

**BULGARIAN HORRORS  
AND THE QUESTION  
OF THE EAST**

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Bulgarian horrors and the question of the East by W. E. Gladstone

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**W. E. GLADSTONE**

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AND THE

## QUESTION OF THE EAST.

BY THE

RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.

*FIFTY-FOURTH THOUSAND.*

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Dedicated

TO

VISCOUNT STRATFORD DE REDCLIFFE,

WITH THE ADMIRATION WHICH ALL

ACCORD TO HIM,

AND THE ESTEEM WHICH HAS GROWN WITH A

FRIENDSHIP OF MORE THAN FORTY YEARS.

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IN the difficult question of the East, entangled by so many cross-purposes and interests, the people of this country have shown a just, but a very remarkable, disposition to repose confidence in the Government of the day: and the Government of the day has availed itself to the uttermost of that disposition. For months the nation was content, though measures and communications known to be of the highest interest were in progress, to remain without official information, and to subsist upon the fragmentary and uncertain notices which alone would transpire through the press. It had to dispense not only with official information, but with discussion in the House of Commons. Only on the thirty-first of July did the House of Commons receive, from the bounty of the Government, after interminable delays and in the dregs of the Session, a single night in which to review the transactions of the Administration, together with those of other Powers, during a twelve-month, and to ascertain the prospects and policy of the coming recess. The lateness of the period fixed for the debate went far to insure its inefficiency. But this was not enough; and further precautions were adopted. It was announced that, if the debate overflowed this narrow limit, it could only be finished in fragments; the ordinary business of the Government must proceed in preference to it, but it could doubtless be renewed on some day of yet thinner benches, deeper exhaustion, and greater nearness to the Twelfth of August, the principal and inviolate festival of the sportsman's calendar.

So much for discussion. Next as to information. For not weeks only but months together, appeal after appeal was made to the Government to supply Parliament with full and authentic information, in lieu of the scanty and uncertain notices which alone could be obtained from unofficial sources. Appeal after appeal was met with dilatory pleas. In these pleas, taken singly, there may often be much reason; but, in the aggregate, they were pushed to excess. Some measure was in progress, and could not be explained till it was completed; or was completed, and therefore a thing of the past, which had disappeared from the range of discussion; or was in contemplation, and the public interest would suffer by disclosure. During this time, instead of preparing the papers and documents, to be ready for instant presentation, when presentation might be allowable, they were left unprepared, so that after

every reason and every pretext for withholding them had been exhausted, precious weeks were lost afresh in the necessary labours for, and of, the press.

And the ending of this extraordinary confidence on the one side, and of these free drafts upon it from the other, what has it been? That we have had by degrees, from private and voluntary exertion, the knowledge which it was the bounden duty of the Administration to supply: and that, by the light which this knowledge casts upon past events we learn with astonishment and horror that, so far as appears, we have been involved, in some amount, at least, of moral complicity with the basest and blackest outrages upon record within the present century, if not within the memory of man.

The effect of the course which was taken by the Government was by no means confined within the walls of Parliament. For securing the escape of a great question from public vigilance there is no expedient comparable to adjourning Parliamentary discussion of it until the dying hours of a Session. For thus it is brought before the public mind at a time when the nation is in holiday, when society as well as Parliament is prorogued, when the natural leaders of every country or municipal community are dispersed. It is the great vacation of the year, when no one expects, and few will consent, to be called to serious business. All, who are acquainted with the inner working of our Parliamentary as well as our social system, know the weight as well as the truth of what I now say.

The state of the case, then, is this. The House of Commons has in the main been ousted from that legitimate share of influence which I may call its jurisdiction in the case. A subject of paramount weight goes before the people at the time when the classes having leisure, and usually contributing most to form and guide public opinion, are scattered, as disjointed units, over the face of this and of other countries. In default of Parliamentary action, and a public concentrated as usual, we must proceed as we can, with impaired means of appeal. But honour, duty, compassion, and I must add shame, are sentiments never in a state of *coma*. The working men of the country, whose condition is less affected than that of others by the season, have to their honour led the way, and shown that the great heart of Britain has not ceased to beat. And the large towns and cities, now following in troops, are echoing back, each from its own place, the mingled notes of horror, pain, and indignation.

Let them understand that the importance of their meetings, on this occasion at least, cannot be overrated. As Inkerman was the soldiers' battle, so this is the nation's crisis. The question is not only whether unexampled wrongs shall receive effectual and righteous condemnation, but whether the only effective security shall be taken against its repetition. In order to take this security, the nation will have to speak through its Government: but we now see clearly that it must first teach its Government, almost as it would teach a lisping child, what to say. Then will be taken out of the way of an united Europe the sole efficient obstacle to the punishment of a gigantic wrong.

*I have thus far endeavoured to describe how it has come about that the nation, deprived of its most rightful and most constitutional aids,*