

ARTICLES AND LETTERS

ENGLAND AND THE TURKS

Sir,

I CANNOT help noting that a rumour is about in the air that England is going to war; and from the depths of my astonishment I ask, On behalf of whom? Against whom? And for what end? Some three weeks ago, if such a rumour had arisen, my questions would, I imagine, have been answered in this way: 'The English nation has been roused to a sense of justice (for at heart they are a generous people) by a story of horrors that no man has been able to gainsay; so they are going to war against the Turkish Government on behalf of certain subject peoples, whom the Turks conquered long ago but have never assimilated, and whom now, in their decrepitude, insolvency and terror, they have been torturing and oppressing in the vilest manner, while they claim to be considered and treated as a civilized Government and a part of the comity of Europe. The end and aim of the war is to force the Turkish Government (who, to speak the downright truth, are a gang of thieves and murderers) to give these subject peoples, who are quite orderly

and industrious, some chance for existence; to force the Turkish Government to agree to give these peoples some security for life, limb and property, and to take order that they shall carry out their agreement (by occupying their territory or otherwise). This is the end and aim of the war; and we and all Europe think it a just and honourable aim, and that we are the right people to see it carried through; for we, a peaceful people, not liars (except in trade), we have nothing to gain by helping these luckless folks to live; and, though we are only their neighbours, in the sense that the Samaritan was to him who fell among thieves, yet we are in a kind of way responsible for their usage, for we have before this waged a great war to keep the Turks, their jailors, alive, thinking that we could make them a respectable and even a progressive people—so sanguine, and to say the truth, such fools we were! However, except that we are still paying for it out of pocket, all that is past; we meant no harm then, and now we mean good and will do it.'

If I had fallen asleep three weeks ago, and woke up yesterday, I should have expected some such answer to my questions of, For whom? Against Whom? and Why? And I, a mere sentimentalist, should have rejoiced in such a war, and thought it wholly good: the people to be helped worthy of helping, the enemy thieves and murderers, all Europe our friends, no mouth to gainsay us but the mouths of thieves and murderers. Yes, I should have thought I had lived for something at last: to have seen all England just, and in earnest, the Tories converted or silenced, and our country honoured throughout all the world. In very truth, all this seemed on the point of happening three weeks ago, though without the terrible expense of a war; but, alas, though I have not slept, I have awakened, and find the shoe quite on the other foot. The Tories are not converted; England is pretty much mocked throughout all the world: I must sorrowfully say, justly mocked, if, as I fear, we were not in earnest when we held all those meetings, and passed all those resolutions full of just anger, as it seemed. I say,

not in earnest, because, to put all conventionalities aside, we know well that, in matters of peace or war, no Government durst go against the expressed will of the English people, when it has a will and can find time to express it; and, on the other hand, again setting aside conventionalities of 'deliberation,' 'calm,' 'statesmanship,' and the like, we know well that our Tory Government has determined to disregard, as utterly as if it had not happened, the seeming enthusiasm of repentance which the dreadful facts stated by your Correspondent and Mr Schuyler, and confirmed by Mr Baring, seemed to awake, and which Mr Gladstone's noble and generous rhetoric, and Mr Freeman's manly and closely reasoned letters, fanned into a seeming fire. We know, to speak plainly, that the new-made 'brave' earl, to whom nothing is difficult, has at all events found it easy to see through a ladder, and is determined to drag us into a shameful and unjust war—how shameful and unjust no words can say. I say it would be impossible for even that clever trickster to do this, not only if united England were in earnest to gainsay him, but even if a large minority were but half in earnest and spoke, and said 'No.' And now, not even the wretched packed Parliament we have got is sitting. The cry for that was not believed; the members are too busy shooting in the country, and the nation is dumb, if it were not for the 2,000 working men who met last Sunday at Clerkenwell, and who took it for granted, as everybody else I come across does, that the crossing of the Turkish boundaries by Russian troops would be followed at a greater or less time by England's declaration of war against Russia. And do you suppose the Turks do not take the same thing for granted?

I appeal to the Liberal party, and ask if it is not worth while their making some efforts to avoid this shame. I appeal to the working men, and pray them to look to it that if this shame falls upon them they will certainly remember it and be burdened by it when their day clears for them, and they attain all, and more than all they now are striving for:

to the organizers of both these bodies I specially appeal, to set their hands to the work before it is too late, to drop all others watch-words that this at least may be heard: No war on behalf of Turkey; no war on behalf of the thieves and murderers! I appeal to all men of sense and feeling of all parties, and bid them think what war means, and to think if only perhaps this were an unjust war! What, then, could come of it but shame in defeat and shame in victory, and in the end ignominious undoing of all that the war should seem to do. I who am writing this am one of a large class of men—quiet men, who usually go about their own business, heeding public matters less than they ought, and afraid to speak in such a huge concourse as the English nation, however much they may feel, but who are now stung into bitterness by thinking how helpless they are in a public matter that touches them so closely. To these also I appeal to break silence at last, if they in any wise can, and to be as little hopeless as may be, for that all may perhaps help, and perhaps they as much as people more busy in such things; for the old proverb is true now as ever: 'Like people, like priest.' If this monstrous shame and disaster—if this curse—has to fall upon us, we cannot make Lord Beaconsfield or Lord Derby, the Tory party or the House of Commons, our scapegoats; we must, our very selves, bear the curse, and make the best of it, for we put these men where they sit over us, and do their own will, such as it is; and we can put them down again if we choose. And, meanwhile, till that happy day comes round, I say again that I firmly believe that a large minority, or even not so very large a minority of the English people, expressing their earnest will, would be enough to prevent any war; for, surely, even the Earl of Beaconsfield must hesitate before signing the death-warrant of so many men, if he has an excuse given him for it, since they say he is human, though, indeed, I scarce believe it. Any war could be stayed, much more, surely, such a cynically unjust and shameful one as this would be: nay, such a monstrously laughable one, if the world could laugh

for shame and grief. This is the last word. I call on all those who attended those many-thronged and enthusiastic meetings throughout the country the other day to meet again; let their organizers see to it. For I assure them that not the less because they have forgotten it were those babies murdered in Bulgaria—there were more, I believe, slain in Scio a while ago, but that is more utterly forgotten than these last—not the less were the poor souls robbed to their very shirts, it seems; not the less because they no longer heed it are people dying hundreds a day of cold and hunger out there; let those who attended those meetings, now they have rested, once more bring their imaginations to bear upon it all, and to take note that we have refused to help these poor people, that we have refused to take order that the like desolation shall not happen again, and have forced the Russians to do our share and their own of the business—for which we propose to go to war with them, after all we have said in our thronged and enthusiastic meetings! Can history show a greater absurdity than this or greater fools than the English people will be if they do not make it clear to the Ministry and the Porte that they will wage no war on behalf of the Turks, no war on behalf of thieves and murderers?

I beg with humility to be allowed to inscribe myself, in the company of Mr Gladstone and Mr Freeman, and all men that I esteem, as an hysterical sentimentalist; and I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,
WILLIAM MORRIS,
Author of *The Earthly Paradise*.

26 Queen Square, Bloomsbury, October 24, 1876.

To the Editor, The Daily News.