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THE MINISTERIAL POSITION
AND ITS DANGERS.

THREE LETTERS,

REPRINTED FROM

THE GERMAN GENERAL GAZETTE.

BY

LORD STRATHEDEN AND CAMPBELL.

LONDON:

EDWARD STANFORD, 55, CHARING CROSS, S.W.

1883.

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THIRD LETTERS,

With Edward Stanford's

Compliments.

55, Charing Cross

London, S. W.

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EDWARD STANFORD, 55, CHARING CROSS, &c.

1885

Houses of the Oireachtas

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PREFATORY NOTICE.

THESE letters are reprinted from a German organ of considerable influence, in which they at first appeared, with the view of accurately stating the ministerial position in Great Britain, against which the European press in May 1882 had already uttered a condemnatory protest. As they were framed during December, it might be thought that subsequent events had now impaired their application. A glance at what has actually occurred suggests an opposite conclusion.

In its essence the ministerial position is unaltered. Since December last, however, some new circumstances have arisen, which place the obligation of correcting it in a far stronger light than at that moment could exist.

Since December, it has been shown that the absence of the First Minister for six weeks in a foreign country is immaterial to the deliberations of the Cabinet and the proceedings of the Legislature; while it had previously been demonstrated that his mere name, so far from being a cause of strength, is a cause of weakness at home, in

Ireland, and in Europe. During the last three years it has been repeatedly maintained that, although the power of the First Minister may be usurped, irregular, and dangerous, it is a condition necessary to the despatch of public business under a Liberal majority. That mode of thinking is repelled by the unanswerable logic of events and of experience.

Since December, an inquiry having been proposed and urged repeatedly as to the transactions at Kilmainham, Mr. Gladstone, on the 8th of March, finally resolved by parliamentary obstruction to defeat it.

Since December, the wave of Irish disturbance, which beginning in the provinces had gradually possessed itself of Dublin, has broken out in London. An age of dynamite has been inaugurated.

Since December, the House of Commons by a majority of 3, and then by a majority of 106, has declared the First Minister incompetent to lead it. Abroad, the event has led to comments, some of which deserve to be enumerated. The *République Française* of May 6th tells us: "A blow such as that which was inflicted on Mr. Gladstone the other day ought to induce him to withdraw from the House, as he has, it is stated, manifested the desire of doing." We see in the *New York Herald* of May 4th: "His [Mr. Gladstone's] speech left it to be inferred that he would stand or fall by the

Affirmation Bill. . . . In any case he will lose credit both in Parliament and the country, and the doom which awaited him before the Egyptian war cannot be very long deferred." According to the *Journal de St. Pétersbourg*, "Mr. Gladstone has sustained a severe 'échec moral,' which will, perhaps, induce him to carry out the idea entertained by him of abandoning public life." The *Univers* thinks that "Mr. Gladstone's defeat on this pitiful question may accelerate his retirement." The *Moniteur de Rome* remarks: "The vote is a severe blow to the Cabinet; it proves that a considerable number of Liberals have separated themselves on this question from Mr. Gladstone." It is thus clear that the protest of the foreign press in May 1882 is rather strengthened than retracted.

Since December, it has been shown that the Conservative reaction is advancing, and that as we have reached a temper in the House of Commons from which a Dissolution might arise, the Conservative reaction may at any moment be fatal to the Liberal majority. The Liberal majority would have to struggle against the constant law by which, under the new representation, governments are overthrown, or were in 1868, in 1874, in 1880, the only cases which experience has given. But it would have to struggle also against the crushing imputation of having since the General Election, without necessity, submitted to a leader too much entangled by the agencies of Russia—however

innocently or however conscientiously—to preserve his freedom for the objects of Great Britain. To put an end to that tie at once is now, in self-defence, the urgent obligation of the Liberal majority.

Since December, Lord Rosebery, who, from the patronage he threw round Mr. Gladstone at Midlothian, may be considered as the founder of the ministerial position in the special form which it assumed, has openly abandoned it, on account of no difference with the Secretary of State for the Home Department, to whom, according to the language of that functionary, he was bound equally “by political friendship and by personal affection.”

The first letter which recalls the General Election and its circumstances is as valid as when originally written. The second, which exhibits certain dangers flowing from the ministerial position, might be enriched by further illustration, especially in reference to Ireland, but contains nothing which has now been superseded. The third, which points to methods of escape, requires no qualification, although it might be easily improved upon. Of these methods one was more particularly advocated in a speech of March 19th, which is therefore added.

THE MINISTERIAL POSITION.

I.

SIR,— * * * *

The interval between the 1st of December and the 15th of February may well suggest the gravest thoughts upon the ministerial position. Even the best supporters of the Government as it exists, must recognise the facts which tend to call in question the foundation it reposes on. It is an object of distrust in quarters so remote as Mr. Bright, the Duke of Argyll, Lord Lansdowne, and Mr. Walter. From the difficulty of filling up the vacant places, it has been necessary for a considerable time to confer a double function on three members of the Cabinet. A Conservative reaction steadily increases. Dublin has now become the capital of Irish disturbance, instead of, as it used to be, the refuge from it. Under these circumstances, it may be useful to trace the ministerial position to its origin, which we are all, if much absorbed by its results, in danger of forgetting.

Men have frequently confounded the Liberal majority and ministerial position. But they

require to be distinguished. The Liberal majority was the outcome of the General Election; the ministerial position was not the outcome of the General Election. The electors of the United Kingdom resolved to overthrow Lord Beaconsfield after a distinct, a solemn, and an unretracted pledge that, if he was defeated, Mr. Gladstone could not possibly replace him. Mr. Gladstone had ceased to be the leader of a party. Another leader had avowedly succeeded to him. Politicians who renounced all allegiance to Mr. Gladstone actively contended to bring about a Liberal majority, and thus became a guarantee to the electors that Mr. Gladstone could not seize for his own purposes a Liberal majority if organised. How the electors would have acted, had the true prospect been revealed, it is impossible to fathom. We cannot sound a million consciences protected by the ballot. It is a problem no historian can settle. We are aware that the electors were deceived: we cannot tell to what extent they were controlled by the deception. No one is entitled to assume that if they had regarded Mr. Gladstone as an impending First Lord of the Treasury they would have formed a Liberal majority. In that case it would have been necessary to all who worked against Lord Beaconsfield to defend the whole career of Mr. Gladstone on the Eastern Question from 1875 to 1880. As it was, they were released from any obligation to excuse it. In the

race which had to be decided, an overwhelming weight was lifted from their saddle. The electors believed what Mr. Gladstone had repeatedly assured them, that if they were prevailed upon to give up Lord Beaconsfield, Lord Granville and Lord Hartington would form a government, to which the unofficial aid of Mr. Gladstone would be given. The plebiscite was not in favour of Mr. Gladstone, but of his designated successors. Had the electors deemed it possible that Mr. Gladstone would return to Downing Street as Premier, they must have deemed him capable of fiction or inconstancy. It is well known that their estimate was different. The existing régime may be good or bad, but it is not a régime founded on the General Election.

Again, it never had the sanction of a party. The judgment of the party which had triumphed was not invoked as to the novel and momentous step of putting down one leader and re-establishing another. It was not convened, as parties in our day are frequently convened, upon such questions. There was not any opportunity of argument against the startling proposal to accept in the face of an astonished Europe and a delighted Opposition—for such they were—responsibility for every error upon foreign policy of which a statesman can be guilty. No protest could be entered against what many of the party must have thought a fatal and extravagant conclusion. It never had the sanction of a club where party

interests are cultivated, although any one of three might have been asked to stamp it with a fiat.

At no time was it declared; either, that the actual leader of the party desired to surrender his priority. But if he had, it could not justify a breach of faith with the electors of the country. If he was entitled to suppress himself for Mr. Gladstone before the General Election, after the General Election he was not at liberty to do so. Public life is hopelessly demoralised when an Opposition supplants a Government under false colours, and only after victory is won, allows the world to see the real dominion to be founded on it.

The appointment of Mr. Gladstone did not spring from any overwhelming agitation, which might have partially excused it. It may be sometimes necessary to act upon the maxim, "The being of the State is more important than its well-being." It is better that a given politician should for a time enjoy usurped and even mischievous authority, than that a riot should invade and overthrow the two Houses of Parliament. But nothing of the kind was apprehended. No public meeting had suggested, no angry demonstration had required, the astonishing catastrophe. To the last moment the London press were wholly unprepared for it. There was not any scope for the resigned expression, "*Populus decipi vult, et decipiatur.*" Still less could the result be traced to any movement in the army, such as that by which a well-

known character was recently imposed upon the Khedive. It could not be connected with an imperial emergency which no one else was ready to encounter. A public man more qualified than any one to deal with an imperial emergency, in spite of usage, regularity, engagements, might be called on to preside over a government. The emergency was then as it is now in Ireland. So far was Mr. Gladstone from being particularly qualified to deal with it, that he was not aware of its existence, as he had the candour to proclaim to men whose votes he was soliciting. At that time, as now, the state of Europe caused anxiety. It will hardly be maintained that the true aims of foreign policy demanded on the part of the Cabinet an unexpected solidarity, either with his language at Midlothian, or with his speeches in 1877, or with the proceedings at St. James's Hall, or with the pamphlet on Bulgaria, or with the supporting criticism in a recent magazine of a Russian authoress, who laudably maintained the objects of the Czar against the objects of Great Britain.

But there was another possibility to give a shelter to an elevation so astonishing. The Crown might have dictated it. No doubt the choice of the First Minister depends upon the Sovereign. The leader of a party may not always recommend himself. A detached or partly independent politician may be better suited to a complication of

affairs which it becomes the Crown to estimate and to provide for. In that manner Lord Chatham, who was not the leader of a party, was asked to supersede Lord Rockingham, who was the leader of a party, and to form a Government in 1766. In that manner the Earl of Aberdeen, who led only a small group in one House of Parliament, was asked to form a Government at the end of 1852. If, however, an event which fixed the wonder of mankind could have been traced to such a movement or initiative, when the two Houses met in May 1880 the explanation must have been presented with alacrity by those who had an interest in giving it. They did not offer any explanation, and thus absolved the Crown from all responsibility. They silently admitted that Mr. Gladstone had been forced upon the Sovereign by methods which would not bear the light of parliamentary discussion.

Some must have thought that Mr. Gladstone had a special title to the office of First Minister. What was it? We have already seen it could not be that he was specially adapted to any exigency of the moment. But had he served the Opposition with fidelity? In 1874 he openly declined to serve it any longer; soon after chose himself a path they could not possibly adventure on; and yet at times insisted that they ought to be regarded as his followers. Against Lord Beaconsfield he delivered many speeches which were not needed to

create the Liberal majority. Those very speeches have been his burden in authority, and could not therefore be his title to it. The General Election of 1874 proclaimed that Mr. Gladstone was incapable of governing. The General Election of 1880 did nothing to efface that verdict, since Mr. Gladstone did not come before it as a candidate for power. It may be thought at first that such a retrospect is useless. When, however, it is seen that a given ministerial position is neither rooted in the judgment of electors, nor the judgment of a Sovereign, nor the judgment of a party; that it does not spring from policy, or from necessity, or gratitude; it becomes more easy to correct it, should it be found that its correction is required, with a view to guard against the dangers which surround us. At present it would be too long a task to indicate those dangers.

Your faithful servant.

LONDON, *December.*

II.

SIR,—

The dangers occasioned by the ministerial position so anomalously formed, are too numerous to be brought within the compass of a letter. I pass over some which must occur to every reflecting politician. It is enough to concentrate the mind at first upon the mode in which the system threatens the cohesion of the Liberal majority.

As no single member of that body was pledged in any manner to support the actual First Minister, as he had himself renounced all title to allegiance, as he had conspicuously embraced an order of ideas the party could not sanction, no one in either House of Parliament is bound in any manner to support him. Without the slightest deviation from party ties and party obligations, public men who helped to overthrow Lord Beaconsfield may resist on every occasion a successor, they neither laboured to create, nor counted upon finding. The most ingenious whipper-in has no answer when they tell him that Mr. Gladstone was not their leader from 1874 to 1880; that he never became so by any subsequent transaction; that they believed his abdication to be genuine; that they were not consulted as to its mysterious withdrawal; that when he disappears again they will again admit the force of their suspended obligations. It is true that in the House of Commons numbers who look to Dissolution as a hanging sword will vote with the First Minister, however violently forced upon them. Since 1880 it has been so. But every session Parliament approaches its legal term, the hanging sword is less effective. In the House of Lords the process I have mentioned has been long ago illustrated. A well-known peer* has—for the time—renounced the party altogether. The cross benches are perpetually

* Lord Brabourne.

occupied, while those who sit behind the Government reserve their title to denounce it. If such a tendency continues, the actual support of the Government in that House will be soon restricted to itself—an isolated group between two fires ready to destroy it. A party is half dissolved when its own members are free, without reproach or inconsistency, to drive its acting leader from his station, in order to establish the arrangement which he himself had recommended to them.

I now approach the danger as to Ireland. During the last two years, in that country, which I have frequently to visit, the Executive has been entirely discredited. From the Atlantic to St. George's Channel there are not two opinions on the subject. The Executive, however, has been partially corrected. But the Executive consists in fact of the Lord-Lieutenant, of his Secretary, and the Prime Minister behind them. Unless all three of the component parts, not only two, are superseded, it cannot possibly regain consideration it has forfeited. Until it does, coercion, as we see, is wholly ineffectual. The leniency of an Executive which inspires respect, is better than the violence of an Executive which a successful agitation has taught the people to look down upon. Beyond that, it is easy to perceive that the withdrawal of Mr. Gladstone, not only as the leading member of a discredited Executive, but on other grounds as

well, would be conducive to distinct pacification. It is not the language of reproach to mention that he has been led by good as well as doubtful measures, to alienate all classes one after another in that country. By his measure on the Irish Church he was obliged, however excellent the scheme, to alienate the Protestants. By a series of emphatic publications against the Vatican, however difficult to answer, he was compelled to alienate the Catholics. By three agrarian projects, even if we think them just and well considered, he made the landlords his implacable antagonists. By repression long delayed and suddenly administered, he estranged at last the tenant-farmers and the masses. All local knowledge will convince us that nothing but his fall can purchase general tranquillity. But now his power over Ireland has become more dangerous than it used to be. He has announced the doctrine that the First Minister in Downing Street may govern in absolute defiance of the Lord-Lieutenant and the Secretary. The late Lord-Lieutenant and his Secretary—we have it from their mouths—insisted upon one policy, the First Minister resolved to overrule it by another. The principle is not confined to any single application. At any moment Ireland may be treated against the judgment of the Lord-Lieutenant and the Secretary. They may resign, indeed, as they did lately; but they are replaced by those who cannot suddenly extemporise a knowledge of the circum-

stances, and who begin their work as vacant tablets for the Premier to inscribe upon. According to the noble Earl who lately held that office, the error of the last few years has been the undue annihilation of the Viceroy. It is now to be corrected by the undue annihilation of the Viceroy and the Secretary both together. The new régime for Ireland is the régime of ignorance in Downing Street. Can ignorance in Downing Street be deemed too strong or too unguarded an expression? Let us remember what occurred as to the committee of Lord Donoughmore. The House of Lords having resolved to inquire into the Land Act on grounds which seemed to them conclusive, the First Minister induced the House of Commons, by the latent fear I have alluded to, to declare that such inquiry was culpable, and ought to be avoided. Soon afterwards the same Minister embarked on a new legislative scheme, to which evidence upon the operation of the Land Act was altogether indispensable. If the first of these steps was not to be ascribed to ignorance in Downing Street, it could only be explained by restless aspiration to beget collision in the two Houses of Parliament. Its results, however we explain it, were deplorable. The uninitiated were led to think that the House of Lords was guilty of extravagance; the enlightened at once remarked that the House of Commons was compelled to sacrifice its judgment to its terror.

To sum up the danger as to Ireland, which cannot be too accurately contemplated. The First Minister is part of a despised and broken-down Executive ; he is individually, although it may be upon no sufficient ground, obnoxious to that country ; he is wedded to a doctrine from which confusion must arise, even if it had not previously existed.

I go on, therefore, to the foreign danger to which the ministerial position lays us open. It is too generally recognised to call for searching exposition. Nine men in ten are ready to admit that, when Mr. Gladstone was allowed "to leap and bound" into the offices he holds, the interests of foreign policy were sacrificed, even if—incapable of estimating risks—they hold that parliamentary convenience justified the sacrifice. What all can see, requires but a little decomposing, to reduce it to its elements, and justify the feeling which prevails already. Egypt has become a momentary centre for diplomacy to work upon. The occupation we propose, however limited, requires the good-will of several important capitals which have the power to embarrass us. Mr. Gladstone renders the good-will of all those capitals impossible. His power is resented at Vienna in consequence of language at the General Election, which might not be imprudent or improper when he renounced all views of coming back as Premier, but which assumed that character when his original engagement was suppressed. His power is resented at Berlin because, in 1879,

the German Empire departed at great hazard from the line of Russia, and was entitled to protest on seeing Great Britain, in 1880, suddenly adopt it, by the irregular promotion of a retired leader, in whom Russia knew the loudest of her advocates. At Paris his power has become still more an object of resentment in reference to late events, although it may be possibly unreasoning. Two years ago in Berlin it was easy to remark a current of political opinion strong enough to overwhelm him, if any action was permitted to it, while in Paris the current ran entirely in the opposite direction. These rival capitals are now united with regard to him.

The direct tendency of the ministerial position which exists is to revive the union of Russia, Austria, and Germany, technically known as the Holy Alliance, and which has always been unfavourable to the objects of Great Britain. Russia, by whom it was originally framed, may naturally aim at its revival. How much importance is attached to it, the movements of M. de Giers sufficiently illustrate. In exact proportion to their estrangement from Great Britain, Austria and Germany are drawn to that Alliance. Great Britain is the counteracting agency to separate them from it. Great Britain cannot be that counteracting agency when she is herself—by the well-known and well-remembered conduct of her actual minister—identified with Russia. How are Germany and Austria to detach themselves perpetually from

Russia, when they observe no power in the world inclined either to repay their loss or countenance their action? There is a limit to the virtue of States as well as that of individuals, when a seductive force is brought to bear upon them.

The ministerial position tends immediately to another war upon the Eastern Question. It does so in this manner. So long as the implacable accuser of the Ottoman Empire is known to lead our counsels, we cannot possibly expect to have the influence we once possessed at Constantinople. The war of 1877 reduced that influence to zero. The advent of Mr. Gladstone brought it down much further. The line pursued in reference to Greece and Montenegro, even if just to them, even if useful to the world, was calculated to depress it. The Conference imposed last year upon the Sultan lowered it profoundly. We are unable, therefore, to advance in any way the cause of Ottoman improvement. The assemblies sleep; their founder is in exile; the despotic rule of 1875 is re-established; the movement of the Softas is defeated; the fall of Abdul Aziz is effaced and unproductive. Under these circumstances Russia cannot be without the grounds of interference or aggression. But at the same time there is a conviction at St. Petersburg—it ought not to surprise us—that interference or aggression will not be resisted by this country while Mr. Gladstone is its Minister. Last of all, the fear of an appropriating

policy, to which the campaign in Egypt is regarded as a preface, kindles the desire of action beyond the Pruth, and brings back the hope so vividly imparted by the Czar Nicholas to Sir Hamilton Seymour, that one power fixed upon the Nile, may see no inconvenience in the other fixed upon the Bosphorus.

If we desire to surmount the complications we have plunged into; if we desire to avert a new Holy Alliance; if we desire to bar the way to another Eastern war; the ministerial position must be seriously altered, and restored to that form which can alone pretend to any sanction from the General Election.

Your faithful servant.

LONDON, *December.*

III.

SIR,—

It is not my intention to insist on any single method by which the change to be desired may be effected. It seems worth while, however, if the ministerial position was always illegitimate, and cannot longer be submitted to with prudence, to exhibit for comparison the more obvious modes by which it may be altered.

Lord Lansdowne, the Duke of Argyll, Lord Cowper, Mr. Forster, and Mr. Bright, have all, in the most honourable manner, contributed to shake

the ministerial position. If other members of the Government were only led to follow the example they have given, it would soon be brought under more regular authority. It may be said that all the five objected to a given course the Government resolved upon. No doubt it was so. But every member of the Government, without objecting to a given course, has yet sufficient ground for his withdrawal. The Liberal majority was brought about by the exertion and expenditure of many who never contemplated Mr. Gladstone as a leader—who would have done their utmost to uphold Lord Beaconsfield, although they were his political opponents, had they been told that the remnant or rump of 1874 was to be again imposed upon the country; that the pretended leadership of Lord Granville and Lord Hartington was destined to evaporate; that the pretended abdication of Mr. Gladstone was a fable. Beyond the consular and diplomatic services, which are independent of first ministers, every member of the Government enjoys his post by a discreditable tenure. The moment he is influenced by the maxim "*Noblesse oblige*," or "*Avant tout on est gentilhomme*," he will cease to hold it. The measure would not be inadequate. It was shown in the time of the Crimean war, when Lord John Russell had come back from a mission at Vienna, that a limited array even of subordinates upon the Treasury Bench may act upon the ministerial

position, at the cost of a distinguished personage, if not the actual First Lord of the Treasury. The ground of the proceeding then was less distinct than at this moment. The subordinates of that day were guided by their own interpretation of a subtle point in foreign policy which might be variously canvassed, and set their private judgment above that of a Secretary of State, a Plenipotentiary, and an ex-Prime Minister. The matter which now calls for action is a question of honour and of faith which might be easily disposed of in a nursery. Ought men to hold offices which they have only reached by solemn guarantees that the Minister they now support was not about to be their leader. It is true that this question is more serious to Lord Granville and Lord Hartington than other members of the Government, as during six years they were the avowed accepted leaders of the party. Their obligation is more cogent, because they were the actual guarantors of that which has not been accomplished. But every member of the Government who holds office at this moment, holds it by the aid of those who would not have suffered him to hold it, who would have averted the formation of a Liberal majority, had the true but latent prospect been declared to them.

But as the conscience of public men is not in our age regarded as a solid or available material for policy, and as there is little reason to suppose that

three years in place will render it more scrupulous than it was shown to be at the beginning of them, it may be useful to approach a second possibility of acting on the ministerial position. It may be useful to consider how far the manifested judgment of the world would be sufficient to correct it.

After the terrible event in the Phoenix Park, a voice from all parts suggested and demanded the very change alluded to. I have before me a crowd of extracts from the press of America and Europe, in which at that time the fall of Mr. Gladstone was insisted on. They come from four and twenty organs, without including those of Hungary and Spain, which were not less decided. The Russian *Golos* even joined in the chorus. The language varied in intensity, but united in the view that Great Britain ought not to depend upon a minister who drew from Ireland such a sanguinary protest. The language of foreign countries is said to be the language of posterity declared to us beforehand. When the mind of foreign countries has just been purged by grief and terror—if it be true that tragedy so purges it—the counsel it sends forth has more significance than otherwise it would have. It stands, however, unretracted. The irresolute proceedings which culminated in a war with Egypt, and made the state of Ireland far more critical than ever, have not affected the conclusion of the world after the death of Mr. Burke and Lord Frederick Cavendish. The military

lustre—bright indeed—of a campaign which, had ability directed our affairs, would never have existed, leaves the judgment on the register. The late calamities in Dublin renovate and sanction it together. Foreign nations may have been precipitate when, in May last, they urged the immediate fall of Mr. Gladstone. They might not understand the obstacles to action which parliamentary routine created in the middle of a session. They might not see that the event which filled them with dismay rendered it more difficult to find another leader of the House of Commons, and another leader of the Cabinet, until a lull of business was arrived at. But in its essence, when sustained by policy so clear as that which I have ventured to delineate, the voice should be regarded as oracular. Of all the Continental powers, the German Empire—on grounds exhibited already—is the most aggrieved by our ministerial position. With nearly every other power backing it, it may close at any moment the irregular supremacy against which Europe has protested. The geographical position of Heligoland and that of Holland both enable it to do so.

But it would not be correct to state that we depend on foreign nations for deliverance. The well-known example of Lord Oxford, in the reign of Queen Anne, twenty-five years after the Revolution of 1688, and when the limits of prerogative were settled, discovers the resources of the British

Constitution, and its faculty to extricate us. A precedent is not sufficient without a principle and an authority. The principle is obvious. If a first minister could only be removed by parliamentary majorities, what follows? Even his insanity—should it unhappily arise—would not admit of his withdrawal, without the fall of the whole Government and without the substitution of another. But such a change may be opposed to policy and adverse to opinion. In that case Parliament is useless. There must be elsewhere a withdrawing power, to avert the hazard of a mind entirely incapable and suddenly deranged presiding over the Executive. As to authority, the resolution of Queen Anne is censured neither by Mr. Hallam nor Lord Stanhope. Historians of that age, they were bound to censure, if they disapproved it. But even if they censured her decision, it does not follow they would censure every use of the prerogative she exercised. When Queen Anne deemed it right to supersede the Earl of Oxford, he had not been imposed upon a party by a mysterious arrangement which neither he nor any of his colleagues ventured to explain, after engaging formally that he would never be its leader. His separation from the Government was far from being essential to tranquillity in Ireland. He was not obnoxious to the first and best of our allies; he did not bar the line of foreign policy the nation was engaged by treaty to adhere to; the voice of Europe had not been pro-

nounced with unanimity and gravity against him ; he was not adding to our insecurity abroad ; and he was not the schoolmaster of confiscation to the legislature.

These appear to be the methods of acting on the ministerial position. I declare no preference for any of them. The action of the press might possibly unite and harmonise, or supersede them altogether.

Your faithful servant.

LONDON, *December.*

SPEECH.

House of Lords, Monday, 19th March, 1883.

LORD STRATHEDEN AND CAMPBELL, in calling attention to the foreign policy of Her Majesty's Government, and moving for a copy of the Treaty formed between Germany and Austria in 1879, said: My Lords, let me return my thanks to the noble and learned Earl upon the Woolsack, who has withdrawn the Notice which stood first upon the Paper. He merits thanks, whatever reasons have directed him, since his Notice might have led to the exclusion of other topics for the evening. It is superfluous to point out that this House ought sometimes to devote itself to foreign matters, as it has done in recent years with credit and advantage. It is clear that the best time for such a purpose is the interval between the first day of the Session

and the Recess at Easter, when legislation makes no great demand upon your Lordships. The debate on the Address gives no sufficient opportunity—if it gives any opportunity—of this kind. We have two ceremonial performances—a speech from the Opposition, a speech from the Government, when the House at once collapses, unless an Amendment has been moved, which scarcely ever happens. Besides, foreign policy has no special title to discussion at that moment. It is only before the House in a congeries of topics. If this Notice is a wide one, its intention is merely to give noble Lords a choice of the ground they may resolve to tread, which, at all events, is limited to the transactions of three years, all more or less conducting to the present state of Egypt. As to the Motion I conclude with, every one knows that the agreement between Germany and Austria has led to more discussion, in the autumn which has passed, than it did even soon after the celebrated journey of Prince Bismarck to Vienna, which is thought to have produced it.

With the permission of the House, I will go back a minute to the formation of the Government under its present Head in 1880. I shall be cautious not to wound the sensibilities of those who are indebted to him for their Offices or Peerages. It is only necessary to remark that his sudden elevation—no outcome of the General Election—when he had ceased for many years to be the Leader of a Party,

begot a certain antecedent probability as to the tenour of the foreign policy he influenced. Men who recollect—perhaps with admiration, or, if you like it, with well-founded admiration—his pamphlet on Bulgaria, his movement at St. James's Hall, his speeches in January 1877—when war upon the Eastern Question was impending—those which followed at Midlothian, above all, his laudatory criticism of a Russian work intended to direct opinion in this country, must acknowledge that his unexpected advent to political supremacy had a tendency, at least, to stamp two characteristics on the direction of the Foreign Office. It had a tendency to stamp on the direction of the Foreign Office, undue antagonism with the Porte and frequent deference to Russia, by which grave difficulties might be possibly created. I propose to touch on one or two transactions—there have not been many—which may show how far that antecedent probability has been supported by events and verified in action. If it has, a practical conclusion may suggest itself, or I would not detain the House this evening.

The first conspicuous step was the recall of Sir Henry Layard from Constantinople. No doubt, as the noble Marquess who leads upon the other side once pointed out, every Government must exercise its judgment in the choice of representatives, as, indeed, it must do in the choice of legislative measures. But it does not follow that the judgment

is correct. It does not follow that a bad and culpable decision may not arise in one sphere or the other. The motives for that recall may have been excellent and virtuous. They may have been free from all vindictive animosity. They may have had no reference to any previous differences between the First Minister and the Ambassador. The consequences, as may be quickly seen, have been deplorable. Sir Henry Layard had this particular advantage. Appointed by another Government, even if he went on serving under this one, in the eyes of the Sublime Porte he was not thoroughly identified with the implacable hostility the First Minister had shown to that Power. Whoever came directly from the Government inevitably was so. Sir Henry Layard was the only person who had any chance of influence at Stamboul, under a Government at home so thoroughly obnoxious to the leaders in that capital. The Government destroyed a force for gaining their own objects they could not possibly replace by any force they might create—however good—because they had created it, because it was their offspring and their reflex. But the recall of Sir Henry Layard had another consequence, which has never yet been properly appreciated. It finally restored the arbitrary power of the Sultan. Sir Henry Layard was the convinced and zealous patron of the Ottoman Assemblies. Among his last despatches he insisted on them as the only safeguard against risks which

were approaching. He would have had a prospect of restoring them after the fall the Russian war had brought upon them. He was acquainted with their mechanism; he had seen them at work; and he could dwell upon their action before the war, and after it began, down to the time the Russian army reached San Stefano. No one else could hold such language as was open to him. It would have been absurd for Mr. Goschen—although he was instructed in some manner—to attempt it. This untoward step restored to confidence and vigour the despotic system of the Palace and its labyrinth of influences. The triumph of the Softas, the fall of Abdul Aziz, the kind of revolution which had happened and been so favourable to our objects, were quite obliterated, or wholly thrown away, when Sir Henry Layard was compelled to turn his back upon Constantinople. But if the Government determined to fence round the arbitrary power of the Sultan—an extraordinary scheme for those who had a Liberal majority behind them—but one course remained, namely, to draw towards themselves such an important and necessary factor in our policy. Having rendered him omnipotent when he might have been restrained and counteracted, they were forced either to propitiate or lose him altogether.

Can it be said, my Lords, if we refer even in a perfunctory manner to the transactions which ensued, that there was any such conciliating effort?

The affair of Montenegro followed. No doubt the Prince of Montenegro was entitled, by the Treaty of Berlin, to certain acquisitions. It is true that great embarrassments arose from the revolt of the Albanians against the transfer stipulated; that many substitutions were invented for what the Treaty had laid down; and that a long time elapsed before the princely claim was satisfied. But we were not bound to interfere in any manner beyond the other signatories of the Treaty. The aggrandisement of Montenegro was ceded by the Treaty, as many other things were ceded, to the position of the Czar, the force of arms, the vestiges of conquest. It was not a British object to enforce or to accelerate it. The gain, if any, was to Russia, who, in the Prince of Montenegro, sees a vassal and a pensioner. Russia may have been entitled to a leading and energetic part upon the subject. It was not so with Great Britain. She ought to have stood still when another Power was quite sufficient for the difficulty. But the language which was held, the naval combination which was organised, the menace about Smyrna, without gaining to any great extent the Prince of Montenegro—if that had been desirable—were inevitably calculated to alienate the Sultan, whose power of reprisals the withdrawal of Sir Henry Layard had imprudently consolidated.

The case of Greece was stronger in the same direction. Greece had no title of any sort under

the Treaty of Berlin. No acquisition was secured to her. The signatory Powers were engaged only to mediate between Greece and the Sublime Porte as to any change which they desired in their frontier. The Government were ready, by means of violence and arms, had other Powers concurred, to deprive the Sultan of his territory, to enforce an act of lawless spoliation, to insist upon a frontier recommended by a Conference, indeed, but which that Conference had no authority to settle, unless both parties acquiesced in it. To establish it the Government were ready to make an unprovoked, unjust, unprofitable war upon the Sultan. It would have been unprovoked, as he had done nothing to their prejudice. It would have been unjust, as no ground for it existed. It would have been unprofitable, because the extension of Greek territory, although it may be a Hellenic, is not in any way a British object. It has been long ago established that to extend Greece does nothing for the permanent solution of the Eastern Question, and that a Grecian *régime* at Constantinople would be useless to defend it. Greece, like any State, is perfectly entitled to look for acquisition by the ordinary methods, such as marriage, which conferred Bohemia upon Austria; such as purchase, which drew Louisiana to the United States; such as conquest, which reunited Alsace and Lorraine with the German Empire. But that Great Britain should contemplate, by land or sea, a war for her

aggrandisement, would be incredible unless the papers thoroughly disclosed it. Who ventures to deny that our conduct on this question was adapted to lead the Sultan—whom we had rendered more despotic—into new and well-founded resentment?

The further system of the Government was to incite, to animate, and keep up a European Concert, as they termed it, to direct him. It is true that Spain and Sweden were excluded from it. The European Concert having passed away, is not entitled to much notice. We need not trample on a spectre. Nothing of the kind had ever been invented since the Concert which so long struggled to assert itself at Carlsbad, Troppau, Laybach, and Verona. It may have arisen partly from the Congress of Berlin, attempting to maintain itself, in other shapes and modes, after its business was accomplished. The principle on which a Congress sometimes endeavours to perpetuate itself admits of serious objection. The normal object of a Congress is to restore the balance of power, when war has interrupted it, or been occasioned by its absence. It is so laid down, at least, among the Treaties of Vienna.* But if a Congress which unites the great preponderance of European States resolves to be immortal, the balance of power can have no existence. The Congress defeats itself when it survives the temporary object which

* See Capefigue sur les Traités de Vienne.

created it. I merely throw this out for the reflection of diplomatists. Whether it is just or not, there can be no doubt that the so-termed European Concert was most obnoxious to the Empire against which it seemed to be arrayed, and that for a long time the Government exulted in the shibboleth.

At last the well-known mutinies of February 1881 and September 1881—for I have brought the House to Egypt—created so much apprehension, that the Sultan—arbitrary Sovereign as we had made him at Constantinople—became far more essential to us than he had been. On those events it must have been seen at once that we might have to ask his military succour—as we did—and that the whole value of that succour would depend upon the mind and temper with which he looked upon Great Britain. What course was taken to improve them? By what measures was it sought to calm the deep and bitter animosity so long and so elaborately kindled? He was ordered not to send even Commissioners to examine a disturbance in his Empire. When his Commissioners proceeded, adverse gunboats counteracted them. The Dual Note—allowed to have been useless—was resolved on, in defiance to his wishes. Against his protestation, French and British ships advanced to Egypt, to do no good to Europeans—their sole pretext—but to remain the idle and humiliated witnesses of massacre. Alexandria was bombarded, for no purpose which has ever been

explained, against the judgment of the French, implied in their departure, to the dismay and horror of Mahometan society. At last a Conference—against the usages of independent Powers—was forced upon his capital. The antagonism of the First Minister could not go much further. In the meanwhile there was a long course of retaliation from the Sultan. His measures were, in a high degree, precipitate and hostile. He thwarted us on every chance, on every occasion. He declined to send troops to Egypt on any acceptable basis. He gave a decoration to Arabi, which was utterly unwarrantable. He seemed to foster every movement with which Great Britain was contending. The fact is, he had a long course of outrage to excite him, and no political Assemblies to control him. Her Majesty's Government had administered the one, and been a fatal bar to the revival of the other. Your Lordships will remember they had organised the arbitrary power which they were unwilling to assuage, and, as it seems, unable to contend with.

The outcome is complete incompatibility between Her Majesty's Government and the Suzerain of Egypt. It is avowed, however, that the state of Egypt is embarrassing. It is not necessary to establish it by details. The Government avow it in a manner pointed and emphatic. They avow it by the removal of Lord Dufferin from Constantinople at the time when he is indispensable to the post

which properly belongs to him. The accord of the Porte is seen to be desirable. A long despatch—unanswered still—is seeking to obtain it. It can hardly be obtained by a Chargé d’Affaires, who, according to the law of nations, is but accredited to the Minister, and has no access to the Sovereign. But still the pressure of embarrassment in Egypt is so urgent that—to bring Lord Dufferin to bear upon it—the British Embassy at Constantinople is virtually shut up when nearly all depends upon its action. The British Embassy at Constantinople is virtually shut up when the person who directs it, in times like these, has no sufficient *locus standi* to demand an audience of the Sultan. It cannot happen otherwise in the despotic system which the Government determined on upholding when they withdrew the only person qualified to alter it. To keep up tranquillity in Egypt there are but two agencies—one, cordial relations with the Sultan; the other, a British garrison permanently settled in that country. Cordial relations with the Sultan have been, as I hold, wantonly destroyed—at all events entirely abandoned. The occupation therefore promises, or rather threatens, to be lasting. Some members of the Cabinet have pointed to the hazards of a lasting occupation. They are so great that even now the subject has not been exhausted, and I should wish to add a few remarks upon it.

A lasting occupation is a strain on our military

force in one direction, when Ireland is a strain upon it in another. We are not strong enough to bear it. Let noble lords read what General Sir Lintorn Simmons has lately written on the army. Suppose, however, that by changes brought about we become stronger, and the objection ceases altogether. A lasting occupation, in the Continental world, would be regarded as possession. When Great Britain possesses Egypt, we know by the avowal of a former Czar, that Russia will conceive a valid title to Constantinople to have come into existence. Some men have blindly reasoned or asserted that, so long as we are placed in Egypt, Constantinople is indifferent to us. They forget that a strong power at Constantinople would make our garrison in Egypt utterly untenable. They forget, also, that we uphold Constantinople not only to secure a passage into India, but far more immediately in order to defend the Mediterranean from an adverse force, and Asia Minor from a conquering invasion. Who ever stood upon the Bosphorus without perceiving that the Mediterranean and Asia Minor may be equally commanded from it? The lasting occupation in Egypt, towards which we are inclining by the want of any hold upon its Suzerain, tends to draw Russia across the Pruth, and make two Powers at least less vigilant in watching her.

Such is the effect in Egypt of the line into which foreign policy, since 1880, has been driven.

But it is worth while to estimate its tendency in different capitals which the Egyptian difficulty renders more important to us than they would have been. In Constantinople—but that was rendered clear before—Great Britain is not listened to. Do you require an authority? A week ago, upon the 12th of March, the Under Secretary, speaking for the Foreign Office, declared, in another place, that remonstrances addressed to the Sublime Porte about the Treaty of Berlin are wholly ineffectual. The catastrophe we always have to fear has come about. The Sultan appeals to Russia for protection against the conduct of Great Britain. It is affirmed by M. de Giers in the despatches now before us. What comes from him will not be lightly disregarded. In St. Petersburg the kind of Russian banner we hold up, in the person of the First Lord of the Treasury, gives strength to the party who are restless for the Treaty of San Stefano, and weakness to the party who are contented with the Treaty of Berlin. In Vienna we all know—as we were officially informed—in what manner our ministerial position is regarded. In Berlin its effect may be more positively dangerous, although I would not speak with confidence upon a workshop of events so difficult to penetrate. In that capital the Seven Years' War must still be recollected, if with us it is forgotten. Its great lesson was that Austria, France, and Russia may possibly unite against the

House of Hohenzollern. In exact proportion as Great Britain proclaims a deference to Russia, it is more hazardous for the German Empire to maintain a separation from her. The influence of Russia over Germany in its disjointed state was formerly supreme. If we look back to the accounts of travellers or residents in Germany some fifty years ago, they will abound with illustrations of it. In the Crimean War it had not vanished, as recent memoirs have explained to us.* Down to 1877 it still continued, or the war of that year would scarcely have been possible. In 1879 a new departure was inaugurated, and we are doing our utmost to reverse it. But if it is reversed, how long can you depend upon the safety of Constantinople?

It may be said that these are speculative arguments, and that the capitals referred to have not pronounced themselves in such a sense as I ascribe to them. The answer is, that they have done so. So far back as last May, when all the world, in common with ourselves, was under the impression of the tragical occurrences in Ireland, there was a chorus from the European press, anticipating the immediate downfall of Mr. Gladstone as a minister. I have at home a chain of telegrams to prove it. On what ground was the result anticipated by nearly all the organs of the Continent, except the eager wish of many States for its arrival?

* Memoirs of Lady Bloomfield.

In the outset I adverted to a practical conclusion as not unlikely to suggest itself. It is idle to dilate on inconveniences without adverting to a remedy. I would not come down to the House or trespass on your Lordships for that purpose. The remedy is not, indeed, original. It requires neither meditation nor invention to produce it. It is the project of the First Minister himself. For six years he incessantly explained to us, that if a Liberal majority was formed it ought not to be directed by himself, but by the noble Earl the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in this House, and by a noble Marquess well known in the other. Whoever shares in that opinion, whoever fearlessly proclaims it, is but the organ of his judgment, although he may not be the minion of his power.

To return, however, strictly to the domain of foreign policy, it is seldom you are able to give it an augmented dignity, or an improved direction, or more security and steadiness, upon terms so easy. It generally happens that to accomplish such results, some extraordinary armament, or some costly work, or some difficult alliance, or some adventurous decision, is required of you. It now arises from the turn of history, that to gain confidence in States where confidence is necessary, to inspire fear where fear is more desirable, to win gratitude where gratitude is useful, and to encourage fortitude where fortitude would aid you,

you have only to take down from the façade or frontage of the empire, a human emblem which never should have been set up—if you believe the gifted personage who forms it.

To bring that end about we do not want the action of the legislature, although it might be grave and patriotic. We do not want the interference of the Crown, although principle and precedent would justify it. We only need the resolution of the noble Earl the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the noble Marquess with whom he used to be associated. When they resolve to imitate the high-minded example of their departed colleagues in the two Houses of Parliament, the problem will adjust itself. It will be but a temporary sacrifice. It will only be the movement of a lifeboat. They will come back into the air of place, after a rapid plunge into the sea of honour and integrity.

In my remarks upon the course which foreign policy has taken, I have not intended to deny that the noble Earl the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs may frequently have exercised a wholesome influence upon it. But for him, Sir Henry Layard might have been replaced with far less judgment than he has been. But for him, Smyrna might have actually been occupied. But for him, we might have afterwards become in the defence of Greece the criminal invaders of the Sultan. But for him, the European Concert might have

longer been prepared, in the Old World and the New, to overthrow the boundary of empires, and to disturb the equanimity of sovereigns. But secretaries of state were not invented to control and mitigate first ministers. In looking back to these events we see two mighty elements of force erroneously distributed. The balance, which Europe deeply wants, is found to work with energy in Downing Street. The Concert, which Downing Street imperatively asks for, is suddenly exported to the Continent, although it does not flourish in that region. Let me add, that I have never for a moment censured the decision of the Government to go to war in Egypt by themselves, rather than leave it to the perilous dominion of Arabi. It was the remark, however, of a philosopher in the last century, that when heroic virtue is required, it is usually to overcome the difficulties which wisdom might have previously averted. There is a *primâ facie* case against a government which sends a warlike expedition. No doubt the laurels of a soldier are an impenetrable barrier to guard the nudity and weakness of a minister. They ought at times to be withdrawn from what they shelter. They will not fade by such a process.

Before sitting down, I wish to add another word about the motion. It is not a merely formal one. The greatest possible importance ought to be attached to the concurrence in 1879 of Germany

and Austria. The Holy Alliance, which had re-appeared, was interrupted, possibly concluded by it. It is a landmark in the diplomatic history of the world. It is a germ from which the European balance may be gradually elicited. It revived a hope which had become almost extinct. It suddenly bestowed what reason and persuasion had laboured idly to appropriate. And if, since 1880, we have done our utmost to subvert it, by indirectly driving Germany towards Russia, it now requires acknowledgment and tribute from your Lordships and the country. It is not irregular that we should have a treaty between two independent powers, which Great Britain never signed, or that of Unkiar Skelessi would not be before us. At the same time, should counsels in Berlin, which I have no pretension to interpret, withhold it from the light until a later period, I am the last person, upon many grounds, to urge the motion on your Lordships.

The noble Lord moved for an humble Address to the Crown, for the Treaty formed in 1879 between Germany and Austria.

After debate,—

LORD STRATHEDEN AND CAMPBELL, in reply, said: I need not detain the House, as no answer has been given to the views I brought before it, and as the noble Earl has not received the Treaty which I moved for. Whatever the noble Earl the

Secretary of State may have expected, I have not endeavoured to "survey mankind from China to Peru;" but, on the contrary, have gone over a series of transactions all belonging to one region, all linked with one another, and all contributing to form the great Egyptian difficulty which engages us at present.

Motion (by leave of the House) withdrawn.