Poland and Hungary: Poland is dead, it is safe to sympathise with her: Hungary has gone past them alive, they can do nothing to her; but Servia, Roumania, Bosnia, Montenegro are struggling, and they long to end their struggles in death: long may they live, in spite of that ill-will, free and progressive.

Throughout the nation also this party of war at any price has strengthened itself by the alliance of a sentiment which one can only blame because it looks rather on things than sees through them: I mean a sympathy, much called forth by this war as by other wars in our own time, for the weaker party: the same sympathy with a certain part of the nation helped the inveterate dislike of freedom (in other people) during the war between the Northern and Southern States of America. Now sympathy with the weaker side has something good about it even if the sympathisers have not nicely weighed the merits of the case: but in that dispute between North and South there was a weaker party still which these sympathetic gentlemen did not think enough of: there were in short three parties to the quarrel not two: the North States, the South States and the slaves. I don't think that sympathy looks quite as generous when we think of it from that point of view: and from the same point of view I call upon you English Liberals, nay upon English Tories too, to look upon this war in the East: I say

there are three parties in this quarrel as in most others: there are the Russians, there are the Turks, and there are the slaves of the Turks: my sympathies are with the last of these three. Yes, I must distinctly call them slaves and not subjects: either actually slaves at present as with the Bulgarians and others, or newly made freedmen as with the Rumanians and the Serbs, or lastly people who would be slaves if they were not heroes as the Montenegrins. This it is that makes me sad and not exultant when I hear of the stout fighting, the heroism if you will, of the Turkish soldiers: I cannot look upon them as men fighting for their hearths and homes, but rather as land-lords fighting for their unjust rents: I am sorry for them man by man; sorrier indeed for those thousands that died that morning at Plevna to satisfy military honour, than I am for those Russians whom at the risk of displeasing you I shall call the martyrs of freedom, who fell last August on the other side of those fatal ramparts doing their day's work as gallantly as any soldiers ever born: for these last fell helping the progress of the world, those died striving to hinder it.

For I say when other people talk of Turkey in Europe they are really only using a geographical name: it is now 425 years ago that the Osmanlee finished the conquest of the remnant of the Byzantine empire by taking Constantinople, after they had gradually conquered Anatolia, Greece, the Islands with Epirus and Thessaly, Servia, Bosnia, Wallachia and Moldavia. As they were then so they are now, except that for some time after Constantinople fell their sultans were mighty warriors and able rulers according to the type of oriental kings: they had neither science, art nor literature, though they had dealt long with people from whom they might have learned these things; they have not learned them yet, nor have tried to in the least in any land in which they have settled. One art they learned though, if they needed to learn it, a hideous art, the art of war: they were masters of it once: they had the first and the best standing army in Europe—the Janissaries: these sub-

jects, Serbs, Wallachians, whatnot, were kept apart from the rest of the population and sedulously bred up to be nothing but soldiers, which office they performed to admiration, and as you know, Europe trembled before them for long. Well if they have somewhat fallen off in this art it is because they have been steadily declining in all ways even from quite early days, and as I said before, they have neither learned nor cared to learn any other, but have imported it all ready made. Now, gentlemen, it would certainly have been a dreadful thing under any circumstances that the East of Europe should have been invaded and a city once the capital not of Europe only but the whole world should have been taken by an alien and barbarous race of another religion than that of the conquered people; dreadful, I say, and specially perhaps at so late a time in the history of Europe: nevertheless things like it had happened before, and perhaps rather than injuring the lands to which they had happened, they had strengthened them by adding new and desirable elements to the population. I must use England as an illustration: for our land has been conquered four times, by the Romans, the Saxons, the Danes and the Normans, and with the exception of the Romans, who came as soldiers and went as soldiers, those invaders have always mingled with the population (those of them that they did not kill off at once), have strengthened the nation not weakened it: they have altered little if at all the course of our history, the tendency of our laws: except in those corners of the land where the invaders did not come, who can say for certain of what blood he is? we are all English together, or if we belong to those later conquered corners of the land, we owe our conquerors no grudge—and are their equals in all matters.

I myself who stand before you am of the conquered race; and you, I must suppose, gentlemen of the South Saxons, are of the blood of my conquerors: your ancestors killed mine, burned their houses and drove them from their land, and then called them Welsh, that is, foreigners, which was

hard, I must needs say: but it is much too long ago to remember all that except as a story: and as for you, why I suppose you would find it difficult to pick out people really of the blood of your conquerors, those Norman-French with whom you played out that tragedy on the hill slopes yonder by Hastings: I say we have all mingled and become Englishmen. So it was with the Normans in Normandy, with the Franks in France, with the Lombards in Italy: dreadful as the invasions were, time has smoothed all away, and conquerors and conquered live together peaceably, scarcely suspecting their origin. How is it that it is not so in Turkey in Europe, where two millions or thereabout of Ottomans rule as masters over 6½ millions of Christians of various races? as masters over slaves, I repeat, who ever as the law of the land yet stands after repeated remonstrances from the European powers, have no pretence of considering themselves equal to their masters, and whom in most cases are customarily dealt with far worse than even the law gives warrant for? What is it that has caused that gallant scrap of mountain land Montenegro, the stronghold of the Serbs, to fight so desperately against the overwhelming power of Turkey? what brought about that desperate, that seemingly hopeless insurrection in Bosnia, that hapless struggle in Crete, that yet more hapless and utterly abortive attempt at a rising in Bulgaria avenged by the ocean of blood shed in May '76 of which I for my part shall never be able to think or speak calmly? What roused the half-armed yeomen of Servia to attempt to stand before those terrible soldiers who have lately all but foiled the whole might of Russia?

The readiest answer to these later questions would be to some people, Russian intrigue: that I think could easily be disproved, but it is scarcely worth while to disprove it for the purpose of answering the question satisfactorily, as no one ventures to deny, I suppose, that the natural hatred and dread of the Turks was there for the aforesaid Russian intrigue to work upon: for myself I would wish to find

another answer to my question than that it is because the Turkish blood is irreclaimable. I doubt that: the Bulgarians are of Turkish blood also, and I believe them to be industrious and capable of education and civilization, though many hard things have been said of them lately; the Hungarians also are of Turkish blood, and have shown abundant capabilities for self-government and the real appreciation of political life; the Turkish families of which there are many in the island of Negropont or Eubea live quietly side by side with their Greek neighbours and are industrious and orderly. I admit that I do not hope for very high things from the Turkish race for many many years, even if the best were to happen to them; but no doubt they have many good qualities, and if so those qualities must be capable of development. Why is it then that the Turks during these 500 years have made no steps towards assimilating or being assimilated by their conquered peoples? Is it because of their religion? I must needs say that has something to do with it to my mind. I have read a little of oriental literature (I think I know Lane's *Arabian Nights* by heart) and in the course of my studies as an artist I have come across a good deal of the history of the East. Since you have heard me say, that you may guess that I am not likely to be prejudiced against the East and its many wonders. Who could read without emotion that story of the life of the prophet and the uprising of the terrible new religion? or the conquest of Syria with Kaled's courage and Omar's glorious simplicity; or the woful tragedy of the sons of Ali? Who could fail to be interested in that mass of anecdotal history which the Arabs have left us with so much told of their great names, partly sublime, partly trivial? and yet with all that we cannot help feeling that there is something wanting in their morality, a want of balance and absence of the sense of true justice. And also as the history gets later and later it becomes a fearful tale of self-seeking scoundrels and their monstrous crimes: even when their Kings have something of the

heroic cast in them they lack entirely any political or public aim; but it becomes a mere struggle for high place because of its sordid luxury: more gold more horses more women—in short like the sailor they want all the rum and baccy in the world and then a little more rum and baccy. I do not mean to say that I refer this lack to the profession of Islam; but rather that Islam was the religion that sprang from these tendencies, and was then corrupted and acted on by their results; and there was in all this something exceedingly repulsive to the ideas and hopes of the progressive West. Let alone that a Moslem living among people of another religion is almost bound by his religion to look upon them as his inferiors: so that all things considered I certainly think the alien religion of the Turks has had much to do with the undying hatred with which their rule has been looked on by their—slaves I will call them.

Nevertheless Islam will not account for everything in the matter: even religious prejudice must give way before facts: Mr. D. M. Wallace says in his book about Russia that the Mussulman subjects of the Czar live in perfect amity with their orthodox brethren, both going to the same village council, each content with his own mosque or church, neither side trying to proselytize the other in the least; and the correspondent of *The Times* told us the other day that the Tartars of the Crimea were praying heartily in their mosques for the success of the Russian arms: perhaps we must say therefore that the Turks are like fire—good servants and bad masters. And yet I do not want them to be servants either: I no more want to see the Turks oppressed by the Christians than I do the Christians by the Turks. True, every dog has its day: but nothing grieves me more in history than to see a fresh brutality take the place of an extinct one, and I think we can do better than this.

Well then, I do not think that it is merely the race of the Turks that has made their government such a curse to Eastern Europe, and such a heavy curse to ourselves at this moment; not their race, though it has been and I think

even to-day is bloodthirsty, indolent and libidinous as well as hardy, patient and dignified; nor is it altogether their religion, alien as that is from our European ideas, and though it was always a religion of the sword, and has grown to be a fosterer of pride and indolence. No, it is caused partly by these things, but by these things worked upon by their unlucky position: so it is in private life as you know: a man has virtues and faults, put him in his right place and everything goes well, put him in his wrong place, and his virtues are ill-developed, his faults ill-restrained. How the Italians used to hate the Austrians, the Tedeschi, in the days of their tyranny, now thank God gone for ever! do they hate them now? don't you remember how the Venetians feasted the Austrian Emperor the other day, I have no doubt in all sincerity? What harm was the loss of Naboth's vineyard to the Austrians? was it not a gain rather? Even such a gainful loss I wish may befall the *people* of the Ottomans, being, I must tell you, pretty much regardless what loss may befall his Excellency Chefket Pasha and his accomplices. For I must say again that Turkey in Europe is a mere geographical nick-name for a set of peoples now and more or less for many years striving to free themselves from an army of occupation that call themselves the Osmanli, who have all the vices of an army: pride of caste, corruption, ambition, grasping greed; who army-like let out their civil administration to the basest rascals in the world; and who repress rebellion, especially if it is unarmed, in the way that we thought ill of last September year (though some of us, it seems, have forgotten all that): yes such pride of caste that the Ottomans say of their brother Turks in Asia, who are less of soldiers (or were thought so before Plevna) and more of peasants than themselves, A Thousand Turks for a radish—poor radish!

Gentlemen: can we be called bad Liberals for not liking to see an army of occupation sitting down on a country and eating it up for 500 years? for saying, You have sat there as an army long enough now? The desire of that body

which I have the very great honour of representing before you to-night: to wit the St. James's Hall Fanatics that you have all heard of, and the desire of the most illustrious statesman of England, the most single-hearted statesman in the world, the desire of Mr. Gladstone, is that that army of occupation should be broken up, and should exercise those many virtues of which we have heard at least as much as enough, in private and under the restraint of equal laws. We wished that Europe would help in laying down the conditions under which this should take place: we believed indeed that in process of time the Ottomans would cease to govern at Constantinople, or perhaps I should say, to appear to govern; but we were willing to wait the slow process of natural decay, determined only to resist the artificial bolstering up of a tyranny which had lost all life, all power except for evil. We thought it possible that England, setting the example of throwing aside jealousy and acting firmly and justly in this matter, might have prevented this terrible war now running let us hope to the dregs. Were we wrong to hope this? To speak plainly I believe that if we had had at this crisis a Liberal government nothing less would have happened: nay I believe that had a patriotic prime-minister been at the head of the Conservative government instead of the shifty place-hunter that the country to the shame of us all has set there, Europe would have been spared this misery, England, I must needs say it, this disgrace. We all know that the Marquis of Salisbury went to Constantinople intending to use the opportunity afforded to us to the best of his power: we pretty well guess how he was foiled. We heard not long ago the plain-spoken scorn which Lord Derby poured out on what shall I call them—the Pall Mall Fanatics—and still more only last week the manly straightforward and sensible words of Lord Carnarvon; and we cannot doubt that if the ministry were strictly composed of such statesmen as these the honour, the interests, the peace of England would be in safe hands.

I believe in that case that the opportunity that England had at the Constantinople Conference of settling this question would not have been wholly lost; though some of us might have thought the settlement less than wholly satisfactory. That opportunity has been lost, and we have for many months been looking on the bloodiest war of our day: nevertheless that war must, if no third party interferes, come to an end soon, and the result of it in that case must be the practical breaking up of that army of occupation ruled by corruption and rapacity which is called the Ottoman government. The end we have desired will be brought about though at the expense of fearful blood-shedding, and though the dignity and renown and influence of England will by her own fault have suffered.

But as you very well know, there is a danger ahead before the ship comes into port: it is now no secret that there are two parties in the Cabinet as there are in the country: there is a moderate party that will at least be in no hurry to quarrel with Russia, composed of those ministers whom we respect though we may differ from them; and there is another party that appears to be ready to quarrel with Russia and drag us, if they can, into an unjust war either with pretext or without, and at the head of that party is a minister whom we do *not* respect, my Lord Beaconsfield. It is no use mincing the matter, the whole country knows by now that such is the case; everybody is putting the question, Is it to be peace or war? For my part I believe that such a war would be a crime, and I will do my utmost to resist its taking place, as I know many thousands of my countrymen will do. But at least if it is a crime do not let us go into it with our eyes shut: do not let us commit the double crime, the double folly, of allowing ourselves from sloth and languor to be dragged into a war that we more than doubt is unjust. That is the danger that I dread: that we shall go from one step to another without resisting, till there will be nothing but the leap before us: and then when the first shot is fired—you know what takes place in these causeless

wars: all right and wrong get muddled up together, the cause and no-cause of the war gets clean forgotten, and men invent some other cause that they never thought of when they first went into the war, and no reason is listened to till peace comes and its reaction: and then people turn round and look about them and say, What did we do it for? what was it all about?

I entreat you all to do your very utmost to save the nation from such a misfortune as our going to war with the country divided against itself: I believe the danger great, but I believe that if the country in general were quite assured of the danger it would soon put an end to it, for I am pretty sure that in spite of its noise the war-party is much in the minority. Yet even if I am wrong, I would appeal to that majority and bid them beware before they ventured into a doubtful war which many thousands of their fellow-countrymen could call nothing but a crime; in which it would be hard to say which would be worse, victory or defeat.

I protest when I think of the ultimate consequences of our joining with the Turks in this war and defeating the Russians, I dare not even in imagination face the hideous confusion that our folly would have created. As for defeat: I cannot suppose, whatever disasters we might meet with, that we should not in the end be called the victors, so great is the wealth and the manhood of England. But, I say again, what a woful victory would such a war bring us, fought out to the bitter end; a war in which so many of us could not wish God speed you, to our departing soldiers. It would be the first time that such a war has happened to us in our time; I think few people can even imagine what a calamity it would be. I will say it deliberately it would be only a few degrees better than civil war—I will not believe it possible to come about: I know it is impossible if the Liberal party will only do their duty in the present crisis, helped as I have no doubt they will be by many honest people on the Conservative side. Let us be firmly united, and the same

choice will be before the man who is at the head of the plot against our liberties, as lay before him who was the helpless head of the French Plotters: let him submit or demit.

Sirs, I tell you that if this war is waged, it will under whatever disguises be a war for the suppression of just insurrection against tyranny. I ask you Liberals to remember our own liberties, the very spring of successful and righteous insurrection, and I call upon you countrymen of Cromwell not to be cajoled by Disraeli into a war which would be above all things a war of reactionists: if any of you Liberals are tempted to think that Russia is your enemy, I beg to think that you may find enemies of freedom nearer home than that: enemies who are watchful to seize upon every opportunity that your mistakes may give them. I think we have not by a long way finished with reform: we have worked hard, we have gained much, we have forced our very opponents to help us; shall all these gains, all these fruits of toil and trouble be trampled into the mud of an unjust war?

Remember the last general election, and see what our sloth, languor and disunion brought us, how it put us under the feet of Lord Beaconsfield. Sirs, shall we not try to rise up and shake him off? let him hear us cry Peace with Russia, war against our own follies and abuses?