

BRITISH INTERESTS IN THE PRESENT CRISIS.

IN all things we ought in the first place to ask ourselves what is desirable. It is indispensable that we should settle clearly the end that we seek, before looking out for means. Yet this is what people constantly neglect to do in economic and political speculations. In politics it is ordinarily understood that what men pursue is the prosperity, greatness, and triumph of their country, without being concerned over-much as to what is required by justice and the good of humanity. Thus patriotism wills it. Read what is written at this moment in England upon the European crisis. It is taken as a matter of course that everything conformable to what are called English interests is legitimate, and to be preserved at all costs; all that is contrary to these interests is detestable, and ought to be resolutely and absolutely combated. Go to Russia, to France, to Germany; you will everywhere hear similar language. Yet if the interests of these different countries are at variance, it cannot be that they are all equally legitimate. Which of them are most so? Of what nation is the triumph most desirable? To decide such questions, we must raise ourselves above national prejudices and the narrow views of patriotism, and inquire in a disinterested way what is the country whose influence is most useful to the progress of humanity. In my opinion, that country at the present moment is England.

England represents in the world better than any other power the principles of political liberty and commercial freedom, the parliamentary system, industrial genius—in a word, the ideas and the inventions that are at the root of the amelioration of the human lot. England has founded in America and Australia colonies that are already, or will become, powerful empires. She has administered to admiration the countries that she possesses or possessed—Canada, the Cape, India, the Ionian Islands. If she could annex all Europe, or have it ruled by British governors, there is no doubt that the countries of Europe would be more prosperous and better governed than they are now. I believe, then, very firmly, that the interest of England is conformable to the interest of humanity. Having that conviction, I am able to place myself in these pages at the highest point of view, without at the same time running the risk of being blinded by patriotism.

This much being understood, let us see what in the present crisis are the interests of England? Ought England to uphold Ottoman administration, and so to keep under a detested and cruel yoke the

people of the Balkan Peninsula? Mr. Courtney answered this question in the *Fortnightly Review*¹ and in his place in Parliament with luminous and decisive arguments. You may declare war against Russia, and, perhaps, reduce her to seek peace as in 1854. What you cannot do is to hinder the speedy and inevitable decay and end of Ottoman power. To give to that power vigour and life is an economic impossibility. As well try to bring leaves from a dead trunk, or to resuscitate a corpse. English interest, then, is to have constituted in Turkey independent Christian states, federated if possible, and having no longer anything to fear from the Turk.

But, it is said, these states will not be allowed to follow a policy of their own; they will necessarily become the auxiliaries of Russia; see what is now happening on the north shore of the Danube. The answer is easy. Roumania allies herself to Russia, first, because she cannot do otherwise; secondly, because she hopes thus to become independent and to increase her territory. Serbia is a satellite of Russia, because she reckons in that way on aiding the emancipation of her Bulgarian brethren and becoming the nucleus of a great Slav state south of the Danube. Greece burns with a desire to throw herself on the Turks, because she believes that in contributing to their defeat she will gain Thessaly, Epirus, Southern Roumelia, possibly with Constantinople, and certainly Crete. The hopes of these small states must necessarily throw them into the arms of Russia, because they are well aware how little sympathetic the other states are towards them. But visit the countries, or study the correspondence from them in the newspapers, and you will be convinced that neither the Roumanians, Serbs, nor Greeks have any love for the Russians, and that they by no means accept the idea of submitting to Muscovite hegemony, still less of being swallowed up in a Pan-Slavic Empire which would of necessity be a despotic empire.

They willingly accept Russian help; but nations know gratitude even less than individuals, and in neither case can we require the sacrifice of existence as the evidence of gratitude. Recall what happened in Italy. So long as Austria was in the Peninsula, the Italians were the very humble servants of France. Since they have had no longer anything to fear from Austria they follow an independent policy. The French even charge them with ingratitude, which is unjust. The Italians cherish affection for France, but they detest the Ultramontanes, who are bent on the destruction of their national unity. How can they show sympathy for France so long as she is in the hands of a militant clericalism? Roumanians, Servians, and Bulgarians would be like the Italians; it is in human nature. So long as they have to fear the Turks, they will be with the Russians. Rescue them once for all from the Turks, they will

(1) *Fortnightly Review* for May, 1877.

be independent, and will become hostile rather than otherwise to all that savours of Russian influence.

Evidently, then, it is England's interest to set up in Turkey federated principalities, definitely emancipated from the Ottoman yoke, and supported by Europe. The immense service rendered by Mr. Gladstone is that he has demonstrated this with such a mass of evidence that the very Ministers themselves have been unable to remain completely blind to it. If Russia thinks that she is working for herself in planting free states in the Balkan Peninsula, she is mistaken. These states "will astonish the world by their ingratitude," like Austria in 1848. It will be the second time that Russia has been deceived in her hopes.

Does any English interest demand that Russia shall be prevented from dictating the terms of peace at Constantinople? I might here place myself at the point of view of the rigorous economists and cry—So much the better if Russia occupies Turkey, for it will be better governed and richer. But for my own part I believe that true economic science consists in seeing that there are interests superior to those of additional millions of imports and exports. I think that the *definitive* possession of Turkey and Constantinople by Russia would give her at the end of fifty years too great a preponderance in European affairs. Now it is not desirable, as it seems to me, that the hegemony of the continent should belong to a state that, however brilliant may be its future, is still behind some other states, and that, being still despotically governed, would place in the hands of a single man the destinies of Western civilisation. Russia, then, ought not permanently to occupy Constantinople.

But ought England to declare war rather than allow the Russians to enter Constantinople? I think not. First, how on other terms than an occupation is a peace to be concluded? If the Turks are aware that in no case will their capital be occupied, and being masters of the sea as they are, what is to prevent them from prolonging the war to eternity? Russia will then have the right to say to England: "The struggle that is exhausting my forces, and is a cause of suffering and ruin to the whole of Europe must have an end: either stand by, while I impose terms of peace on the shores of the Bosphorus, or go thither yourselves, and insist that the Turk puts an end to a contest that must henceforward be fruitless and unavailing." Europe will approve such language. There are only two alternatives. Either England must go herself to dictate peace to the Turks at Constantinople, or she must not interfere with the Russians in their way thither.

And for that matter, it is exactly the worst enemies of Russia who ought to be most anxious for her to go to Constantinople, and not

only to go, but to wish to stay there. After an extremely short time England would find two allies to help her to dislodge Russia. These allies are Austria and Germany. It is evident that Russia can have no security in Turkey so long as Austria, debouching from her Transylvanian bastion, has it in her power to cut off all communication between the Russian empire and its new conquests. As it is, Austria would move, did she not feel the sword of Prussia at her flank, upholding the alliance of the Three Empires. Germany at the present moment, and so long as her accounts with France remain unsettled, not only has no interest in arresting Russia, she has every interest in seeing Russia brought closer and closer to the great and formidable obstacles in her course, possibly including even England. Let us never forget that in May, 1875, Germany found England and Russia confronting her. Prince Bismarck could have said to the Emperor Alexander: "Do what you will in the East, but leave me free in the West." Now that Russia is engaged in the East, his desires are exactly fulfilled. It is the situation that he sought in 1875.

The policy of Germany is complex and double, because she has to parry different dangers. At present she is completely with Russia. She has to take advantage of the friendship between the two Emperors in order to meet the perils that menace her in the West. But suppose that in one way or another Germany were to find security in the West; then necessarily she will begin to think of the Slavic danger, and, regarding herself the destined successor of Austria, she will be no more ready than Austria is to suffer the Danube to become a Russian river. From the first outburst of the insurrection in Herzegovina, it was clear that Germany and Russia were marching in absolute agreement, and that their plans were settled. Russia would never have taken that decided attitude; she would never have pushed Serbia into the fight by dispatching bands of volunteers in spite of all international law, if she had not been all the time completely assured of the support of Germany, guaranteeing the neutrality of Austria. The Emperor Francis Joseph must have joined the plot, first to avoid being crushed by his two powerful neighbours; next, because they have probably promised him Bosnia—a piece of aggrandisement that is not desired either by the Hungarians, or the Austrian Germans, or by Count Andrassy, but that may well flatter the vanity both of the sovereign and the army. What seems to prove that the Emperor of Austria has an understanding with the two other powers is that he maintained in Dalmatia, notwithstanding parliamentary interpellation, a governor of Slav origin and Slav sentiment, who favoured as much as he could the risings in the adjoining Turkish provinces. Germany, then, will let Russia go whither she will, and do what she will, in the East. She will permit whatever may come, because she knows that nothing

definitive can take place under present circumstances. Notwithstanding the anger and impatience of the Hungarians, Austria, half from caution, half from interest, will do like Germany. England, if she insists on action, will find herself without allies.

If the Emperor Alexander said that, should he be forced to go to Constantinople, he should know how to find his way out of it, he only expressed the necessity of the situation. He sees clearly that he could not remain there without provoking by-and-by a triple alliance, against which he evidently could not defend the possession of Turkey. Let us suppose Russia to annex all the Turkish provinces, including the capital. During the first years the conquests could only be a source of weakness, for they would compel her to scatter her forces. It would take two generations before she could assimilate those countries so completely as to find new strength in them. It is certain that before this could be brought about, a new coalition would force her to let go. Russia will never be able definitely to establish herself across the Danube until she has created a broad base of operations by destroying Austria and annexing all the Slav country that Austria comprehends. Panslavia may occupy and keep Turkey: Russia never can. Now the bare attempt to set up Panslavia will provoke the desperate resistance of all Germans. These eventualities are still remote, but they already affect men's minds, and so are real elements in the existing situation. Read the correspondence of all those who have lately visited Russia and who have been in relations with the Russian army; they all make it plain how little love is borne by Russians to Germans. Instinctively Russians understand that Germany is the great obstacle to their aggrandisement in Europe. On the other hand, the Germans loves the Russian just as little. The independent newspapers all blame the Government for upholding Russia. Herr Virchow, the distinguished professor at the University of Berlin, lately made himself the eloquent interpreter of this sentiment. He was wrong; he did not understand that at the present time Germany ought not only to back Russia, but even to push her forwards; but he saw rightly enough what would be needed in the future. The antagonism of Slavs and Germans is inevitable; sooner or later it will end in open conflict. A recent manifesto of the best known of the leaders of the Czech movement, which has caused a general agitation throughout Austria, revealed the danger. In a public letter addressed to the Panslavist Committee at Moscow, Dr. Rieger expressed his ardent sympathies for Russia for taking into her own hands the cause of all the Slavic peoples, too long oppressed by foreign races, and he predicts that the era of the Slavs is drawing near. It is inevitable that the national movement among the Czechs, repressed by the Germans, must turn towards Russia, as Serbs and Bulgarians have done in their struggle against the Turks. Well, Germany will

never endure that Bohemia and Moravia should attach themselves to the Muscovite empire in any fashion or degree whatever.

Without doubt nobody in Russia dreams of advancing on this side, but coming events cast their shadows before. The disquiet of the Austrian Germans at the idea of new Slavic principalities being about to come into existence on the Danube, the manifesto of Dr. Rieger, the excitement of the Czechs and Croats, are all symptoms of a situation whose perils would pretty quickly come to light if Russia were to find aggrandisement in Europe. German statesmen evidently have their eyes on the danger, but menaced as they are by two dangers, one on the west, the other on the east, it is natural enough that they busy themselves first with the present before thinking of the future.

From what has gone before, then, this results: To arrest Russia, England cannot at present count on Germany, nor consequently on Austria. But if the Russians, in case of victory, are to occupy Constantinople, they would not remain there. If they were to remain there, then as soon as Germany should have her hands free, we may be sure that Germany and Austria would unite to drive Russia out. Whatever, therefore, may happen to Europe, England will be under no necessity to go to war. Powers with greater interests than hers will uphold or restore equilibrium on the Danube.

In Asia the situation is different in two respects. There Russia will probably seek compensation for her enormous sacrifices, and there England in that case will find no ally. Suppose that victorious Russia were to insist on keeping Armenia, ought England to oppose this by force of arms in order to defend India on the banks of the Euphrates? Lord Salisbury has just shown with infinite good sense and keen wit how little ground there is for the alarm of pessimists. The Russians will not soon be able to set out on the road to India. By ruining their finances they are putting off to a future day the construction of railways to the regions beyond the Caspian, and it is not until after an enormous development of the resources of those districts that they will be able to make of them a base of operations for a march towards India.

Then by what right would England oppose the annexation of Armenia? The Christians of the country, and even the Kurds, Mahometans though they be, welcome the Russians as their liberators. The deplorable government of the Pacha ruins them and stops all progress. They would evidently be happier under the authority of a Russian Government, and this aggrandisement of Russia would be so much added to the domain of civilisation. The opposition of England would therefore be without justification from

the point of view of English interests, and it would be worthy of all condemnation from the point of view of humanity.

At the same time, if Russia annexes Armenia, then there is a measure of precaution imposed upon England, and that measure is the occupation of Egypt and Cyprus. I say Cyprus and not Crete. Crete ought to go to Greece, because the national sentiment there is too much awake to be restrained. In Cyprus this is not the case, and moreover this island, transformed into a Gibraltar, will be a better and nearer commanding-point for the shores of Syria and the entrance to the Suez Canal.

I will set forth shortly the motives which, as I think, should recommend this measure of compensation to England. It is generally believed on the Continent that the English still dream as in old days of acquiring new colonies, and that they would ask nothing better than to take Sicily, for example, as the Dutch Indies. Of course nothing is more mistaken. The general feeling in England is that the country has only too many possessions already, and too many responsibilities. It is only by reason of a new and clearly demonstrated necessity that the Government could be induced to undertake new possessions and responsibilities. If, therefore, England occupies Egypt, it will be in spite of herself, and because she feels absolutely unable to do otherwise. But she will be constrained to do so, it seems to me, on several grounds. To begin with, if when the time comes for peace Russia shall acquire considerable territory in Asia, and England shall decide on no act of compensation, her authority in the East will find itself distinctly touched. If, at the beginning, as the Liberal party wished, she had acted in accord with Russia, the defeat of Turkey would not have at all compromised her prestige. Now that the English Government has deliberately figured as the adversary of Russia, it is evident that the complete success of Russia is a check for English influence. The only way of parrying the blow is to restore the equilibrium by an act of wise vigour, which would echo and resound all over the Eastern world.

In the second place, the control of the passage of the Canal can only be thoroughly secure if it is guarded on the spot by English forces. Russia, by the annexation of Armenia, would command Syria, and so would threaten the Canal with an attack by land against which the English fleet would be powerless. The purchase of the Canal shares was an absurdity, unless it was the prelude to occupation. The approach of Russia plainly makes the further step now necessary.

Such a step, commended as it is by English interests, would be at the same time a great blessing to the Egyptians, and a great gain to civilisation in general. The Valley and the Delta are among the richest districts in the whole world: water, sun, rich soil, and all

the products of Europe and the tropics; a gentle, intelligent, and prodigiously laborious population, whom even incessant and organized pillage does not disgust with toil! Formerly the system of government was detestable, being Turkish, but the fiscal processes were imperfect and the needs very limited. Now, in order to pay the interest of enormous sums, fatuously thrown away and wasted, the Egyptian Government borrows the financial expedients of Europe. Thus they come to that worst of all possible combinations, Oriental disorder served by European financing. The lot of the slave in the Southern States of the American Union was paradise compared with that of the Egyptian fellah. As I looked at these poor creatures working all day long, and often half the night as well, to satisfy the insensate and prodigal rapacity of Cairo, I said to myself, "Why does not Europe, that sends cruisers to suppress the slave trade, send hither a few good regiments to put an end to these barbarities?"

Egypt in the hands of the English would recover the splendour of her antiquity. With public works such as those which Mr. W. T. Thornton has described in his excellent book on *The Public Works of India*, the extent of arable land, the numbers of the population, and the revenue would all augment. Thanks to the annexations conducted by Colonel Gordon, Egypt now extends to the great lakes of Central Africa, and she has thus become, in point of territorial extension, one of the largest countries in the world. Only let her pass under the protection of England, instantly the slave-trade is suppressed steam navigation connects the interior of the continent with the Mediterranean, and civilisation and commerce penetrate into an immense region of admirable fertility, and, by reason of its altitude, habitable by Europeans. By the Cape, by Natal, by the Transvaal, the English are advancing towards the Zambesi. Already they have a station on Lake Nyassa; soon they will have others on Lake Tanganyika and Lake Victoria. The International Exploration Society, founded under the auspices of the King of the Belgians, will send into the country travellers, emigrants, artisans of every kind. It has been shown that a telegraphic line could easily be established from Cairo to Natal and the Cape. Lieutenant Cameron thinks that railways uniting the centre of Africa to the coast, would not be long in paying their expenses.

If, therefore, England consented to fix her attention in this direction, an unbroken current of civilisation would speedily cross Africa from Alexandria to the Cape along the line of the high table-lands. The English would thus erect for themselves an empire as extensive as that of India, with virgin lands of far greater fertility, with a more agreeable climate, and completely free from long droughts. The wealth of Cuba, of Brazil, of the Southern States of the American Union, comes of the circumstance that the white man directs the toil of the black, under a tropical sun that only the latter can

support. In the centre of Africa the same advantages would exist, with the free labour of the natives, and without the necessity of employing capital in the purchase of slaves. The capitalist would enjoy all the benefits of the European wages-system, which does not compel the master to trouble himself about the lot of those in his employ. Even the European himself could work far better there than at the Antilles or in India. The Anglo-Saxon race, mistress of Africa, mistress of America, mistress of Australia, would thus reach the fulfilment of its high destinies. In face of so magnificent a prospect as this, how comes London to agitate itself at the idea that Russia will seize this or the other petty place in Armenia?

As for India, necessarily England will lose it in the end. The reason is plain. I say nothing of the danger of the approach of the Russians, which must go on with time, without necessarily ending in a shock. But the more actively the English set up railways in India, canals, manufactories, schools—the more, in a word, they civilise the natives—by so much the more rapidly will they be hastening the epoch of their coming of age, and consequently their aspirations after independence. What do we see in Europe? In proportion as a country is instructed, and so acquires consciousness of itself, the national feeling awakes. Formerly there was the patriotism of the church-steeple, the local sentiment: the national sentiment did not exist, because the various groups of which a country consisted had little communication with one another, and did not feel themselves a unit. At the beginning of the present century, neither Italians, nor Germans, nor Slavs, ever dreamed of vindicating their ethnographical unity, while in the treaties of that time diplomatists parcelled out the populations as if they had been flocks of sheep. To-day the sentiment of race is the principal factor in all the changes which the map of Europe is undergoing. India in this respect is still in the Middle Ages. But let the press work, the schools, the railways, and she will rapidly arrive at the modern epoch, and then in spite of the diversities of caste, of origin, of manners, the national feeling and the desire for independence will awake. The English administer the Indian Empire better than any other European power would do, and infinitely better than native potentates. But the better the administration, the sooner will the hour of emancipation strike. It is simply impossible that a hundred thousand Europeans should continue indefinitely to govern two hundred millions of foreign subjects, when the latter have once been, in however slight a degree, penetrated with modern ideas.

If then the emancipation of India must inevitably take place, even in a remote future, a farsighted English minister ought already to take his measures. He ought to occupy Egypt in order that the

road to India may not be interrupted. And along the banks of the Nile he ought to advance towards the interior of the continent, so as to have a new colonial empire when the old empire comes to cut the bond that attaches it to the mother-country.¹ But, it is said, such a step would irritate the susceptibility of France and Italy. It may be that a certain movement of *amour propre* would take place, but in truth it would be a great gain for all the Mediterranean countries. If Egypt prospers, if it becomes the depot of an important trade with the interior, it is Marseilles, Brindisi, Trieste, Genoa, that would be the very first to profit by it. The occupation of Egypt would bring no substantial gain to Italy, and none to France, which have both of them so much to do at home; and even for England it would be rather a burden than anything else, if she had not India, the Cape, and the prospect of an immense expansion of the English element in Africa. If France had expended on the colonisation of the departments of the Centre, that are so grievously in need of population and of capital, the two or three millions that Algiers cost her, it would plainly have been a far better way of using the money. She would then have no reason to regret the want of a new Algeria, at a time when she is thinking of giving up the Algeria that she already possesses.

The impartial and disinterested examination of the existing situation leads us to believe that Lord Derby in his last speech was completely in the right, when he said that the sovereign interest of England is the maintenance of peace. The maintenance of peace: for even the most fortunate war would bring to the English no advantage which they could not secure without war. In Europe Russia will not keep Constantinople, nor even the mouths of the Danube. In Asia Minor such annexations as Russia may make, will not bring her sensibly nearer to India, but they will considerably lessen the distance that separates her from Syria and the Suez Canal. To secure this passage, and to preserve her authority in the East, England will therefore be obliged in spite of herself to declare a protectorate over Egypt. This will be an indispensable measure of compensation, which every true friend of humanity, to whatever nation he belongs, ought sincerely to applaud.

ÉMILE DE LAVELEYE.

(1) The annexation of the Transvaal has caused a keen chagrin among all Netherlanders, and I have been able to understand it all the better, because, as a Fleming, I belong to the same stock as the Boers. But if it remains isolated, the future of the Transvaal is very narrow. By forming a part of the British Confederation, the Boers will be equally free, better protected against the Caffres, and in a better position for entering the general movement of Southern Africa. The French of Canada and of Neuchâtel and Vaud are happier than those who live in France: the Italians of the Ticino happier than those of the kingdom of Italy; and the Germans of Zurich and Berne happier than those of the Empire. It will be the same with the Boers.