

CONTENTS

BRITISH POLICY AND DIPLOMACY IN THE NEAR EAST

DURING THE LIBERAL ADMINISTRATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION AUGUST 1892 - JUNE 1895

II. THE BRITISH POSITION OF THE BOSPORUS

III. GREAT BRITAIN AND ASIA MINOR

By K. H. W. Hilborn, M.A.

IV. THE STRAIT NEGOTIATIONS AT CONSTANTINOPLE

Balliol College

V. THE STRAITS: A SPLIT FROM THE EAST

VI. ROSEBURY AND THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE, 1893

VII. ROSEBURY AND THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE, 1894

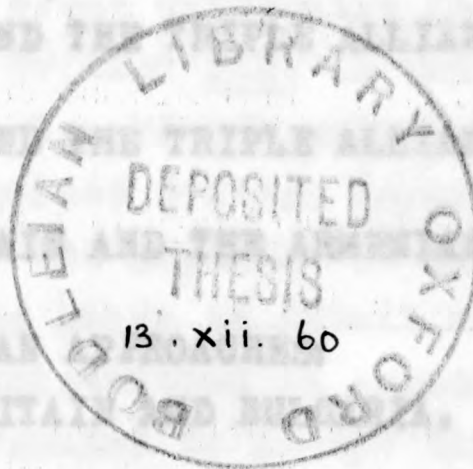
VIII. GREAT BRITAIN AND THE STRAITS, 1894-95

IX. THE EUROPEAN POSITION

X. GREAT BRITAIN AND THE STRAITS, 1895-96

XI. SALISBURY'S INHERITANCE IN 1895

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CONTENTS

	PREFACE	11
	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	1v
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	THE BRITISH POSITION ON THE BOSPHORUS	19
III.	GREAT BRITAIN AND ASIA MINOR: THE DIPLOMACY OF ECONOMIC PENETRATION	71
IV.	THE STRAITS: NEGOTIATIONS AT CONSTANTINOPLE	124
V.	THE STRAITS: A BOLT FROM THE BLUE?	150
VI.	ROSEBERY AND THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE, 1893	205
VII.	ROSEBERY AND THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE, 1894	266
VIII.	GREAT BRITAIN AND THE ARMENIANS, 1894-'95	322
IX.	THE EUROPEAN APPROACHES: GREAT BRITAIN AND BULGARIA, 1892-'95	362
X.	SALISBURY'S INHERITANCE IN 1895	373
	APPENDIX	396
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	399

PREFACE

This thesis should be regarded as a sequel to Colin L. Smith's valuable work The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople, 1886-1891. Although there were highly important developments in British official thinking on the defence of the straits between White's death in December 1891 and Salisbury's electoral defeat in the following summer, little of moment was actually happening in Near Eastern politics. It is therefore possible, without sacrifice of continuity, to leave a certain chronological gap in the narrative of events. The reason for so doing lies partly in the fact that the new ambassador who arrived in Turkey in the winter of 1892 was to be significant only for his deficiencies and his failures. Thus, whereas Dr. Smith could take as his hero a great diplomatic figure on the Bosphorus, the student of the British rôle in the Near East during the years after 1891 must perforce select as his central character the man who guided British foreign policy as a whole from the capital of the Empire. It has accordingly seemed best to carry on the story in detail only from the advent of the Liberal administration in August 1892, when the Earl of Rosebery was persuaded to accept that authority which he was destined to wield, first as Foreign Secretary and then as Prime Minister, through a period of uncertainty, of danger and of changing circumstances in international affairs.

Unfortunately for the researcher, access to Rosebery's private papers is not permitted by the present Earl. Unpublished documentary material is, nevertheless, plentiful.

Apart altogether from the official British and Austro-Hungarian archives, there are useful collections of private papers in the public Record Office, the Foreign Office Library, the British Museum and elsewhere. Singling out one among many who have in some way facilitated the quest for evidence, I wish to acknowledge a particular debt of gratitude to the present Earl Spencer for his kindness in turning me loose in the muniment room at Althorp, and for the friendly interest which he took in the progress of my explorations.

To my supervisor, Mr. A.J.P. Taylor of Magdalen College, I owe thanks for his willingness to put up with untidy drafts, for his numerous encouraging words, and above all for his sound criticism and advice.

In conclusion I should like to place on record my appreciation for the generous financial assistance accorded me under their scholarship programme by the Imperial Oil Company Ltd. of Toronto, Canada. The support of the Company, supplemented by a favourable rate of exchange, has enabled me to devote myself to research and writing without any of the worries attendant on shortage of funds.

K. H. W. H.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Add. MS.** Additional Manuscripts in the British Museum
- Adm.** Admiralty Archives in the Public Record Office
- D.D.F.** Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1871-1914
- F.O.** Foreign Office Papers and Embassy Archives in the Public Record Office
- G.P.** Die Grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette, 1871-1914
- W.O.** War Office Archives in the Public Record Office
- W.S.A.** Archives of the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry in the Wiener Staatsarchiv

A strategic planner at St. Petersburg, with a glance at his maps, could see three possible routes to the Ottoman capital. One lay through the Balkans; a second through the Bosphorus.² Neither of these was inviting. To use the Bosphorus route entailed the necessity of maintaining communications through a hostile Roumania,³ and of entering uninvited Bulgaria as well as Turkey. While the European war was

¹ Below, pp. 16-18, 153-154.

² On the vulnerability of Constantinople, see D.G. Hogarty, *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 100.

³ For evidence of Roumanian hostility, see *The Times*, No. 166 Confidential, 13 July 1914; and *The Times*, No. 172 secret, 21 July 1914.

INTRODUCTION

The central objective of Great Britain's traditional policy in the Near East can be simply stated: it was, in modern parlance, the 'containment' of Russia, and particularly the frustration of Russian designs on Constantinople and the Straits. In August 1892, when the Liberal Party returned to power with the Earl of Rosebery at the Foreign Office, this tradition had still not been overtly abandoned, but its foundations had been undermined by the conviction of the Admiralty and the War Office, expressed some months before, that the protection of the Straits was no longer physically feasible. Great Britain, the Service Departments now believed, lacked the military and naval capability of resisting, without undue danger to herself, the type of attack which the Russians were most likely to launch.¹

A strategic planner at St. Petersburg, with a glance at his maps, could see three possible routes to the Ottoman capital. One lay through the Balkans; a second through Asia Minor.² Neither of these was inviting. To use the Balkan route entailed the necessity of maintaining communications through a hostile Roumania,³ and of subduing nationalist Bulgaria as well as Turkey. While the Russians were thus

¹ Below, pp.16-18, 158-161.

² On the vulnerability of Constantinople from the Asiatic side, see D.G. Hogarth, The Nearer East, pp. 212-213.

³ For evidence of Roumania's attitude, see Paget to Rosebery, No. 168 Confidential, 18 Sept. 1892, F.O. 7/1186; Monson to Rosebery, No.17 Secret, 24 Jan. 1894, F.O. 78/4592.

engaged, they would be running a risk of Austrian and German intervention under strategic conditions thoroughly advantageous to the Central Powers. Attack through Asia Minor was safer, since it would afford both a less direct provocation and a less tempting opportunity to the Austrians; but this course too implied a campaign over long distances, and a major commitment of forces. In the 'nineties, a major commitment of her armies in the Near East was precisely what Russia wished to avoid. To write with unqualified confidence about 'Russian intentions' would admittedly be misleading, for Russian governing circles were not united in disciplined promotion of clearly defined purposes. Different ministers, officials and ambassadors had different ideas, and as the Tsar normally failed to impose a coherent pattern of policy, his subordinates sometimes attempted independently to put their personal schemes into execution.¹ With the benefit of hindsight, however, we can detect readily enough the tendency which was dominant at St. Petersburg during this period. In the same month in which Rosebery became Queen Victoria's Foreign Secretary, Count Sergei Witte was appointed Alexander III's Minister of Finance.² Witte, whose exceptional ability and energy enabled him to overshadow all rivals, represented a rising school eager for expansion in a part of the world remote by many miles from Constantinople.³ Russia's aim in the Near Eastern region was by now strictly limited, and indeed,

¹ G.N. Curzon, Russia in Central Asia in 1889, pp. 315-317; Sir J.T. Pratt, War and Politics in China, p. 95; Viscount Grey, Twenty-Five Years, 1. 167.

² A. Yarmolinsky, The Memoirs of Count Witte, p. 36.

³ D.J. Dallin, The Rise of Russia in Asia, pp. 34-35; B.H. Sumner, Tsardom and Imperialism in the Far East and Middle East, 1880-1914, pp. 8-9, 15.

in a sense, defensive: it was not to conquer Bulgaria or Asia Minor, but to control the Straits, so as to safeguard her Black Sea coasts from the perils of bombardment and invasion in the event of an Anglo-Russian war.¹ When such a war came, if it did, it was expected to arise from a Far Eastern issue. It was on the Far East that Witte's ambitions were centred; with the approval of most sections of Russian opinion, the covetous gaze of the Tsarist government was fastened from the early 'nineties not on the Ottoman Empire, but on the Empire of China.² To achieve mastery of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles had become, therefore, a merely subordinate goal, intended to secure the flank and rear of the main advance. Being subordinate, it was not worth an effort so great as to deplete Russian military and financial resources: an impregnable flank would be worse than useless, if the cost of obtaining it were to cripple the country in the pursuit of her primary objective.

That objective was one which imposed important financial obligations on the Russian government. To establish herself as the dominant Power in China against the will of Great Britain, Russia had to free herself from dependence on the sea as her chief means of communication with Chinese territory. The earliest proposal for a railway from European Russia into Eastern Asia had originated with Count Nicholas Muraviev-Amurski, the celebrated pioneer of Russia's Far Eastern imperialism;³ and by 1866, six years after Muraviev's

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918, p. 347.

² Dallin, *loc. cit.*; Sumner, pp. 8-9, 15-16; P. Renouvin, La Question d'Extrême-Orient, pp. 132-133.

³ F.H. Skrine, The Expansion of Russia, p. 314. On Muraviev, see M. Mitchell, The Maritime History of Russia, pp. 165-171.

retirement from his Siberian governorship, his dream had been transformed into a definite plan and submitted to the Tsar.¹ With the departure of Muraviev from the scene of his triumphs, however, St. Petersburg had begun to neglect the Far East, and this phase was destined to continue for a quarter of a century.² It was not until the mid-'eighties that the project of a trans-Siberian railway was seriously considered; but then the consideration did not fail to bear fruit. The commencement of construction in 1891 marked the effective inauguration of Russia's second drive into the lands of the Pacific³ - a drive which was to preoccupy her for over a decade, until it was brought to a halt by Japan. The trans-Siberian line not being expected to make a profit, no private capital was available to finance it; of necessity, it was a government enterprise.⁴ Embarked on such a momentous undertaking - a giant stride on the road to Peking - Russia had the best of reasons to remain quiet elsewhere, and to refrain from squandering men and money on the killing of Bulgarians or Turks. If the Straits were to be seized at all, it would have to be done with a minor investment: not in a great and exhausting campaign, but through the swift victory of a small force. In economy of force lay the attractiveness of the third possible method of capturing Constantinople - that of assault from the sea. The detailed prospects for an operation of this kind will be examined later, in another

¹ Skrine, loc. cit.

² Renouvin, p. 132; A. Malozemoff, Russian Far Eastern Policy, 1881-1904, pp. 14-15, 18-19.

³ Ibid., pp. 38-40; G.F. Hudson, The Far East in World Politics, pp. 71-75; Dallin, p. 34.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

context.¹ For the present, it will suffice to remark that a coup de main through sea-borne invasion would have required the commitment of comparatively few troops, and that it held out the promise of a quick decision, entailing the total paralysis of Turkey's war-making power. Such, at least, was the appreciation accepted at the War Office in London,² and the Tsar's military and naval leaders evidently leaned far enough towards the same view to feel themselves seriously tempted. Several years before 1892, preparations had begun to be made in the Russian Black Sea ports, and they were being continued on an ominous scale in the early 'nineties.³

To historians, alert to the first indications of the trend that ended in the Russo-Japanese War, the Far Eastern orientation of Russian thinking during this period has been more conspicuous than it was to contemporaries.⁴ It is true that as early as 1889 the Russians' growing interest in eastern Siberia had been the subject of comment by Sir Robert Morier, Great Britain's ambassador at St. Petersburg.⁵ But Morier was more clear-sighted than most. Late in 1893 the German ambassador at Constantinople voiced the opinion that St. Petersburg was chiefly desirous of having 'another go at the Turks'; and his Austro-Hungarian colleague, who disagreed with this assertion, did so on the ground that the ambitions

¹ Below, pp.150-160.

² A.J. Marder, British Naval Policy, 1880-1905, pp. 157-160; below, pp.153-160.

³ Below, pp. 151-154, 163, 167-168.

⁴ Rose L. Greaves, Persia and the Defence of India, 1884-1892, pp. 192-193.

⁵ C.L. Smith, The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople, 1886-1891, p. 140.

of the Tsarist government were primarily directed against the Central Powers and Bulgaria.¹ The Austrian foreign minister, assessing the situation more shrewdly than his representative on the Bosphorus, realized that Russia did not want a European war, and certainly not a war to crush the Bulgarians.² This did not mean, however, that he considered the main sphere of her activity to have been transferred from the Near East to the Far East: the shift which he had discerned was one from Bulgaria to the Straits. Russia's entire attention, he believed, was now being devoted to obtaining command of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles;³ and the motive which he suspected for this endeavour was not the protection of her Black Sea coasts, but the 'establishment of her influence, backed by all the force of the Empire, in the Eastern waters of the Mediterranean'.⁴

Official opinion in London was similarly misled. It was the thought of an immediate Russian menace in the Mediterranean, not of long-term Russian designs in Eastern Asia, which troubled Lord Rosebery in 1893.⁵ British military Intelligence was only beginning to become conscious of the possibility that St. Petersburg had aggressive intentions in

¹ Sir A. Nicolson (chargé d'affaires at Constantinople) to F.H. Villiers (Private Secretary to the Earl of Rosebery), Private, 7 Dec. 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Paget to Rosebery, No. 12 Confidential, 20 Jan., F.O. 7/1197; No. 102 Confidential, 7 June 1893, F.O. 7/1198; Monson to Kimberley, No. 127 Confidential, 8 May 1894, F.O. 7/1214.

³ Paget to Rosebery, No. 2 Confidential, 3 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4592 (copy in F.O. 7/1197).

⁴ Monson to Rosebery, No. 17 Secret, 24 Jan. 1894, F.O. 78/4592; Kálnoky to Deym, No. 1 Secret, 25 Jan. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

⁵ J.A. Spender, The Life of the Right Hon. Sir Henry Campbell-

the Pacific area. In November 1892 a memorandum drafted in the Intelligence Division of the War Office had maintained that the aspirations of Russia's Army chiefs - there was no allusion to those of civilian statesmen - lay towards the West. A strengthening of the Russian forces at Vladivostok was explained away as a purely defensive measure, undertaken in part to ensure that so remote a fortress, which could not be readily succoured after the outbreak of war, would have a garrison adequate for its security in all eventualities, and in part to balance a major concentration of Imperial Chinese troops in Manchuria.¹ This judgment was somewhat modified early in '93: a further memorandum, drawn up by the same officer, placed a greater stress than its predecessor on Russia's reinforcement of her Far Eastern outpost, and suggested both offensive and defensive interpretations as equally tenable. The main emphasis, however, continued to be on the military arrangements in the Tsar's European territories.²

In short, whereas the prevailing school of thought at St. Petersburg tended more and more to look upon the Straits question in a Far Eastern context, London and Vienna still looked upon it in the context of Europe, the Mediterranean and (in the case of the British) the Middle East. To the Austrians, Russian control of the Straits meant two things. The first was Russian hegemony in the eastern Balkans: there

Bannerman, G.C.B., i. 140-141; Rosebery to Campbell-Bannerman, Confidential, 1 Sept.; Private, 12 Sept. 1893, Add. MS. 41226.

¹ Secret Memorandum by Captain Grierson, dated 8 Nov. 1892 (printed on 9 November), F.O. 65/1456.

² Confidential Memorandum by Captain Grierson, 'Twenty Years of Russian Army Reform and the Present Distribution of the Russian Land Forces', dated January 1893 (received by the Foreign Office from the War Office on 10 Apr. 1893), F.O. 65/1456.

could be no certainty that the diversion of St. Petersburg's attention from this region was more than temporary, and the Ballplatz was fearful lest the Bulgarians, once Russia was mistress of Constantinople, would seek safety within the sphere of her influence. Indeed, the Austrian foreign minister believed that the Sofia government, with the Straits question settled in Russia's favour, would be virtually at the mercy of the Tsar, so that the exclusion of Russian influence from its affairs would be hardly conceivable.¹ Equally disquieting was the second probable consequence of a success by St. Petersburg on the Straits issue. Command of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles would make it readily practicable for Russia to bring her whole naval strength, including her substantial Black Sea fleet, to bear in the Mediterranean. Confronted with the impressive power of a Franco-Russian naval combination, seriously challenging British supremacy in Mediterranean waters, weak and vulnerable Italy might well decide that she could best protect her interests by defecting from the Triple Alliance, and attaching herself to the rising fortunes of the Dual Entente. Even with the Straits still closed to Russia's warships, Vienna became more than a little worried in late 1893, after the establishment of a Russian Mediterranean squadron, lest an Italian volte-face might be in the offing.² In view of the implications of such a development for the security of Austria's southern frontier, the concern at the Ballplatz was understandable. Germany, as we shall see, was disinclined to take an active part in a Balkan quarrel; and Great Britain, if she had not intervened to save the Straits

¹ Paget to Rosebery, No. 2 Confidential, 3 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4592 (copy in F.O. 7/1197); Deym to Kalnoky, No. 7A-E Secret, 7 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Kalnoky to Deym, No. 2 Strictly Confidential, 7 Dec.; Strictly Confidential, 20 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

themselves, her primary interest in the Near East, would certainly not do so in order to uphold the Austrian position on the European approaches to the Straits. Thus isolated, with Russian influence becoming paramount in Bulgaria and a hostile Italy in the rear, the Danubian Monarchy could have no alternative but to accept a settlement in South-Eastern Europe on terms favourable to its traditional Slav rival.¹

To Austria's friend Great Britain, Russian command of the Straits implied several disadvantages of no small gravity, though not the one which St. Petersburg had in mind. Whether the Tsar's government succeeded or failed in gaining control of the entrance to the Black Sea, the British were not now planning to retaliate against Russian aggression elsewhere by embarking on a Black Sea campaign. In the first place, such retaliation exceeded their capabilities; the same considerations which ruled out a British defence of Constantinople rendered the idea of offensive action beyond the Bosphorus quite absurd.² Secondly, even if action in the Euxine had been feasible, it would probably have been regarded in London as too ineffective a means of injuring the enemy. The most important Russian coastal points had been so strongly fortified and garrisoned that they could not be besieged with much hope of victory; Sebastopol in particular was alleged by one Austrian observer to have acquired immunity even from naval bombardment.³ In the mid-'eighties, years before it became evident that Great Britain could not fight at or beyond Constantinople, the War Office had cherished the notion of Black

¹ Cf. below, pp. 207-210, 227-237, 266-268.

² For these considerations, see below, pp. 16-18, 158-160.

³ Anonymous, Antagonismus der Englischen und Russischen Interessen in Asien, pp. 135-136, 141.

Sea operations, but in 1885 General Sir Frederick Roberts was already their outspoken opponent.¹ As Commander-in-Chief in India through the latter half of the decade, Roberts insisted that to fight in the Euxine or Asia Minor, at the cost of standing on the defensive in Central Asia, would be a disastrous blunder. It was from India, he maintained, not from Turkey, that Great Britain would have her best chance of striking back at Russia decisively. With this doctrine Salisbury expressed full agreement.² Thus even before the Service Departments proclaimed the impossibility of defending the Bosphorus, let alone of operating offensively in the Black Sea theatre, the project of an attack on Russia in that region had been rejected in the highest quarters.

In the early 'nineties, accordingly, Great Britain's concern for the Straits was, like Russia's, essentially a defensive one. Primarily the British feared the direct threat posed by Russian control of the waterway to their interests in the Mediterranean.³ The Admiralty, it is true, held the view throughout this period that the opening of the Straits to Russian warships, even with a military occupation on shore, would not represent an addition to Russia's offensive power.⁴ In a narrow physical sense, this conclusion was sound enough: the Black Sea fleet, unsupported by land, could probably have

¹ S. Gwynn and Gertrude M. Tuckwell, The Life of the Rt. Hon. Sir Charles W. Dilke, Bart., M.P., ii. 156.

² D. James, Lord Roberts, p. 204; cf. G.P. ix, No. 2127 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 11 Nov. 1892).

³ Greaves, p. 218.

⁴ Kimberley to Spencer, 11 May 1894 (encloses summary of Memorandum by Sir T. Sanderson (Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office) on Naval and Military Policy in the Mediterranean); Spencer to Kimberley, 12 May 1894, Spencer Papers.

passed down the Bosphorus to Constantinople without suffering any significant damage from the inadequate defences,¹ and once in a position to threaten the capital with its guns, it could quickly have compelled the Sultan to open the Dardanelles. The naval advantage to be derived by Russia from a prior opening of the Straits was therefore small. The diplomatic advantage, however, was great: if the question of free passage were once settled, whether by peaceful means or by localized armed action, then in a future Anglo-Russian conflict the Black Sea warships could rush through the waterway into the Mediterranean without violating a European treaty or introducing a new factor into the Near Eastern situation, and so with less risk of provoking a Continental crisis. The eventuality of the Tsar's fleet sallying forth to co-operate with the French Mediterranean fleet was thought to hold a genuine danger for the British Empire: the spectre of the combined Franco-Russian forces achieving naval predominance in the Mediterranean, and indeed of Great Britain's total expulsion from that sea, haunted Whitehall and Westminster.² Nor was the outlook encouraging if the two fleets refrained from effecting a junction. In order to deal with the French alone, the British would have to concentrate all available vessels, at least during the initial stages of hostilities, in the Western Mediterranean basin;³ and while this concentration was maintained, the Russians would be supreme in the

¹ Below, p. 156.

² Marder, pp. 182, 184; Deym to Kálnoky, No. 36B, 29 Nov. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114; Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 4th ser., xix. 1864-1867, 1879. For an attack on the pessimists, see Harcourt to Spencer, 9 Dec. 1893, Spencer Papers.

³ Spencer to Seymour (Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean), 14 Nov. 1893; 1 May 1894, Spencer Papers.

waters of the East. Until a sufficient number of ships could be spared to blockade the exit from the Dardanelles, the Suez route to India would be exposed to the action of Russian forces emerging at will from that fortified strait.¹

The dangerous results of Russian control of the Dardanelles and Bosphorus were unlikely to be confined, moreover, either to the naval situation or to times of war. As Vienna was uneasy about the effects to which such control would lead on the European side of the waterway, so London had to bear in mind the repercussions to be expected on the Asiatic side, in the direction of the Persian Gulf and the Afghan and Indian borders, and indeed in India itself. The protection of Constantinople being a tradition of her policy, the fall of the city might seem a sign of Great Britain's weakness, with the result that her prestige would be shaken throughout the Orient. Since it was on prestige that she depended in part for the security of her Indian hegemony, the prospect was not one to be lightly faced.² The consequences on India's flank, in Persia, might likewise be unfortunate. The Persians were already badly frightened by the strength of their northern neighbour,³ and it appeared by no means improbable that a triumph by Russia at the Straits, emphasizing British impotence as well as Russian power and aggressive inclinations, would render the Shah and his subjects completely subservient to St. Petersburg. In the Ottoman dominions a sharp rise in Russian influence was still more to be anticipated. 'If the

¹ A.T. Mahan, The Problem of Asia and Its Effect upon International Policies, pp. 117-118; cf. J. Popowski, England and the Triple Alliance, p. 16; Marder, pp. 224-225.

² Greaves, pp. 217-218; Popowski, pp. 16-17.

³ G.N. Curzon, Persia and the Persian Question, ii. 603.

Straits fell to Russia,' warned the British military attaché at Constantinople in 1893, 'whatever Turkey's future her policy henceforward would be dependent on Russia, as would that of all Western Asia (Persia, Mesopotamia, etc.) commercially as well as strategically; and while Russia gained this, the occupation of Egypt would only benefit England so long as she retained, or when she regained, naval preponderance.'¹

To forecast the probable method of Russia's attack on the Straits, the British did not need to grasp the Far Eastern preoccupation of Russian statesmen, or even to realize that their primary ambition lay elsewhere than in attaining the status of a Mediterranean Power. If the Russians resorted to force at all, it appeared almost certain in any case that they would adopt the most economical means of seizing their Near Eastern objective. The preparations in the Black Sea ports, and the unusual strength and special training of the divisions stationed there, confirmed this view:² in May 1889 Bismarck was already convinced that Russia's next attempt on the Ottoman capital would take the form of a sea-borne expedition.³ There was, of course, an alternative, which the Austrian foreign minister in particular came to think more likely than a coup de main - namely, that when St. Petersburg did decide in favour of an initiative in the Straits question,

¹ Colonel H. Chermiside (military attaché at Constantinople) to General E.F. Chapman (Director of Military Intelligence), Personal and Confidential, 24 Sept. 1893 (enclosed in Chapman to Sir P. Currie (Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office), Secret, 29 Sept. 1893, F.O. 78/4502).

² Marder, pp. 152, 156-157; cf. Confidential Memoranda communicated by Count Hatzfeldt (German Ambassador in London), dated 29 Aug. 1893 (with minute by Rosebery), F.O. 64/1308.

³ T. Palamenghi-Crispi, The Memoirs of Francesco Crispi, iii. 253.

its move would be diplomatic rather than military.¹ But, in either event, the threat foreseen was one posed directly to the Straits, not one arising on the Balkan or Asiatic approaches. In the 'seventies and 'eighties, the great problem confronting the diplomacy of Russia's opponents in the Near East had been that of erecting barriers not against a blow across the Black Sea, but against an advance around it, through Bulgaria or Asia Minor. By the 'nineties, the main problem having changed, the Foreign Office in London was paying rather less attention to the security of the flanks. When the question of railway concessions in Asia Minor became prominent in late 1892, Rosebery, unlike his predecessor on a similar occasion, ignored political and strategic considerations in order to give protection to the interests of British investors; and he abandoned this policy only after it had led to an exceedingly unpleasant diplomatic incident with Germany.² As for Bulgaria, the new Foreign Secretary still believed in 1893 that there was real danger of a Russian attack;³ but there was little that he could do to avert it beyond admonishing Sofia to avoid provocative conduct, which he feared might irritate the Tsar into accepting the advice of those who advocated war.⁴ It cannot be said that Bulgaria played more than a peripheral rôle in British Near Eastern policy during the Liberal administrations.

¹ Memorandum by Kálnoky on a conversation between Kálnoky and Monson, Strictly Confidential, dated 18 Jan. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Chapter III.

³ Rosebery to Queen Victoria, 16 June 1893 (printed in G.E. Buckle, The Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd ser., ii. 260-261).

⁴ Ibid.; Chapter IX.

The foregoing is not intended to imply that problems relating to the flanks can or will be ignored in the present study. An account of British diplomacy in the Near East from 1892 to 1895 would be neither complete nor adequate without some description of the efforts made to prevent the Bulgarian question from becoming acute, and of the policy which Rosebery pursued in Asiatic Turkey with regard to railways and Armenian persecutions. Notwithstanding the Foreign Secretary's initial conduct in the matter, railways were still closely connected, though less than before in a strategic sense, with the problem of protecting Constantinople;¹ and for other reasons as well the story of the Anatolian railway controversy of 1892-'93 is one of outstanding interest. Not only did the dispute and its outcome influence the development of the famous Baghdad Railway project, and therewith the future of Turkey, but they also inflicted appreciable damage on the spirit of Anglo-German relations, prejudiced for a time Great Britain's position in Egypt, and may have contributed indirectly to an impairment of British relations with the Ottoman Empire.² For many weeks the activity of the British embassy on the Bosphorus was primarily devoted to the railway issue.³ Yet it is certainly true that apart from the question of railways and of oppression in Armenia, culminating in the outbreak of massacres in 1894, the concern shown by the Foreign Office for Near Eastern affairs was chiefly concentrated on the Straits themselves, and on the

¹ Chapman to Chermiside, Private, 14 Feb. 1893, W.C. 106/16; below, pp. 71-74, 111-115.

² Below, pp. 30-31, 86, 109-111, 123.

³ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 14 Jan.; Private, 27 Feb. 1893, Villiers Papers; below, pp. 85-86, 94, 101-102, 117-121.

difficulties of their defence.

In the judgment of the Admiralty in 1892, Great Britain was not strong enough at sea to defend Constantinople and the Straits against the Russians 'without endangering her general naval position'. As long as France possessed a powerful undefeated fleet in the Mediterranean, astride the communications of any British squadron operating in the vicinity of the Ottoman capital, the hazards of intervention could be made tolerable only by an assurance of French neutrality or of Turkish co-operation. The latter, it was thought, would permit action in the East with such a small force that a French attack could be risked.¹ Without a reliable guarantee of Turkey's assistance, however - or at least of her benevolent neutrality - the Admiralty insisted that the communications of the British squadron through the Dardanelles would have to be protected by the presence of a British land force on the shores of the strait.² The War Office calculated that for this purpose no fewer than 10,000 men would be needed initially, and that the advance body would have to be promptly reinforced. Apart altogether from the unacceptable perils of moving troops through the Mediterranean in the face of the French naval menace, it was believed that adequate reinforcements could not be made available in time under Great Britain's existing military arrangements.³ Since the latter could

¹ Secret Joint Report by the Directors of Military and Naval Intelligence, dated 18 Mar.; Admiralty to War Office, Secret, 20 May 1892 (revised version), printed copies in F.O. 78/4434.

² Admiralty minute, dated 25 Jan. 1892 (with War Office to Admiralty, 2 Jan. 1892, Adm. I/7135).

³ Secret Joint Report by the Directors of Military and Naval Intelligence, dated 18 Mar. 1892, printed copy in F.O. 78/4434; cf. Captain S. Eardley-Wilmot, R.N., The Next Naval War, pp.

presumably have been altered, Turkish friendliness cannot be said on this ground alone to have been indispensable, but lack of it was certainly inconvenient. On another ground it was more than inconvenient: to occupy the shores of the Dardanelles before the British squadron passed would entail delaying the naval intervention, and the Admiralty considered it essential to success that the intervening warships should be able to act rapidly on the 'first intimation' of Russian aggression.¹ Yet, if the warships attempted to pass while the Dardanelles were still in Ottoman hands, it would mean risking the fire of the Turkish batteries, the power of which was held in awe by the Mediterranean Commander-in-Chief.² To force the strait by naval means was expected to require such a large commitment of ships that French intervention in the rear might well be disastrous.³

At first sight, the Turkish aspect of this problem makes no sense: that a country, threatened by its age-old enemy, should have been suspected of intending to turn its guns against its would-be protectors, is superficially fantastic. In truth, however, Anglo-Turkish relations were so bad, Ottoman distrust of Great Britain so profound, and British influence

14-15. On the danger of moving troops by sea before destruction of the French fleet, cf. also S. Wilkinson, The Command of the Sea, pp. 33-34.

¹ Admiralty to War Office, Secret, 30 Jan. 1892, Adm. I/7135; Admiralty minute, dated 25 Jan. 1892 (with War Office to Admiralty, 2 Jan. 1892, Adm. I/7135).

² 'Report on the Defences of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles' (with supplementary paper), by Vice-Admiral Sir G. Tryon, Confidential, dated 27 June, 1892 (received by the Foreign Office from the Admiralty on 22 July 1892), F.O. 78/4435.

³ Admiralty to War Office, Secret, 20 May 1892 (revised version), printed copy in F.O. 78/4434.

at Constantinople so feeble, that it was by no means absurd for London to fear a rejection by Turkey of British aid, and her quiet acceptance of a Russian protectorate. The notorious timidity of the Ottoman ruler increased the danger: on learning of an enemy armada near his capital, he might be expected to think first and last of his personal safety, which he could secure most reliably by playing the game of the aggressor. There was no way of prognosticating with certainty, but a genuine risk apparently existed that a British attempt to enter the Straits would be opposed by the supposedly formidable Dardanelles batteries.¹

With respect to the problem of enforcing French neutrality in an Anglo-Russian clash, Rosebery proposed a solution to the Central Powers in 1894 - though, as we shall discover, it was a solution dependent on the illusory hope of German co-operation.² As for the problem of obtaining Ottoman neutrality or collaboration, the Foreign Secretary found no solution at all beyond trying to impress the Turks with an augmentation of the British fleet, and appointing, in December 1893, a new ambassador who enjoyed his special confidence.³ The ambassador's task, that of restoring British influence on the Bosphorus, was one which urgently demanded attention, but in which no marked success was conceivable. The reasons for this situation, being fundamental to an understanding of British diplomacy in the Near East, must be explored at some length.

¹ General Sir J. Lintorn Simmons to Salisbury, 25 Sept.; Salisbury to Simmons, Confidential, 30 Sept. 1891, F.O. 358/6 (Simmons Papers); Greaves, pp. 216-217.

² Chapter VII.

³ Deym to Kalnoky, No. 38D Confidential, 22 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114. See Appendix.

...spher who became a puppet of Abdul Hamid II... during the Liberal administrations of 1841-55, the domination of Ottoman policy by the **II** was not appreciably more complete than in previous years. The First Secretary of the British Embassy

1893: 'What means the Porte nowadays? It has almost stopped

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, the term 'Anglo-Turkish relations' meant, in reality, the relations between Great Britain and the Ottoman Sultan. The rule of Abdul Hamid II had developed into an extreme form of personal absolutism, both military and civil power being concentrated in his hands to a degree unprecedented in the history of the Empire.¹ Ministers, usually suspected by their master of disloyal intentions,² could not safely evade his will or take an unauthorized initiative, for Imperial spies were alert and ubiquitous.³ Thus inhibited from independent action, the Porte degenerated into a mere instrument of the sovereign. The final phase of its decline took place in the early 'nineties: whereas Kiamil Pasha, who was Grand Vizier through most of Salisbury's Foreign Secretaryship from 1886 to 1892, had possessed a mind of his own and even exercised a little influence at the Palace,⁴ his successor - Djevad Pasha - was a

¹ G.L. Lewis, Turkey, p.37; Sir E. Pears, 'A Description of the Turkish Government', in L. Villari, The Balkan Question, pp. 16-17.

² E. de Laveleye, The Balkan Peninsula, p. 316; Sir E. Pears, Life of Abdul Hamid, p. 4.

³ Nicolson (First Secretary of the Constantinople embassy) to Villiers, Private, 12 Feb.; Private, 8 May 1893, Villiers Papers; G. Young, Constantinople, pp. 218-219; A.D. Alderson, The Structure of the Ottoman Dynasty, p. 70.

⁴ C.L. Smith, The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople, 1886-1891, p. 148.

cipher who became a puppet of Abdul Hamid.¹ Accordingly, during the Liberal administrations of 1892-'95, the domination of Ottoman policy by the Sultan was appreciably more complete than in previous years. The First Secretary of the British embassy at Constantinople, Sir Arthur Nicolson, wrote in 1893: 'What means the Porte nowadays? We have almost dropped the adjective "Sublime" . . . The point of interest is what Yildiz is meditating.'² The most trivial matters, the Secretary reported, had to be 'submitted to the Imperial consideration'.³ In so centralized a system, decisions might go unmade; but such decisions as were made, were made at the Palace.

This situation was a misfortune for Great Britain's influence on the Bosphorus. While Kiamil, unfavourably disposed towards France and Russia, had been friendly towards the British, the attitude of the Sultan, and therefore of Djevad, was markedly different. As more than one diplomat had learned to his cost, from the beginning of the reign, Abdul Hamid 'disliked British ambassadors'.⁴ He had no enthusiasm for British statesmen either, and William Ewart Gladstone was the special object of his detestation and distrust. In part, this can be attributed to the fact that the Liberal leader had long displayed a profound distaste for Ottoman autocracy, and had championed the cause of Turkey's Christian populations. But

¹ Currie to Kimberley, No. 145 Confidential, 3 Apr. 1894, F.O. 78/4540; Sir. A.H. Hardinge, A Diplomatist in the East, pp. 12-13; Sir V. Corbett, Reminiscences, Autobiographical and Diplomatic, pp. 169-171.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 29 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers; cf. Cambon to Develle, 27 May 1893 (printed in P. Cambon, Correspondance, 1870-1924, i. 359-361).

³ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 25 Nov. 1893, Villiers Papers.

⁴ Smith, p. 1.

in August 1892, on the formation of his fourth ministry, what was remembered against him with the greatest uneasiness was his rôle in the theft of Egypt, and it was the fancied prospect of Egypt's formal and definitive detachment from the Turkish Empire, through the agency of a Gladstonian plot, which constituted for the moment the Sultan's chief preoccupation. In his anxiety, Abdul Hamid turned for support to the French ambassador, Paul Cambon, begging him to defer an intended absence from his post 'pour déjouer les intrigues anglaises'.¹ Such was the nadir to which Anglo-Turkish relations had sunk: Great Britain, the ally of old, the traditional defender of Ottoman integrity against Russian encroachment, was looked upon at the Palace not as a friend, but as a designing and unscrupulous foe.²

The accession to office of the Liberal cabinet had not altered the Sultan's attitude towards Great Britain in any fundamental sense: although the personal record of the incoming Prime Minister plainly aggravated his suspicions, those suspicions had been acute enough before. Their strength may be judged from the measures which the Padishah had taken to protect his capital from the British Mediterranean fleet. For years, while the approach to Constantinople through the Bosphorus was left virtually undefended against a Russian naval incursion from the Black Sea, the Turks had been displaying an unwonted 'activity and continuity of purpose' in

¹ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 6 (Cambon to Ribot, 25 Aug. 1892). For additional evidence of the Sultan's concern regarding Gladstone's intentions in Egypt, see Ford to Rosebery, No. 286, 12 Sept. 1892, F.O. 78/4416.

² Cf. Nicolson to Villiers, Private and Confidential, 19 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers; Confidential Memorandum by Nicolson, dated 19 Jan. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 25 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477); G.P. viii, No. 1829.

the construction of fortifications on the Dardanelles.¹ This eloquent fact testifies, more convincingly than mere words about 'English intrigues', to the intense and consistent Anglophobia of Abdul Hamid.

The factors responsible for the Sultan's anti-British sentiments are not difficult to identify, though to assess their relative significance is less simple. The most prominent among them, in the conscious minds of Abdul Hamid and his entourage, appears to have been the British presence in Egypt;² yet the true importance of the Egyptian question can easily be exaggerated. While the suggestion has been made that the friendship of Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire was abruptly 'snapped' by the events of 1882,³ the opposite is the case. In reality, serious friction had arisen between them by the end of Sir Henry Elliot's embassy in 1877, and their relations had grown progressively worse thereafter.⁴ Doubtless the occupation of Egypt did increase the Sultan's existing aversion for the British,⁵ and he is said to have once given an assurance that a satisfactory settlement of the Egyptian problem would throw him into the arms of England 'with all the military resources at his command'.⁶ But prom-

¹ Cheraside (military attaché at Constantinople) to Ford, Confidential, 30 Mar. 1892 (enclosed in Foreign Office to Admiralty, Confidential, 23 Apr. 1892, Adm. I/7166).

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 14 Jan.; Private, 29 Jan.; Private, 11 Mar. 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ H. Nicolson, Sir Arthur Nicolson: First Lord Carnock, p. 87.

⁴ Smith, pp. 1-2.

⁵ Cf. Alma Wittlin, Abdul Hamid: The Shadow of God, p. 153.

⁶ Memorandum by Sir A. Sandison (Chief Dragoman of the Constantinople embassy), dated 1 Mar. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478).

ises from Abdul Hamid meant little, and Colonel Chermside, the able military attaché at Constantinople, was almost certainly justified in his belief that Egypt made less difference to the situation than it seemed to do on the surface. Writing in 1893, Chermside commented:

I am quite of opinion that, were England to evacuate Egypt, the effect on the Sultan's policy would be very ephemeral. Before the British occupation of Egypt the Sultan's action was little, if at all, more Anglophile in reality. Cyprus was constantly spoken of - England's support of the Armenians, and so on - and this would recur.¹

A similar view was expressed by Sir Arthur Nicolson. 'If we left Egypt tomorrow,' the Secretary remarked, 'I doubt if we should permanently improve our position at the Palace.' There might, he thought, be a 'passing gush of gratitude', but soon 'our motives would be attributed either to weakness, or perhaps more probably to some deep-laid covert scheme'.²

There is, indeed, reason to believe that Abdul Hamid, with part of his mind at least, did not genuinely desire a British withdrawal from Egypt. It is true that he dreaded the eventuality of an Egyptian declaration of independence from Turkey, and that this was what he suspected Gladstone of intending to arrange.³ But, although Paul Cambon endeavoured to persuade him that a continued occupation would lead inevitably to Egypt's separation from the Empire, the Sultan remained apparently unconvinced.⁴ Nor was his attitude illogical:

¹ Memorandum by Chermside, dated 6 Mar. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478).

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 14 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 6; cf. No. 60 (Cambon to Ribot, 1 Dec. 1892).

⁴ Ibid., No. 14 (Cambon to Ribot, 1 Sept. 1892); No. 176 (Cambon to Develle, 25 Feb. 1893).

he had grounds for thinking that he would enjoy greater security for his rights, both in Egypt and elsewhere, if the British stayed than if they went. Appreciating that the surest safeguard of his own independence lay in the differences and mutual jealousies of the European Powers, Abdul Hamid set much store by the policy of playing off those Powers against one another - a policy of which he considered himself, not without justification, to be a skilful and cunning practitioner.¹ Among his worst nightmares, therefore, was that of an Anglo-French rapprochement, followed by co-operation between London and Paris in imposing their common will at Constantinople.² To this dangerous development the maintenance of Great Britain's Egyptian occupation was by far the most important obstacle. Moreover, the presence of British troops freed the Sultan from any possible necessity of sending Ottoman forces to Egypt - a major consideration in his judgment, for he thought that there would be a greater likelihood of secession by an ambitious military leader than by a Khedive who had to do the bidding of Lord Cromer. 'Que deviendrais-je enfin', he once asked Cambon in the heat of argument, 'si je suis obligé d'envoyer une armée en Égypte, et si le général qui la commandera a l'idée de se proclamer indépendant?' - and he added that, as against such a risk, he preferred the status quo.³ With these calculations in his mind, reinforcing his innate irresolution and his distrust of France - which differed only in degree from his distrust of

¹ Sir E. Pears, Forty Years in Constantinople, p. 145; R.W. Seton-Watson, The Rise of Nationality in the Balkans, pp. 125-126; Lord Eversley and Sir V. Chirol, The Turkish Empire, p. 317.

² D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 176; cf. No. 14.

³ Ibid., No. 60; cf. No. 176.

Great Britain¹ - Abdul Hamid was unwilling to co-operate with Paris in putting serious pressure on the British to evacuate. Indeed, as the French found to their chagrin (though not to their surprise) when the Egyptian question came to the fore for a time in January 1893, he hesitated even to protest against an increase in the British garrison.²

One must take care, however, not to deduce too much from this Imperial restraint. Notwithstanding its advantages and the Sultan's reluctance to relinquish them, the British occupation of Ottoman territory remained a rankling grievance - an 'open wound' in Anglo-Turkish relations.³ To say that the resentment at the Palace was due to a feeling of wounded amour propre would be true in part, but an over-simplification, for there was more involved than the understandable hurt pride of a ruler at foreign encroachment on his domains. The Sultan was not merely a temporal sovereign, but claimed a religious position as well - that of Caliph, or successor to the Prophet. Though of debatable validity,⁴ the claim was widely accepted in the Islamic world; and Egypt, as a British official at Constantinople pointed out, was regarded by Moslems in general, and by Abdul Hamid himself, as the 'unalienable appanage' of the Caliphate, 'chiefly owing to its

¹ Memorandum by Chermide, dated May 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 223 Confidential, 29 May 1893, F.O. 78/4479); Cambon to Develle, 27 May 1893 (printed in Cambon, loc. cit.).

² D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 139 (Cambon to Develle, 26 Jan. 1893); No. 176; G.P. viii, No. 1822 (Radolin to Caprivi, 29 Jan. 1893).

³ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 14 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers; cf. Joan Haslip, The Sultan, p. 207; W. Yale, The Near East, p. 113.

⁴ For a criticism of the Sultan's claim to be Caliph, see Sir W. Muir, The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline and Fall, p. 596.

proximity to the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina'.¹ Especially since the Caliph was supposed to be the protector of Islam and its Holy Places against the unbeliever, a Sultan who encouraged his subjects to take the Caliphate seriously could not fail to experience embarrassment and humiliation as a result of the supremacy at Cairo of a Christian Power. Unlike his ancestors, and unfortunately for the British, Abdul Hamid insisted that his spiritual office should be taken very seriously indeed.² To some extent, no doubt, he adopted this attitude for reasons of self-esteem, but he saw in addition practical advantages to be gained. Weakened by the mutual distrust and hostility of its many different Moslem peoples, the Ottoman Empire had need of some potent unifying myth capable of submerging racial antagonisms, and of drawing together all Moslem elements in a common loyalty to the autocrat at Yildiz. It was largely in order to meet that need that Abdul Hamid stressed his exalted status as head of all the faithful;³ and in truth it seems certain that his pretensions to the Caliphate were effective in appreciably enhancing his authority over Turkey's Moslem inhabitants.⁴ Nor was this domestic advantage the only one that carried weight with the Turkish ruler. Beyond the bounds of the Empire other

¹ Memorandum by Sandison, dated 1 Mar. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478).

² Sir W.M. Ramsay, 'The Intermixture of Races in Asia Minor', Proceedings of the British Academy, vii. 47-48.

³ Ibid.; Sir R. Bullard, The Middle East: A Political and Economic Survey, pp. 11-12. On the great diversity of mutually unfriendly Moslem races even in Asia Minor alone, see also Sir W.M. Ramsay, Impressions of Turkey during Twelve Years' Wanderings, pp. 94-123.

⁴ 'Report on the Turkish Army', by Colonel Chermiside, dated July 1891, F.O. 195/1759.

prospects beckoned. Among educated adherents of Islam, bitterness was growing at the political weakness of their faith, and at the extension of European control over lands once ruled by Moslem dynasties. In consequence, many thinkers were influenced by a desire for unity not merely among the various Ottoman peoples, but among believers throughout the world - a unity which, it was hoped, would pave the way for a political renaissance. For such a Pan-Islamic movement, there could be but one focal point of shared allegiance: the Caliph-Sultan, who combined in his person religious pre-eminence and sovereignty over the most powerful Moslem State.¹ At the least, the rise of Pan-Islam contained a promise of some strengthening of the Sultan's position in relation to all governments that held sway over Moslem populations, as the British did in India; and Abdul Hamid, who sent agents far and wide - not without a good deal of temporary success² - to disseminate the ideal, evidently had much confidence in its value to himself.³ Dreaming as he did, he was especially disturbed and irritated by anything which threatened to impair the lustre of his spiritual leadership. Hence the intensity of his vexation over Egypt: his inability to resist the infidel in so important a territory, he felt, gravely compromised his dignity in the eyes of his co-religionists everywhere.⁴

¹ Lewis, p. 38; Sir T.W. Arnold, The Caliphate, pp. 173-177; Sir T.W. Arnold, The Islamic Faith, pp. 38-40; H.A.R. Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam, pp. 111-112; H.A.R. Gibb, Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey, pp. 175-176.

² H.A.R. Gibb, Whither Islam?, p. 43.

³ A. Vambéry, The Story of My Struggles, ii. 368-369; T.L. Jarman, Turkey, pp. 45-46.

⁴ Memorandum by Sandison, dated 1 Mar. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478); Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 29 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers.

In the light of these considerations, it is not surprising to find the Sultan, in September 1892, raising the question of the British occupation with the Austrian ambassador, dwelling on the 'difficulties which it entailed upon him as Caliph', and asking unsuccessfully that Austria use her good offices to arrange Anglo-Turkish negotiations for a withdrawal.¹ What Abdul Hamid's true intentions were at this time is, of course, obscure. Possibly, in his mood of the moment, he genuinely wanted the occupation brought to an end, regardless of the risks involved. More probably, he hoped to satisfy Moslem opinion by negotiating some formula through which he could retain the advantages of the British presence while eliminating the element of humiliation. If he could be given such a 'golden bridge' for the salvage of his pride and religious prestige, predicted an observer at the British embassy half a year later, he would be 'far from viewing with displeasure' the indefinite maintenance of the existing Egyptian régime.²

How the bridge was to be constructed, what the formula was to be, was a problem that lacked any obviously acceptable solution. A few months after the approach to Austria, the Ottoman representative at Cairo seems to have been thinking in terms of a joint occupation by Turkey and Great Britain;³ but Abdul Hamid himself may well have had no clear conception of what he wanted even at the instant of his speaking. His

¹ Paget to Rosebery, No. 173 Confidential, 29 Sept. 1892, F.O. 7/1186.

² Memorandum by Sandison, dated 1 Mar. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478).

³ Cromer to Rosebery, Tel. No. 64 Confidential, 6 Feb. 1893, F.O. 78/4517B.

nature was not such that he could weigh and balance calmly the conflicting considerations operative in his mind, or formulate a coherent, consistent policy to reconcile them.¹ As a result, he had got the Egyptian question into so hopeless a 'tangle in his brain' that, in the opinion of Sir Arthur Nicolson, he would 'never be able to unravel the skein'.² Yet for all his muddled tortuousness, for all his mixed views on the advantages and disadvantages of the British presence, Abdul Hamid was sure of his own sentiments in one respect. No prestige-saving formula had in fact been negotiated; his vanity was pricked and his dignity prejudiced; and accordingly, whatever practical profit he might derive from the occupation, he bore a grudge against the occupying State. Unwilling to embark on major action - an appeal to the Powers, for example - he vented his spite in petty gestures, particularly in the bestowal of high honours and decorations on the most prominent Anglophobe journalists of Egypt's native press.³

Such was the atmosphere of Anglo-Turkish relations regarding Egypt during the early months of the Gladstone administration, and in January 1893 the situation deteriorated still more. At the outset of his Foreign Secretaryship, Rosebery had shown a natural desire to avoid any incidents which might further irritate the Sultan with respect to Egyptian affairs.⁴ Events in January, however, rendered an irritating

¹ Cf. D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 176.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 29 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers; H. Nicolson, p. 88.

³ Cromer to Rosebery, No. 195, 16 Nov., F.O. 78/4453; Ford to Rosebery, No. 341 Confidential, 10 Nov. 1892, F.O. 78/4417.

⁴ Rosebery to Hardinge, Tel. No. 55, 23 Aug., F.O. 78/4454; Hardinge to Rosebery, Tel. No. 146, 23 Aug. 1892 (with minute by Rosebery), F.O. 78/4455.

policy inevitable. The Khedive Tewfik, an obedient servant of the British authorities, had died not many months before the change of government in London, and had been succeeded by his young son Abbas Hilmi. The latter, Lord Cromer soon discovered, was resentful of British advice and eager to assert his independence.¹ The return of the Liberals to office made matters worse: exaggerating the influence of the 'Little Englanders' in the cabinet as opposed to that of Rosebery and the Liberal Imperialists, the new Khedive felt encouraged to express yet more openly his dissatisfaction with his British guardians.² Then, in January, as a result of the controversy which had just broken out over railway concessions in Anatolia, Germany suddenly withdraw her diplomatic support from Great Britain's Egyptian position. In this - or so the British suspected - Abbas saw his chance:³ he attempted to determine the composition of his ministry without reference to Cromer's wishes. The effort led to an outburst of religious and nationalist fervour, which he assiduously promoted. Extremist Moslem newspapers adopted what Cromer characterized as a 'very violent and mischievous' tone, anti-Christian sentiment ran high, and a threat arose of mob demonstrations.⁴ The Sultan, delighted to find the British in difficulties, privately congratulated the Khedive on his conduct.⁵ He failed

¹ C. de Freycinet, La Question d'Egypte, p. 379; T. Little, Egypt, p. 102; E.W. Polson Newman, Great Britain in Egypt, p. 154; Sir A. Colvin, The Making of Modern Egypt, pp. 247-249.

² G. Young, Egypt, pp. 170-172.

³ L. Raschdau, Unter Bismarck und Caprivi: Erinnerungen eines deutschen Diplomaten aus den Jahren 1885-1894, p. 297.

⁴ Marquess of Zetland, Lord Cromer, pp. 197-201.

⁵ Cromer to Rosebery, Tel. No. 29, 18 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4517B.

to foresee the sequel to the agitation: on the 24th Great Britain announced to the Porte and the Powers that she had decided to increase her garrison. London maintained that this move implied no change in policy, that the provisional nature of the occupation was not affected;¹ but for Abdul Hamid it was nevertheless a grievous blow. Previously, British forces in Egypt had been undergoing a gradual reduction, and the Sultan had exploited the fact in order to cultivate the illusion among his followers that he was making progress towards securing the complete withdrawal of the unbeliever.² Now his pretence had been exposed. The Porte might take the matter calmly, as indeed it did;³ the sovereign himself could not. While he was reluctant, for the reasons already indicated, to lodge a formal protest, there is no doubt but that he was extremely angry.⁴ Some weeks later, moreover, his indignation was reinforced by a published despatch from Rosebery to Cromer, which was interpreted at the Palace to mean that the British were not prepared even to negotiate with Turkey on the withdrawal issue.⁵ All in all, it was an un auspicious beginning to a year that was to see grave anxiety in London regarding Russia's designs on the Straits.

¹ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 128; No. 132; Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 13, 23 Jan. 1893, F.O. 195/1778.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 29 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers; Ford to Rosebery, No. 35 Confidential, 30 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

³ Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 15, 25 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4486.

⁴ Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 16 Secret, 26 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4486; Earl of Cromer, Abbas II, p.31.

⁵ Ford to Rosebery, No. 123 Secret, 7 Apr. 1893, F.O. 78/4478. For the relevant paragraph of the despatch, see S.H. Jeyes, The Earl of Rosebery, p. 144.

We have noticed that Ottoman dislike and distrust of Great Britain predated the Egyptian occupation, and the factors responsible for these feelings in earlier times still retained their vitality in the 'nineties. One of them is revealed in Colonel Cherm-side's reference to Cyprus: Beaconsfield's acquisition of that island in 1878 had unquestionably contributed to the suspicion in which the British were held at Constantinople,¹ and although by 1892-'93 the grievance had been long in the background, overshadowed by that of Egypt, it had not yet been either forgotten or forgiven.²

Related to Cyprus, through the terms of the Cyprus Convention, was a more potent cause of friction - Great Britain's endeavours to protect the Sultan's Christian subjects in Asia Minor. From the late 'seventies onwards, British ambassadors had deepened Abdul Hamid's distrust of themselves and their country by the solicitude which they had displayed for Armenians. It is true that after Sir William White was promoted to the Constantinople embassy in 1886, expostulations on this issue were reduced to a minimum: he knew that they would neither be supported by the representatives of other Powers nor produce any worth-while effect on the administration of the Asiatic provinces, and that in fact their only consequence would be a further impairment of British influence at the Palace. But since Turkish brutality was sometimes too egregious to be ignored, and a degree of satisfac-

¹ A.D. Elliot, The Life of George Joachim Goschen, First Viscount Goschen, 1831-1907, i. 221; J.T. Shotwell and F. Deak, Turkey at the Straits, p. 70; G. Gaulis, La Ruine d'un Empire, p. 100; G. Roy, Abdul Hamid: Le Sultan Rouge, p. 145.

² Memorandum by Cherm-side, dated 6 Mar. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478); Cherm-side to Chapman, Personal and Confidential, 24 Sept. 1893 (enclosed in Chapman to Currie, Secret, 29 Sept. 1893, F.O. 78/4502).

tion had to be offered to the Liberal Opposition at Westminster and to other sympathizers with the Armenian cause, even White found it necessary to remonstrate with the Ottoman authorities now and then.¹ Such activity, limited as it was, cannot have failed to keep alive unpleasant memories of the past, to the detriment of Great Britain's political position.

The preference shown by White for making as few representations as possible about Armenians coincided fully with the wishes of Lord Salisbury. Shortly after his arrival in Constantinople at the end of February 1892, Sir Francis Clareford - White's newly appointed successor - received a despatch from the Foreign Secretary in which he was instructed to maintain the attitude of the preceding years: to continue to abstain from advocacy of the general reform which had been envisaged in the Treaty of Berlin, and to continue confining the action of the embassy to particularly conspicuous instances of 'misgovernment and outrage'. The one qualification to these restrictions was a request that he urge upon the Grand Vizier the great importance of redressing legitimate Christian grievances; and this Salisbury rendered virtually meaningless by indicating that it should be acted on only when there appeared to be a 'prospect of an advantageous result'. To the extent that the despatch had any positive aspect at all, it was intended more for eventual public consumption in Great Britain than for the benefit of the Armenians.²

Ford evidently did approximately what was expected of him: he went through the necessary motions, drawing the attention of the Porte to specific cases of injustice, speaking in

¹ Smith, pp. 105-107.

² Salisbury to Ford, No. 67, 17 Mar. 1892, F.O. 78/4411. A minute by Salisbury with the draft despatch proves that 'Blue Book' considerations were uppermost in his mind.

favour of the selection of fair-minded functionaries for regions where Christians were numerous, and formally reporting his proceedings, for the sake of the record, to the Foreign Office.¹ In view of the weakness of the new ambassador's personality and his distaste for conflict - of which more anon² - it seems safe to assume that he did no more than the minimum that duty demanded. There is thus no reason to suppose that Anglo-Turkish relations regarding Armenia were under greater strain in the summer of 1892, during the dying months of the second Salisbury administration, than they had been in the latter days of White. The existence of the Armenian question remained a disadvantage for the British, but Salisbury's policy of cautious restraint was still workable, and the problem was not acute.

Whatever annoyance the Sultan did feel at the token support of the Conservatives for his Christian subjects, was supplemented by uneasiness when Gladstone returned to power in August. If the first fear which occurred to Abdul Hamid after the change of ministry was that he might be confronted with a fresh humiliation on the Nile, the second was that Parliament might now make it necessary for the Foreign Office to take a more serious interest in the issue of Armenian reform.³ Such anxiety was probably aggravated by the fact that one of the members of the new cabinet was James Bryce, not only an outspoken champion of the Armenians⁴ but actually the

¹ Ford to Rosebery, No. 270, 25 Aug.; No. 275, 28 Aug. 1892, F.O. 78/4415; No. 330, 19 Oct. 1892, F.O. 78/4416. Cf. V. Bérard, La Politique du Sultan, p. 147.

² Below, pp. 61-69.

³ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 25 (Bourgarel (chargé d'affaires at Constantinople) to Ribot, 26 Sept. 1892).

⁴ H.A.L. Fisher, James Bryce, i. 182-184; ii. 207-208, 293.

founder and president of the Anglo-Armenian Association, which was suspected at Constantinople of being a revolutionary body.¹ In order to forestall possible danger, the Ottoman ruler decided on a characteristic ruse: in an interview with Ford, he referred spontaneously to the problem of reforms in his Asiatic territories, gave assurances that the matter was under active consideration, and promised that in the following spring he would send a special commission to the provinces concerned. This group was to be empowered to investigate the state of affairs, and to report on all cases of maladministration with a view to the implementing of remedies.² The commission did not, of course, materialize, but Ford imagined at the time that the promise was sincere, and Abdul Hamid was warmly congratulated by the British government on his supposed resolve.³ Whether Rosebery, like Ford, was genuinely taken in by the deception is unclear; but in any case the satisfaction with which the Foreign Secretary greeted the Sultan's pledge was unfeigned, for the mere fact that the pledge had been given provided him, for the time being, with a degree of security against parliamentary pressures. Despite the ineffectiveness of his predecessor's methods, Rosebery had no desire to be pushed into undertaking anything more drastic: when Armenian émigrés appealed to him in behalf of their countrymen, they were politely rebuffed with the argument that the course already being pursued was more likely to have beneficial results than any practicable

¹ Anonymous, The Case for the Armenians (issued by the Anglo-Armenian Association), pp. 5, 31, 33-34.

² Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 107, 12 Nov. 1892, F.O. 195/1753.

³ Ibid.; Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 71, 16 Nov. 1892, F.O. 78/4418.

alternative.¹ Under its new Liberal chief as under Salisbury, the Foreign Office intended that restraint and caution should be the keynotes of Great Britain's approach to the Armenian question; and by cultivating, however disingenuously, the hope of voluntary investigation and reform, the Sultan had made a significant contribution towards maintaining the feasibility of that stand.

It was one of the many misfortunes of the Liberal ministry that during the winter of 1892-'93, just after Anglo-Turkish friction had been intensified by Egyptian developments, the comparatively unprovocative Salisbury-Rosebery policy on Armenia began to break down. Although Armenian persecutions did not attain the proportions of a major international scandal until the massacres of 1894, events were already occurring, in the first few months of the preceding year, which no British government could watch in silence, or meet with mere formal gestures.

As early as 1878, chagrined at the inadequate provisions made in the Treaty of Berlin for enforcing reforms, some Armenian leaders had concluded that no substantial advancement of their cause would be possible without insurrection against the Sultan's rule.² As a consequence of this conviction, there had grown up a number of revolutionary committees with headquarters at such places as Athens, London and Marseilles, but associated with agitators inside Turkey. The committees had no illusions that an unaided rebellion could achieve its object directly; their hope was rather that in seeking to suppress or forestall rebellion the Turks would have recourse

¹ Foreign Office to M. Tchéráz, 27 Oct., F.O. 78/4435; Rosebery to Ford, No. 217, Confidential, 24 Oct. 1892, F.O. 195/1744.

² A.O. Sarkissian, History of the Armenian Question to 1885, p. 85.

to barbarities so extreme as to bring about foreign intervention.¹ The chances of intervention must certainly have been magnified in Armenian eyes by Gladstone's return to office in 1892, and in addition the Armenian population was being rendered more receptive by this time to seditious propaganda. Up to about 1890 conditions for Christians in the Asiatic provinces, though very far from satisfactory, appear on the whole to have been reasonably tolerable;² but with the beginning of the new decade, perhaps as a response to the premonitory symptoms of an Armenian revolutionary outbreak which were already in evidence,³ there commenced a phase of growing oppression and attempts at 'Turkification'.⁴ The upshot was that in early 1893 agitation reached a higher level than ever - a level sufficiently threatening to invite drastic Turkish reprisals.⁵ That the Sultan saw in the revolutionary activity a pretext for cruelty is by no means impossible, but that he was motivated primarily by genuine fright seems the most convincing explanation of his conduct.⁶ Obsessed as he

¹ Sir E. Pears, Turkey and Its People, p. 277; Rev. E.M. Bliss, Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities, p. 336; R. Pinon, L'Europe et l'Empire Ottoman, pp. 43-44.

² M.W. Tyler, The European Powers and the Near East, 1875-1908, p. 154; E.J. Dillon, 'The Condition of Armenia', Contemporary Review, lxxviii. 159, 164.

³ Bliss, pp. 336-337; A.C. Wratislaw, A Consul in the East, pp. 62-64.

⁴ Tyler, loc. cit.; M. Choublier, La Question d'Orient depuis le Traité de Berlin, pp. 400-401.

⁵ Bliss, p. 337; A.J. Toynbee, The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, p. 624.

⁶ Cf. J.A.R. Marriott, The Eastern Question, p. 397; W.S. Davis, A Short History of the Near East, p. 357.

was with fears for his authority and his life, Abdul Hamid could be easily alarmed by the faintest shadow of a plot.¹ It appears that for some years the Armenians' intrigues and conspiracies had been preying on his mind, and that he was worried, with the Greek and Bulgarian precedents in his memory, lest the disaffection might lead to a further dismemberment of his Empire.² Given the Sultan's character, therefore, it is not in the least surprising that when he found himself confronted with reports of overt Armenian sedition, he reacted with the indiscriminate severity of an insecure and terrified man. By the spring of 1893 Armenians had been arrested by hundreds, among them two professors of the American college at Marsovan.

Though initially only out of deference to public opinion, Rosebery felt obliged to intervene with energy in behalf of the imprisoned Christians. Instructing Ford to use strong language at the Porte, he added that if the Turks remained obdurate, Great Britain would have to 'institute an enquiry'.³ The British embassy accordingly proposed to the Sultan's foreign minister that investigations should be carried out in the troubled areas by the Turkish-speaking Colonel Chermide.⁴ At this prospect Abdul Hamid was perturbed, not only because of the likelihood of embarrassing revelations, but also because the appearance on the scene of a British officer was

¹ Lewis, p. 37; G. Dorys, The Private Life of the Sultan, pp. 74-75; Colonel Lamouche, Histoire de la Turquie, p. 312.

² Vambery, ii. 367-368.

³ Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 32, 21 Mar. 1893, F.O. 195/1778. For Rosebery's private opinions on the Armenian question in this period, see below, pp. 324-326.

⁴ Ford to Rosebery, No. 105 Confidential, 26 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478.

sure to give much encouragement to the Armenian movement. In early April, to avert these dangers, he granted an extensive amnesty. Plans for the immediate dispatch of the colonel were thereupon dropped,¹ and a fortnight later, many of the prisoners having been released, Nicolson was able to write that the situation seemed 'quiet for the moment'.² It was not to be quiet for long: a substantial number of Armenians, including the two professors Thoumaian and Kayaian, were still held in custody, and the Turks proved determined to deal with them harshly.

From March, when the arrest of Thoumaian first attracted attention, until June, when he and his colleague were tried at Angora, Rosebery took no special steps in the case beyond mentioning it to the Ottoman ambassador. The latter maintained that Thoumaian was reputed to be a conspirator as well as a professor, and that he had been one of the principal authors of the revolutionary propaganda.³ These assertions the Foreign Secretary was not initially inclined to dispute: he himself suspected that both the accused might well be guilty.⁴ On learning of the manner of their trial, however, and of the sentences of death which the Turkish tribunal imposed, he adopted a very different attitude. The prosecution had brought forward no evidence of the slightest weight; wit-

¹ Ford to Rosebery, No. 126, 7 Apr.; No. 133 Confidential, 10 Apr. 1893, F.O. 78/4478.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 24 Apr. 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ Rosebery to Ford, No. 92A, 12 Apr., F.O. 195/1779; No. 109, 26 Apr. 1893, F.O. 78/4476.

⁴ Ford to Rosebery, No. 151 Confidential, 21 Apr. 1893 (with minute by Rosebery), F.O. 78/4479; Dr. G.F. Herrick to Rosebery, 10 May 1893 (with minute by Rosebery), F.O. 78/4501.

nesses for the defendants had not been heard; and in fact, in the words of a British Vice-Consul who had been present at the proceedings, the convictions had been a 'cut-and-dried affair' from the start.¹ Informed of such a mockery of justice, no Foreign Secretary could have remained inactive even had he wished; and Rosebery, as we shall find, now saw a reason of diplomatic expediency for acting with vigour.² There ensued an intervention which was successful both in its humanitarian and in its immediate diplomatic purposes, but which brought Anglo-Ottoman relations on the Armenian question to what was undoubtedly their most embittered state since the ignominious end of Sir Edward Thornton's embassy nearly seven years before.³

Since Ford was now absent from his post on leave, the task of saving the condemned professors fell to the lot of Nicolson, as chargé d'affaires. Confident that the capital sentences would not be carried out, but fearing lest they be commuted to exile in some such uninviting territory as the Yemen,⁴ the latter pressed at the Porte for a free pardon. The Grand Vizier temporized, insisting that if a miscarriage of justice had indeed taken place, the Cour de Cassation could be relied upon to rectify it. Nicolson responded with an intimation that Great Britain no longer had much faith in the impartiality of the Ottoman judiciary; whereupon the

¹ T. Newton (Vice-Consul at Angora) to Nicolson, Private, 20 June 1893 (copy enclosed in Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 281. 25 June 1893, F.O. 78/4480).

² Below, pp. 44-45, 48-49.

³ For the events leading to the recall of Thornton in 1886, see Smith, pp. 44-46.

⁴ Nicolson to Rosebery, Tel. No. 94, 16 June, F.O. 78/4486; No. 270, 18 June 1893, F.O. 78/4480.

Grand Vizier retorted contemptuously that the British cabinet was allowing itself to be influenced by 'a few missionaries and agitators'. Leaving the Porte after what he described, perhaps euphemistically, as a 'somewhat warm discussion', the chargé d'affaires was for the first time somewhat pessimistic as to his chances of securing the pardon.¹

At this point the Khedive of Egypt came unwittingly to the rescue. Abbas was about to pay a visit to his suzerain, the Sultan, and was to travel to Constantinople on board an Imperial yacht. Apprehensive regarding the effect which might be produced on his subjects by any reminder of Great Britain's dominant position at Cairo,² Abdul Hamid was anxious that the occasion should be a strictly Ottoman one. His foreign minister had therefore been beseeching Nicolson to promise that the yacht would not be accompanied by a British naval escort.³ The Sultan's frantic eagerness to have his way in this matter gave Rosebery and the chargé d'affaires their opportunity: by temporarily withholding the desired assurance, and hinting at a connection between the question of the escort and that of the professors, they were able to put enough pressure on the Palace to carry the day.⁴ Early in July, by an act of clemency made conditional upon their departure from the

¹ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 290, 30 June; No. 294 Confidential, 30 June 1893, F.O. 78/4480. For evidence of Nicolson's earlier confidence, see Nicolson to Villiers, Personal, 19 June 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 299, 2 July 1893, F.O. 78/4480.

³ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 283, 26 June, F.O. 78/4480; Tel. No. 100, 26 June; Tel. No. 104, 29 June 1893, F.O. 78/4486.

⁴ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 293 Confidential, 30 June; No. 299, 2 July; No. 300, 2 July, F.O. 78/4480; Tel. No. 106, 1 July 1893, F.O. 78/4486; Rosebery to Nicolson, Tel. No. 57, 30 June 1893, F.O. 78/4485. Cf. D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 283.

Ottoman dominions, both Thoumaian and Kayaian were pardoned and released.¹

Nicolson was now free to turn his attention from the cause célèbre to the fate of other Armenians convicted by the Angora tribunal. At once he proceeded to do so, making repeated representations 'privately and unofficially' with the object of securing a mitigation of the more serious sentences.² His efforts, in which he persevered throughout the summer, met with only limited success: although by the end of the month further death sentences had been commuted, and terms of imprisonment reduced, some of the penalties were still 'exceptionally severe'.³ In August Nicolson's task became yet more difficult, for Thoumaian and Kayaian, once safely beyond the Sultan's reach, had unwisely indulged in public criticism of the Turkish government - behaviour which provoked much irritation at Porte and Palace, and made them less inclined than ever to listen to British requests for leniency towards the professors' countrymen.⁴

Through all this period of humanitarian endeavour, the British received no important support from the foreign embassies on the Bosphorus. By contrast with the situation in the following year, there was a notable lack of international collaboration: whereas the Armenian problem in 1894-'95 must be examined within the context of relations among the Great Powers, the events of 1893 are significant only for the re-

¹ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 307, 5 July, F.O. 78/4480; Rosebery to Nicolson, No. 173A, 5 July 1893, F.O. 195/1779. Cf. D.D.F., 1st ser., x, Nos. 284 and 285.

² Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 317, 11 July 1893, F.O. 78/4481.

³ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 359, 31 July 1893, F.O. 78/4481.

⁴ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 412, 28 Aug. 1893, F.O. 78/4482.

lations between Great Britain (and indirectly her rivals) on the one hand, and the Sultan on the other. Nicolson had realized at the very beginning that to intervene in the interests of justice for the Armenians would be to act in isolation. Writing in late March, he had observed of the German ambassador: 'Radolin is a little vexed at the Armenia question cropping up, as he has a little fear we may ask him to join in representations or something.' It was a question, the British diplomat added, 'at which all the ambassadors tuck up their skirts and fly from [sic], except perhaps the Russian.'¹ Subsequently Radolin did betray some concern for the fate of the two professors, and for a moment in mid-June Nicolson hoped to be able to concert action with the German embassy.² But the German's sympathy evidently turned out to be largely platonic: though he appears to have offered the Turks some good advice,³ nothing more was heard of his possible participation in joint action. When it came to incurring the odium of threats and pressure, Great Britain was left to undertake the whole responsibility - to suffer alone the political losses of the Sultan's aggravated enmity.⁴

If the foregoing statement is not to be misleading, however, a qualification is necessary. The Armenian controversy was not in the short run an undiluted disaster for the British position at Constantinople. Just before the troubles began in March to attract serious attention at the Foreign Office,

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 27 Mar. 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Nicolson to Rosebery, Tel. No. 94, 16 June 1893, F.O. 78/4486.

³ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 275 (Cambon to Develle, 29 June 1893).

⁴ H. Nicolson, pp. 99-100.

Colonel Chermside had put forward the view, which was shared by Nicolson, that since the Sultan's anti-British sentiments were deep-seated and 'instinctive', they were more likely to be controlled by fear of Great Britain's indifference or hostility than by demonstrations of her friendliness.¹ To have accepted and applied consistently in practice one plausible deduction from this argument would have been hazardous in the extreme: in the spring of 1893, for reasons unconnected with Armenian affairs, Franco-Russian prestige on the Bosphorus was gaining a temporary ascendancy over that of Germany,² and in these circumstances Abdul Hamid might well have responded to any settled British policy of intimidation by seeking safety in more intimate relations with Paris and St. Petersburg. Yet the reactions of the Ottoman ruler to British firmness in the Thoumaian-Kayaian case indicated that Chermside's conclusion contained a significant element of truth. Whereas the feeble, futile nagging to which the Turks were accustomed had aroused ill-feeling without inspiring respect, the more determined intervention of 1893 reminded Abdul Hamid in a forceful way that Great Britain was still a factor with which, on occasion, he would have seriously to reckon. The French ambassador noted the influence which '*les procédés de la diplomatie anglaise . . . ont eue sur l'esprit timoré du Sultan*'.³ It was precisely such an effect which Rosebery had intended to produce by protecting so vigorously

¹ Memorandum by Chermside, dated 6 Mar. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478); cf. Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Feb.; Private, 11 Mar.; Private and Personal, 25 Nov. 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Below, pp. 124-129.

³ *D.D.F.*, 1st ser., x, No. 289 (Cambon to Develle, 11 July 1893).

the unfortunate professors. Although his action in March had been determined primarily by public opinion,¹ since he had at that time no particularly urgent reason for wishing to frighten the Sultan, the Foreign Secretary confided in July to the German ambassador at London that he had been following up the Armenian question for the purpose of demonstrating to Abdul Hamid the unpleasantness to which an anti-British policy could lead.² His motive for so doing related to Egypt, and it was doubtless in part as a consequence of his success in so doing that the Sultan now decided to conceal his bitterness at the Egyptian situation. When the Khedive arrived at the Turkish capital early in July, afire with Anglophobe ardour, Abdul Hamid damped his enthusiasm with unexpected admonitions to show 'patience and goodwill' towards the occupying Power.³ Just at the period when the improved position of France at the Palace might have resulted in fresh difficulties for the British on the Nile, a strengthened regard for British diplomatic energy helped hold Ottoman policy in check.

In June and July, before London knew of the Sultan's coolness towards the Khedive, there appeared to be some degree of risk that such difficulties might arise - that Turkey, as a result of French persuasion, might reopen the Egyptian question by proposing a conference of the Powers.⁴ A few months earlier Rosebery had been toying with the idea of referring

¹ G.P. ix, No. 2181 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 29 Mar. 1893).

² G.P. viii, No. 1841 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 13 July 1893).

³ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 351 Confidential, 28 July 1893, F.O. 78/4481; cf. Earl of Cromer, Abbas II, p. 46. For the various other factors tending to restrain the Sultan, see above, pp. 23-25.

⁴ W.L. Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1890-1894, pp. 317-318.

the question to the Powers himself.¹ The obstreperousness of Abbas Hilmi, culminating in the crisis of January, had made it seem evident that the era of co-operation between the British and Khedivial authorities at Cairo was at an end,² and Cromer had concluded that the maintenance of the Egyptian status quo was therefore impossible. Great Britain, he argued, would have either to evacuate or to assert herself more strongly and consolidate her hold on the country. He naturally preferred consolidation, and in this view he was supported by the Foreign Secretary.³ Hence the latter's plan for a conference: France, he calculated, could thereby be isolated, for the Triple Alliance would support Great Britain while Russia would remain relatively indifferent. Although the Russian ambassador at Constantinople was co-operating with Cambon on Egyptian affairs, Rosebery believed - correctly - that he was doing so on his own initiative, without instructions from St. Petersburg.⁴ The Germans, however, were fully aware of the advantages which they derived from Great Britain's need of their backing in Egypt,⁵ and could not reasonably be expected to look with favour on a strengthening of the British position which would make London more independent.

¹ G.P. viii, No. 1823 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 30 Jan. 1893).

² J. Marlowe, Anglo-Egyptian Relations, 1800-1953, p. 165.

³ Cromer to Milner, 22 Jan.; 28 June 1893 (printed in J.E. Wrench, Alfred Lord Milner, 1854-1925, p. 143).

⁴ Wydenbruck (Austro-Hungarian chargé d'affaires at London) to Kalnoky, Tel. No. 8, 8 Feb. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114. For the evidence that Rosebery was right, see D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 176 (Cambon to Develle, 25 Feb. 1893).

⁵ G.P. viii, No. 1733 (Memorandum by Raschdau of the German Foreign Office, dated 20 July 1892).

They immediately voiced opposition to the Foreign Secretary's idea, on the grounds (in which they may well have sincerely believed) that an international discussion would give France and Russia the habit of acting in concert on Eastern issues, where divergent interests had hitherto kept them apart, and that it would drive Abdul Hamid into the embrace of the two governments advocating evacuation. Faced with the disapproval of the Wilhelmstrasse, Rosebery soon put aside the thought of reference to the Powers, and opted instead for an attempt to settle the problem directly with the Sultan.¹

The ensuing bilateral negotiations achieved nothing. Rosebery's terms explicitly contemplated the formal acceptance by Abdul Hamid of an indefinite British occupation. The most that the Foreign Secretary was prepared to concede, as a means of saving the Sultan's face, was a provision whereby the parties to the projected agreement would consider holding discussions on withdrawal after a specified period, perhaps five years, had elapsed.² This formula, virtually meaningless, proved altogether insufficient to satisfy the Turks, who left the British offer unanswered through the entire spring of 1893.³ There seems little likelihood that Rosebery ever had much hope of his proposal bearing fruit, and in mid-June, with public opinion becoming increasingly anti-Turkish because of the Armenian injustices, he finally intimated to the Ottoman ambassador that he had no longer any desire to pursue the matter further.⁴ Turkish counter-proposals were neverthe-

¹ Ibid., No. 1824 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 31 Jan.); No. 1825, No. 1828 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 1 and 4 Feb.); No. 1832 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 5 Apr. 1893).

² Ibid., No. 1832.

³ Langer, p. 318.

⁴ G.F. viii, No. 1836 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 15 June 1893).

less submitted early in the next month, but being considered at the Foreign Office to be absurd ('une convention dérisoire'), they were given a reception far from pleasing to their authors. In June, and still more in July - the Sultan's advice to the Khedive had not yet been reported - Anglo-Ottoman relations on Egypt appeared to be once again severely strained.¹

Especially in view of the rise in French influence at the Palace, the possibility that Abdul Hamid might now try to embarrass Great Britain by inciting Abbas to make more trouble, or by appealing to the Powers, could not be lightly dismissed. It was at this time, in the latter part of June, that Rosebery devoted himself so whole-heartedly to succouring the condemned professors. In July, after the pardons had been obtained, but before the effect of the intervention on the Sultan had become clear, the apparent dangers of the situation were aggravated by growing evidence of a Russian willingness to co-operate with France in the Mediterranean.² Under the new circumstances an international debate on the Egyptian issue was plainly something to be avoided, as it might precipitate war between Great Britain and a Russo-French coalition. The Wilhelmstrasse was alert to the increased risk of complications, and its ambassador at Con-

¹ Ibid., No. 1839, No. 1842 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 13 July; 15 July 1893); Rosebery to Nicolson, No. 180 Confidential, 14 July 1893, F.O. 97/601; cf. G.E. Buckle, *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 3rd ser., ii. 261-262, 276-277. For the substance of the Ottoman proposals, see G.P. viii, No. 1838 (Radolin to the German Foreign Office, 11 July 1893).

² Howard (chargé d'affaires at St. Petersburg) to Rosebery, No. 180, 5 July 1893, F.O. 65/1447; Rosebery to Howard, Tel. No. 85, 12 July 1893, F.O. 65/1448; below, pp. 169-170.

stantinople was instructed on 21 July to warn the Sultan against taking action.¹ But since the weakened state of Germany's prestige on the Bosphorus inevitably raised some doubt regarding the effectiveness of her representations, the Foreign Office had a compelling reason not to rely too much upon expectations of aid from Berlin, but instead to adopt a strong policy of its own. By the 19th at latest, Rosebery had decided that the time had come for the lion to make a yet more conspicuous display of its teeth. Hitherto, despite his conscious use of the Armenian issue to impress the Palace with the consequences of British displeasure, the Foreign Secretary had stopped short of exploiting the question to the full. Now, presumably with Chermiside's advice still in mind, he threw caution momentarily to the winds, and set out to threaten the Turks with the bogey of a British-inspired Armenian revolt. When the Ottoman ambassador gave him an opening on the 19th by asking for assurances that Great Britain would not encourage Armenian plotters, Rosebery replied that 'as yet' she had not done so; then, after pointing out that if London had encouraged it, 'the present movement would have been of a very different character . . . a serious revolution' instead of a mere conspiracy, he refused to promise that he would continue withholding encouragement in future. What he did, he announced, would depend on the 'general relations' of Great Britain and Turkey.²

For the time being, Rosebery was plainly thinking of the Armenians as an asset - as a sword to be kept suspended over the Sultan's head, to terrify him into suppressing his Anglo-

¹ G.P. viii, No. 1843 (Marschall to Radolin, 21 July 1893).

² Rosebery to Nicolson, No. 185B Very Confidential, 19 July 1893, F.O. 78/4476.

phobe prejudices. But this phase was short-lived. Within a few days the Foreign Office learned that representations made by the German embassy at Constantinople on the 22nd had been favourably received, and that the Turks had disclaimed any immediate intention of causing difficulties for the British over Egypt.¹ This news was followed at the end of the month by belated tidings of the Khedive's disappointment at the hands of Abdul Hamid.² The danger which had occasioned his minatory posture having vanished at least temporarily, Rosebery soon lost interest in keeping the Armenian issue alive. In the second week of August he referred to it as a 'burden', and simultaneously he made clear his opinion that Great Britain had now done quite enough in the Armenians' behalf.³

By autumn the Armenian question no longer possessed the obvious urgency of spring and summer, and British policy had ceased to be effective except as an irritant to the Turks. In the circumstances, the latter development was unavoidable. It was not within Rosebery's power to try and reduce Abdul Hamid's distrust of Great Britain by abandoning the Christian minority altogether, for such an experiment would have been intolerable both to the Prime Minister and to the British public. Nor could the Foreign Secretary have afforded, even had he wished, to make a major effort for a general amelioration of the Christians' lot. At a time when Anglo-Turkish tension was unusually acute for some other reason, as it was because of Egypt in June and July, vigorous support of Armen-

¹ G.P. viii, No. 1844 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 23 July 1893); No. 1845 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 24 July 1893).

² Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 351 Confidential, 28 July 1893, F.O. 78/4481.

³ Rosebery to Gladstone, 10 Aug. 1893, Add. MS. 44290.

ians and the threat of encouraging them to rebel might seem useful short-term expedients to deter a timorous Sultan from mischief. But it was impossible to ignore the fact that if continued over a long period - as would have been necessary in a campaign for broad reform - such severe pressure was likely to prove a boomerang. Nicolson, despite his conviction that a chilly attitude towards the Sultan was preferable to a conciliatory one, was warning by the end of July that matters could be carried too far: 'The worm may turn', he wrote, and he expressed a hope that the 'Armenia agitation' in Great Britain would subside.¹ Within the bounds of feasibility and prudence, there appeared no alternative to the middle way adopted by Salisbury and White in the later 'eighties: that of making occasional unofficial representations without pressing very hard for results. It was to this course that the British embassy drifted back.²

With the return to normality, what endured in the mind of Abdul Hamid was not the respect for Great Britain's energy which had been evident in the summer, but rather the bitter resentment which he had felt from the spring onwards at the British response to his conduct. Rosebery's diplomatic interference was not his sole grievance; he was but little less incensed at the voicing of pro-Armenian views by leading editors and public figures, including Gladstone.³ By December of

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 31 July 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Ford to Rosebery, No. 476, 12 Oct.; No. 482, 13 Oct. 1893; F.O. 78/4483.

³ G.P. viii, No. 1836 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 15 June 1893); Vivian to Rosebery, No. 146 Confidential, 11 May 1893, F.O. 45/698; Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 428, 6 Sept. 1893, F.O. 78/4482; Currie to Rosebery, No. 107 Confidential, 7 Mar. 1894, F.O. 78/4540.

1893 British influence in Turkey was at a much lower ebb than a couple of years before;¹ and while the Armenian question had probably contributed less to this decline than had the injury inflicted by Egyptian events on the dignity of the Caliphate, it had been of sufficient importance for the Grand Vizier to list it, in March 1894, among the factors in Anglo-Turkish relations which caused particular concern to the Ottoman authorities.²

Apart from the Egyptian and Armenian issues, Abdul Hamid distrusted Great Britain for a more fundamental reason - for her liberal and constitutional traditions. 'Besides believing in despotic government', observed Colonel Chermiside, the Sultan had the 'old, narrow, mediaeval ideas of kingcraft, statecraft, and the measure of knowledge and liberty fitting for subjects'. With a 'hatred of all that is liberal and a morbid fear of democratic institutions, of public discussion and opinion', he was suspicious of 'England's policy as regards himself and his throne'.³ The difficulty was not merely that Great Britain adhered to a domestic political system which the Ottoman ruler found deeply distasteful, but that she reminded him of the fact by applying her liberal tenets in ways which offended or alarmed him. The condemnation of his Armenian repression by British newspapers was the most

¹ Kalnoky to Deym, No. 3 Strictly Confidential, 7 Dec.; Deym to Kalnoky, No. 38A-E Secret, 22 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Currie to Rosebery, No. 107 Confidential, 7 Mar.; Currie to Kimberley, No. 139 Confidential, 28 Mar. 1894, F.O. 78/4540.

³ Memorandum by Chermiside, dated 6 Mar. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478); Chermiside to Chapman, Personal and Confidential, 24 Sept., 1893 (enclosed in Chapman to Currie, Secret, 29 Sept. 1893, F.O. 78/4502); cf. Vambéry, ii. 357.

conspicuous and perhaps the most damaging aspect of this problem, but it did not stand alone. For example, when an Imperial secretary complained in 1892 of abusive anti-Turkish articles appearing in a paper in Egypt, the British reply took the form of an uncompromising declaration on the freedom of the press¹ - an admirable rejoinder, but not one calculated to enhance the affection in which Great Britain was held at the Palace. More serious was the unpleasantness occasioned when journalists' attacks were aimed at the Sultan in person. Just after the formation of the Liberal ministry, extreme annoyance arose at Constantinople over the publication in London of a newspaper called La Turquie Libre. Its very name was anathema, the language it used about Abdul Hamid was apparently rather vehement, and the Turkish ambassador received indignant orders to request its suppression on grounds of scurrility. Rosebery seems at first to have been conciliatory, offering to give the matter his attention; but if he hoped that the Sultan's wrath would soon subside, he was to be sharply disillusioned. The ambassador renewed his representations almost immediately, and nearly seven weeks later, hounded by 'further pressing despatches' from his government, he raised the issue yet again. At last Rosebery flatly rebuffed him, by means of an unequivocal statement that no steps to ban the journal could be taken.²

To the Sultan, such an incident as that of La Turquie Libre was not a trivial one. From the earliest years of his reign he had been quick to resent, and slow to forget, the

¹ Ford to Rosebery, No. 341 Confidential, 10 Nov. 1892, F.O. 78/4417.

² Rosebery to Ford, No. 185, 31 Aug.; No. 187 Secret, 2 Sept.; No. 215A, 19 Oct. 1892, F.O. 195/1744.

In addition to Great Britain's newspapers and press criticisms in which the foreign - especially the British - press was wont to indulge;¹ and doubtless La Turquie Libre was in his mind even more objectionable than ordinary fault-finding, since it was devoted specifically to propaganda against his autocratic régime. Moreover, as if Great Britain's toleration of the paper were not bad enough, he learned that copies of it were evading the rigours of his censorship and finding their way into the Empire through the British post office at Constantinople.² From these circumstances, a man of Abdul Hamid's distrustful nature was certain to draw the most sinister conclusions, and there can be no question but that the 'Free Turkey' affair confirmed and reinforced his suspicions of London's policy towards 'himself and his throne'. The suspicions were, of course, totally unfounded: neither Gladstone and Rosebery, nor other British statesmen of their century, took the slightest interest in exporting to Turkey the principles of constitutionalism and parliamentary rule which the Sultan dreaded.³ What mattered, however, was what the Padishah imagined. The sole compensation which the British derived from Abdul Hamid's terror of liberal ideas was that France too suffered grievously from the stigma attached to democracy and freedom.⁴

¹ (Alwyn Parker), 'The Bagdad Railway Negotiations', Quarterly Review, ccxxviii. 493; H.S. de Blowitz, My Memoirs, p. 271.

² Ford to Rosebery, No. 283 Confidential, 11 Sept. 1892, F.O. 195/1747.

³ H. Temperley, 'British Policy towards Parliamentary Rule and Constitutionalism in Turkey, 1830-1914', Cambridge Historical Journal, IV. 11 (1933), pp. 185, 191; E. Kedourie, England and the Middle East, p. 26.

⁴ Cambon to Develle, 27 May 1893 (printed in P. Cambon, Correspondance, 1870-1924, i. 359-361).

In addition to Great Britain's occupation of Egypt, her intercession for Armenians, and her refusal to suppress critical comment in the press, other powerful factors were at work to weaken British influence. Two were historical - the successful support which Gladstone, early in his second administration, had given to Greece in a frontier dispute with Turkey,¹ and, more important, the failure of the British to participate in the Russo-Turkish war in the 'seventies. Ottoman officials still liked to complain that they had been led to hope for assistance which had never materialized, and the Sultan himself insisted that 'England left me in the lurch'. The appearance of British warships in the Sea of Marmora was ascribed strictly to a selfish concern on the part of London for its own interests, rather than to friendship for the Turks; and since the Treaty of Berlin was not considered at Constantinople to have been a major improvement on that of San Stefano, no recollection of Great Britain's diplomatic intervention could offset the bitter memory of her military neutrality.² There resulted not merely a dislike of Great Britain, but scepticism regarding the value of an alignment with her. The latter feeling was aggravated by the nature of British national armament. The Turks feared the British fleet in a tactical sense - their fortification of the Dardanelles is proof of that - but they had little appreciation of the broader strategic significance of sea power. 'It is a curious fact', remarked Colonel Chermiside, 'that notwith-

¹ R.W. Seton-Watson, Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question, p. 549; G. Lenczowski, The Middle East in World Affairs, p. 23; R.B. Mowat, The Life of Lord Pauncefote, pp. 46-47.

² Memoranda by A. Block, dated 23 Feb. 1893, and H. Marinitsch, undated (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478); Vambéry, ii. 356, 366; cf. Canon M. MacColl, 'Russia and England', Contemporary Review, lxvii. 12.

Turkish official classes
 standing Turkey's past history and the geographical conditions of her possessions, the bulk even of the most educated Turks, and probably the Sultan himself, are very ignorant of the relative value of naval supremacy.¹ Preferring to judge power by the counting of bayonets, they could see little security to be gained from a policy of leaning on Great Britain. In consequence, their emotional antipathy towards her was left unbalanced by any sufficiently weighty calculations of self-interest, and was given a much freer rein than would have been the case had the London government controlled a standing army of Continental proportions.²

For all the reasons mentioned, the cold and suspicious attitude of Abdul Hamid towards London appeared, in most Ottoman eyes, to be justified by both past experience and existing facts; and the support therefore given to the Sultan's Anglophobe outlook by his officials and his favourites was itself an important factor in the situation. There was no question of the ruler having to impose his will on a reluctant following; on the contrary, those around him encouraged him in his views. In this there was no doubt an element of sycophancy, but that is by no means the whole explanation. The alliance of the mid-century was not merely dead but largely forgotten,³ and hatred of Great Britain was rampant in the

¹ Memorandum by Chermiside, dated 6 Mar. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478).

² It is noteworthy in this connection that the relative influence at Constantinople of Germany and the Franco-Russian combination depended in a major degree on the Turkish appraisal of their respective armed strengths on land. See Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 5 June 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ Memorandum by Sir A. Sandison, dated 16 Jan. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 15, 16 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477).

Turkish official class:

The Sultan is strongly anti-British [wrote Nicolson] and I am not surprised. Here is a suspicious, timorous man, surrounded by people . . . who lose no opportunity of instilling into his mind absolute misrepresentations of our aims and policy. . . Practically we are isolated from the Palace.¹

There was still, admittedly, an 'English party', which adhered to older ideas of an Anglo-Turkish community of interests; but too obvious an association with this body of opinion was imprudent for the ambitious.² Although the group had a sympathizer in Rustem Pasha, the Sultan's ambassador in London,³ most of its members were demoralized and silent, without hope of exerting effective influence, and shaken even in their own convictions by the British presence in Egypt and Cyprus.⁴

Moreover, apart from everything else, the intellectual climate was unfavourable to the growth, or even the survival, of a pro-British school of thought. Whatever might be the British policy towards their country, whatever might be their assessment of British power, Ottoman officials were predisposed, by the cultural tendencies prevailing among them, to advocate an Anglophobe course. French, rather than English, was the foreign language which they were accustomed to read and speak.⁵

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Feb. 1893, Villiers Papers.

² D.G. Hogarth, A Wandering Scholar in the Levant, p. 48.

³ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 142 (Montebello to Develle, 27 Jan.); No. 152 (Develle to Cambon, 31 Jan. 1893); G.P. viii, No. 1829 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 5 Feb. 1893).

⁴ Memoranda by Charmside, dated 6 Mar. 1893, and A. Block, dated 23 Feb. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478).

⁵ L. Ostrorog, The Turkish Problem, pp. 50-57; H. Kohn, Western Civilization in the Near East, p. 197.

'So far as any foreign press exercises influence' in Turkey, commented one of the British ambassador's staff, 'it is the French press which prevails in the appreciation of current events.'¹ This was damaging enough to Great Britain, in view of the virulent hostility of French journalists to most things English.² But the trouble went deeper than the reading of the wrong newspapers. It was summed up in one of Nicolson's letters:

We should not forget that now we have to deal with very different Turks from the Turks of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe for instance. The men we deal with and who are now the instruments of the Sultan are not the old Turks, but are the products of a vitiated French education overlying the old stock. Young Turkey may have sharper wits and more extended knowledge than their forefathers, but they approach very closely . . . to the corrupt, wily Levantine, with a good dose of fanaticism and arrogance underneath, and a craze for money-making and speculation. The old Turk understood us, and you had a man to tackle. The present men's training and habits of thought are largely influenced by French ideas, not of the highest order, and widely opposite to anything Anglo-Saxon. What I mean to point out is that with the old ruling classes we could get into touch and sympathy, and exercise some influence over them. To the present entourage of the Sultan, England and English modes of thought . . . are antipathetic.³

In a way which Nicolson omitted to mention, the eclipse of the 'English party' was in part directly attributable to

¹ Memorandum by A. Block, dated 23 Feb. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478).

² Dufferin to Rosebery, No. 450 Confidential, 3 Nov. 1893, F.O. 27/3121 (printed in Gooch and Temperley, British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914, ii. 285-288); E.M. Carroll, French Public Opinion and Foreign Affairs, 1870-1914, p. 159.

³ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 27 Feb. 1893, Villiers Papers. The passage is quoted, with a few minor inaccuracies, in H. Nicolson, p. 90.

the 'craze for money-making' to which he alluded. Ottoman officials acted in opposition to British interests not from inclination alone, but often from motives of pecuniary gain. Next to absolutism, corruption was the most conspicuous characteristic of Turkish government, and the power of an embassy depended, in a significant degree, on its ability to offer bribes to those members of the Imperial entourage who were currently most in favour. In this respect, in competition with Continental Powers, Great Britain was at a grave disadvantage: her Secret Service funds, strictly limited by a watchful House of Commons, were not commensurate with the requirements of an effective Eastern diplomacy.¹ While enough money was available to operate a reasonably adequate system of espionage inside the Ottoman administration,² the British had of necessity to abstain from bribery on a large scale, and their abstention prejudiced both their political position and their economic opportunities.³

In the light of such an array of unfavourable circumstances - from the friction over Egypt and Armenia to the corruptibility and cultural orientation of Ottoman officialdom - there could be no realistic hope of restoring the voice of Great Britain to its former supremacy at Porte and Palace.

¹ Salisbury to Queen Victoria, 29 Aug. 1886 (printed in G.E. Buckle, The Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd ser., i. 193-194); Lady G. Cecil, The Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury, iv. 2.

² Below, pp. 66-67.

³ On the advantages which other Powers secured by bribery, see the Memorandum by A. Block, dated 23 Feb. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478). In 1887 the British ambassador (then Sir William White) had expressed the view that the practice of using 'baksheesh' was an 'almost insurmountable' obstacle to full support by the embassy of British business enterprise in Turkey. See Smith, p. 115.

In the early 'nineties, indeed, a further decline in Britain influence was probably inevitable, not only because of the fresh bitterness injected into the Egyptian and Armenian questions in 1893, but because the fall of the relatively pro-British Kiamil Pasha two years previously had removed the last domestic check on the Sultan's Anglophobe policy.¹ It was clear in '93 that no chance existed of securing a dependable guarantee of Turkish military co-operation against a coup de main on the Straits, and that there was no prospect of the Sultan's attention being diverted from the fortification of the Dardanelles against the British to the strengthening of the Bosphorus defences against Russia.² The most that any British representative at Constantinople could sensibly aspire to accomplish was to salvage something from the wreckage: to keep the weakening of his country's position to a minimum, and to see that Franco-Russian influence was held as much as possible within safe limits. The difficulties being what they were, even so restricted a task was one which demanded diplomatic talent of an uncommon calibre. In this respect, too, Great Britain was unfortunate in 1892-'93. Sir William White - the illustrious 'Bosphorus Bull' - has been called the best representative that any British government had in Turkey after the days of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe;³ but White had died in December 1891, within four months after Kiamil's dismissal. When the Liberal administration came into

¹ Above, pp. 19-20.

² Minute by Currie, dated 22 Nov. 1893; Minute by Rosebery, dated 26 Nov. 1893 (both with Foreign Office to Admiralty, Secret, 6 Dec. 1893, F.O. 78/4592).

³ H.S. Edwards, The Career and Correspondence of Sir William White pp. 264-265; G. Young, Diplomacy Old and New, p. 37.

office in the following summer, it inherited from its predecessor an ambassador of a very different type.

Sir Clare Ford had been one of Lord Salisbury's mistakes. As a man, he was in many ways to be admired: not only did he possess culture and artistic taste, but these qualities were supplemented by an attractive personality, charming, amiable, and kind.¹ Even as a diplomatist he was not without certain merits: Granville, considering him for the Constantinople embassy in 1884, observed that he had been 'extraordinarily successful' in getting questions settled.² At the embassy in Madrid, from which post he was promoted to that on the Golden Horn, he had presumably been competent enough. But Spain was a land he knew and loved,³ and he had been troubled there by few major political problems, with which he possessed neither the ability nor the inclination to deal.⁴ When plucked from this congenial backwater after eight contented years, and plunged into the complexities and intrigues of the Near East, he soon found himself hopelessly out of his element. He was altogether ignorant of his new environment,⁵ and the very kindness and amiability which made him so likeable as an individual proved to be a handicap in his contacts with the

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Personal, 19 June; Private and Personal, 7 Dec. 1893, Villiers Papers; Joan Haslip, The Sultan, p. 213; Anonymous, 'Our Diplomats', Temple Bar, lxxxiv. 196.

² Granville to Gladstone, 15 Aug. 1884 (printed in Lord E. Fitzmaurice, The Life of Granville George Leveson Gower, Second Earl Granville, II. 365).

³ Dictionary of National Biography (Supplement), xxii. 649.

⁴ G.P. viii, No. 1767 (Blow to Caprivi, 20 June 1894).

⁵ Sir V. Corbett, Reminiscences, Autobiographical and Diplomatic, p. 144; Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, Old Diplomacy, pp. 47, 49.

Turks. His objective should have been to make himself respected, as White had been;¹ and his method should have been to maintain a consistent attitude of firmness - normally friendly firmness, but firmness nevertheless. Ford, however, felt uncomfortable when he tried to be firm, and only sporadically did he muster the will power to make the necessary effort. As he once sadly confessed to Nicolson, he was 'not a fighting man'; the approach he preferred was that of 'soft sawder'.² It was this policy which he carried out from the beginning of his mission. At his first meeting with the Grand Vizier and the foreign minister, he is said to have scored a 'great hit' by keeping them entertained with stories, which he told with 'great bonhomie'.³ The 'hit', if any, was entirely superficial, and of no practical value. Ford's chatty informality was indeed less likely to win him genuine popularity than to arouse a concealed contempt. His method was fundamentally wrong: 'It is no use at all', wrote Nicolson in the following year, 'smiling and smirking with the Sultan and the others. They only laugh in their sleeves . . .'⁴ Nicolson had been in the East before, and had an appreciation of the local psychology. He wished that Ford had 'a little more tenue':

The Ambassador is a very big personage here, and the Oriental is impressed with a little dignity; jovial familiarity rather puzzles him, and involves the danger of one never being taken au sérieux . . . Much depends on the personality of the Chief, and the Turk watches a man's character and bearing very carefully. After the

¹ Corbett, loc. cit.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 23 July; Private and Personal, 7 Aug.; Private, 9 Nov. 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ Sir T. Waugh, Turkey: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, p. 32.

⁴ Nicolson to Villiers, Private and Personal, 14 Aug. 1893, Villiers Papers.

Sturm und Drang period of poor old White, sailing in a pleasure boat is perhaps a welcome relief to the Turks; but it would be well that they should understand that we should not overlook everything for the sake of being friendly and amiable.¹

Despite the experience and superior knowledge of his subordinate, Ford remained true to his own nature: as long as he was in personal charge at Constantinople, his embassy gave the Palace an impression of feebleness which was probably more accentuated than offset by his rare spasms of evanescent vigour. Of these the most noteworthy was his attempt, at the beginning of 1893, to protect British railway investments in Turkey.² Railways, of course, were largely an economic question, and for many years economic questions had been Ford's special interest.³ In general it is fair to say that the ambassador (unlike Nicolson when chargé d'affaires) refrained from asserting himself in a sufficiently determined way for the Sultan to be convinced of the disadvantages of flouting British wishes.⁴

It was serious enough for Great Britain that her representative acquired neither influence nor the respect from which influence might have grown, but the full extent of Ford's failure at Constantinople can be understood only in the light of the fact that he fell himself under the influence of the Turks. Both the foreign minister and the Grand Vizier, Nicolson remarked, knew perfectly how to 'amuse and

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 14 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 14 Jan.; Private, 12 Feb. 1893, Villiers Papers; Chapter III.

³ Dictionary of National Biography, loc. cit.

⁴ Corbett, pp. 144-145; Nicolson to Villiers, Private and Personal, 7 Dec. 1893, Villiers Papers.

Villiers, Personal, 13 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers.

trifle with him'; and that was not the worst. Among the most dangerous weaknesses for a diplomatist on the Bosphorus was to be trusting, and Ford was trusting to the point of gullibility. Confident that everyone he met was 'as clear and pellucid as spring water', he tended to accept Imperial professions at face value:¹ we have already noticed the ease with which the Sultan deceived him in November of 1892, by promising to establish an investigating commission on administrative abuses in Armenia.² In the end Abdul Hamid succeeded in reducing Ford to the condition of a captivated admirer. The ambassador, charming himself, was equally susceptible to the charm of others; and the Sultan, as skilful a charmeur as ever breathed,³ made of him an easy prey. A steady stream of cajoleries and 'sweet messages' flowed from the Palace to the ambassadorial residence, with the result that in November 1893, just after Ford had learned of his impending transfer to Rome, Nicolson found that his chief was 'quite bewitched'. He had said, the secretary reported, that his single deep regret at leaving Constantinople was the 'thought of being separated from his Padishah':⁴

Ford's appointment to Rome was the result of what Rosebery had heard regarding the ambassador's unsuitability for his Eastern post. Almost as soon as he assumed office in Aug-

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Feb.; Private, 11 Mar.; Personal, 19 June 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Above, p. 35.

³ Sir V. Chirol, Fifty Years in a Changing World, p. 134; Count C. Mijatovich, The Memoirs of a Balkan Diplomatist, pp. 83-84; Mrs. Max Mueller, Letters from Constantinople, pp. 191-193.

⁴ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 9 Nov. 1893; cf. Nicolson to Villiers, Personal, 19 June 1893, Villiers Papers.

ust 1892, the Foreign Secretary appears to have become aware that the situation at the Constantinople embassy was not entirely satisfactory. Ford had been there only since the early spring, but in September Rosebery was already discussing with the Queen the possibility of replacing him.¹ For the time being, however, no change was made: Rosebery contented himself with ensuring that Ford's manner of conducting affairs would be watched from within the embassy and secretly reported to the Foreign Office. It was to spy on his chief, as well as to carry out the ordinary duties of a secretary of embassy, that Nicolson was sent to Constantinople at the end of the year.² Of his unfavourable discoveries about the ambassador the latter's inadequacy in dealing with the Turks was only the most disquieting. Another difficulty was that presented by the mistress whom Ford had brought with him to his new post. An official who served under him briefly in 1892 afterwards maintained that his attachment had adversely affected his prestige, particularly with the Turks;³ but on arriving at Constantinople in January 1893, Nicolson came quickly to the conclusion that this was not the case to any serious extent. The real disadvantage of the ambassador's 'petite faiblesse', he believed, was that the lady occupied too much of her lover's time.⁴ With Ford 'absorbed in the fair one', it was not solely the quest for influence which had been neglected - for this, as we have seen, there were more funda-

¹ Extract from Queen Victoria's Journal, dated 11 Sept. 1892 (printed in Buckle, 3rd ser., ii. 157).

² H. Nicolson, p. 81.

³ Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, p. 49.

⁴ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 14 Jan.; Private, 29 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers.

mental reasons of temperament - but the internal supervision of the embassy as well. 'Affairs had got dreadfully slack': by March Nicolson felt able to say that he had accomplished something towards restoring efficiency, but he described himself as having been 'appalled at the chaos' which had previously prevailed.¹

Ford's unfitness for his position was revealed also in the matter of the embassy's intelligence service. It was admittedly not his fault (as Nicolson was careful to point out) that the 'very good system' of earlier days had disappeared; this misfortune had been the work of White, whose long experience and intimate knowledge of the Near East had given him access to so many strictly personal sources of information that he had considered an organization to be superfluous.² After White's death the embassy suffered for his short-sighted policy: without an adequate network of agents, there could be no certainty of receiving early warning as to intrigues directed against British interests, nor was it possible to keep as close a watch as was desirable on political trends at the Palace. In the spring of 1892, therefore, one of Ford's first tasks should have been to see that a start was made on restoring the intelligence system to its former effectiveness. In fact, however, he did little or nothing in that direction, permitting himself to be ruled by conscientious scruples regarding bribery. Although he had been in the Turkish capital for more than ten months before the arrival of Nicolson, the latter found intelligence arrangements 'practically non-existent'. But at the same time as he recorded this finding,

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private and Personal, 8 Mar. 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 29 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ H. Nicolson, p. 81.

the new First Secretary was able to report that the obstacle of his chief's conscience had been finally overcome, and that shortly the British network would be 'satisfactorily laid out'.¹ The rapidity with which progress was made, now that the green light had been given, emphasizes the unwisdom of Ford's original hesitation. To engage in espionage for Great Britain was not the safest of occupations: if an informant were to betray himself, his fate, Nicolson suspected, would be a trip to the Yemen or a 'header' into the Bosphorus. But in Turkey virtually anything could be obtained for a price, and by early March a properly organized intelligence system was once again in being. Indeed, the British had succeeded in recruiting as their chief agent none other than the son of Artin Pasha, the Ottoman under-secretary of state for foreign affairs - 'a slight veil', wrote Nicolson gleefully, 'to having Artin himself, as I imagine he pockets the stipend'.²

For all Ford's failings as a diplomatist in the East, Nicolson could not help feeling personally fond of him, and frequently tempered criticism of his weaknesses with references to his more admirable qualities.³ By August 1893, however, the secretary - then chargé d'affaires - had come to the definite conclusion that a stronger ambassador should be found for Turkey. The suggestion was easier to make than to carry out: as Salisbury had once complained, it was 'almost impossible' to remove an unsatisfactory ambassador during his term unless he had committed a specific error or misdeed which could be publicly proved, or unless he could be appoint-

¹ Ibid.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private and Personal, 8 Mar.; Private, 10 Apr.; Private, 8 May 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ H. Nicolson, p. 81.

ed to a better post.¹ It was a transfer, not a forced retirement, which Nicolson had in mind for Ford: there were other places, he thought, where his chief would serve well enough.² But for the moment no suitable vacancy was at hand, and the Foreign Office took no action: returning from his long leave, Ford resumed his duties at Constantinople in early October.³ Then, on the 21st, sudden tragedy brought a solution to the problem. The unexpected death of Lord Vivian, the ambassador to Italy, opened up a quieter post in a friendlier capital, where Ford's culture and sociability would be genuine assets. Rosebery was unwilling to replace Vivian with 'indecent haste', but within five days at most his mind was made up that 'Ford should go to Rome':

Sir A. Nicolson has made and would continue to make an excellent chargé d'affaires at Constantinople. As to the permanent arrangement for Constantinople I would say nothing at present. Of one thing only am I absolutely clear - that Ford, good and amiable as he is, should go elsewhere. He . . . would do very well at Rome.⁴

Apart from the pain of parting from his Padishah, Ford was delighted at receiving the Italian appointment. On 6 December he had his farewell audience with Abdul Hamid, and the conduct of British diplomacy on the Bosphorus passed once again, on a temporary basis, into the capable hands of Nicolson.⁵

¹ Salisbury to Queen Victoria, 29 Aug. 1886 (printed in Buckle, 3rd ser., i. 194; Cecil, iv. 3).

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private and Personal, 7 Aug. 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Oct. 1893, Villiers Papers.

⁴ Rosebery to Gladstone, Secret, 26 Oct. 1893, Add. MS. 44290. Cf. also Gladstone to Rosebery, 28 Oct. 1893, Add. MS. 44549.

⁵ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 9 Nov.; Private and Personal, 25 Nov.; Private, 7 Dec. 1893, Villiers Papers.

Since the British ambassador in 1892-'93 had not even been a vigorous and determined, let alone a successful, contender, the serious competition for influence in Turkey had been left in those years to Germany, France and Russia - the two latter Powers being, in broad terms, on the same side of the diplomatic fence, though their interests were by no means identical and their co-operation by no means consistent.¹ Among these rivals, prior to the spring of 1893, it was Germany that enjoyed the most advantageous position; and her strength was felt to the full in a prolonged and bitter conflict between the French and German embassies during the first winter of the British Liberal administration. At stake was the control of new railway construction in Asiatic Turkey, and with it the assumed political advantages of economic penetration. Paul Cambon saw the issue clearly: while he still paid some attention to making life difficult for the British, particularly with reference to Egypt,² he knew that in the general question of influence, Germany was the antagonist that mattered. 'Il s'agit de savoir', he wrote in February, in one of the later phases of the railway controversy, 'si les Allemands seront seuls maitres ici.'³

¹ W.L.Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1890-1894, pp. 270-274; D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 145 (Herbette to Develle, 28 Jan. 1893); No. 176 (Cambon to Develle, 25 Feb. 1893); No. 179 (Develle to Cambon, 8 Mar. 1893).

² 'Un Diplomate' (H. Cambon), Paul Cambon: Ambassadeur de France, p. 132; H. Nicolson, p. 91; D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 110 (Cambon to Develle, 18 Jan. 1893); No. 133 (Cambon to Develle, 25 Jan. 1893).

³ Cambon to d'Estournelles, 27 Feb. 1893 (printed in P. Cambon Correspondance, 1870-1924, i, 357-358). For Cambon's assessment of the extent of Great Britain's participation in the controversy, see D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 175 (Cambon to Develle, 25 Feb. 1893).

From precedents established in the later 'eighties, it might have been expected that the sympathies of the British embassy in such a Franco-German clash would have lain decidedly on the side of the Germans.¹ In this case, however, Sir Clare Ford acted for some time along what amounted to parallel lines with the French. Great Britain's rôle in the dispute is deserving of examination in some detail, for not only did it lead to a dramatic incident between London and Berlin which has been generally misunderstood by historians, but it signified in addition a change on Rosebery's part - albeit an abortive one - in the policy which had been pursued in Asia Minor under the administration of Lord Salisbury.

political and military reorganization of the country as a bulwark against Russia. In this Asiatic sector, the threat apparently posed by Russia was two-pronged - one prong pointing southwards at the Persian Gulf, in which St. Petersburg had begun by 1887 to show symptoms of increased interest, and the other westwards at the Straits. During the later 'eighties, both in London and at the British embassy in Constantinople, these dangers were viewed with considerable anxiety, and it was largely in response to them that British diplomacy on the Bosphorus commenced to become deeply involved in railway questions and controversies.

Although the ambassador, Sir William Gell, did not fully share the enthusiasm for Turkish railways that animated many of his contemporaries, he expressed the conviction in 1887 that their construction 'throughout Asiatic Turkey' would be advantageous to Great Britain. It would be 'desirable', he added, for new lines to be in the hands of British enterprise.

¹ G. Gaulis, La Ruine d'un Empire, p. 114; K. Helfferich, Die Deutsche Turkenpolitik, pp. 10-11; C.A. Schaefer, Die Entwicklung der Bagdadbahnpolitik, p. 37.

III

GREAT BRITAIN AND ASIA MINOR:

THE DIPLOMACY OF ECONOMIC PENETRATION

When Lord Rosebery went to the Foreign Office in 1892, the policy of Great Britain in Asia Minor had been for several years to encourage the building there of a network of railways. The objective, in part, was to bring about an expansion of trade, but it was also hoped to advance another cause equally dependent on adequate communications: the political and military reorganization of the country as a bulwark against Russia. In this Asiatic sector, the threat apparently posed by Russia was two-pronged - one prong pointing southwards at the Persian Gulf, in which St. Petersburg had begun by 1887 to show symptoms of increased interest,¹ and the other westwards at the Straits. During the later 'eighties, both in London and at the British embassy in Constantinople, these dangers were viewed with considerable disquiet, and it was largely in response to them that British diplomacy on the Bosphorus commenced to become deeply involved in railway questions and controversies.²

Although the ambassador, Sir William White, did not fully share the enthusiasm for Turkish railways that animated many of his contemporaries, he expressed the conviction in 1887 that their construction 'throughout Asiatic Turkey' would be advantageous to Great Britain. It would be 'desirable', he added, for new lines to be in the hands of British entrepre-

¹ Sir A.T. Wilson, The Persian Gulf, p. 258.

² C.L. Smith, The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople, 1886-1891, pp. 104-105, 108-118, 125-133.

eurs, rather than under the control of French or Franco-Russian competitors.¹ With the second point there could be little disagreement; but that new lines even under the ownership of her own capitalists would be to Great Britain's national benefit was, at any rate in a strategic sense, a more debatable proposition. On this issue the War Office vacillated, torn between the hope of increasing Turkey's ability to resist a Russian attack, and the fear that railways would simplify the logistical problems of an invading force and facilitate its advance. White himself recognized some justification for the War Office doubts, but in the spring of 1888 the military experts finally handed down a verdict in favour of his previous advice.² Once firmly made, their decision endured: under Gladstone's ministry in the 'nineties, Intelligence continued to believe that completion of a unified rail system in Asia Minor would represent for Great Britain a significant strategic (as well as commercial) gain.³

For Great Britain acting alone, however, any scheme for constructing a network of railways in Turkey was plainly impracticable. The Sultan suspected that if the British were to build new lines or extend existing ones, it would be with the ulterior purpose of transforming his Asiatic provinces into

¹ Memorandum by Sir W. White, dated 25 July 1887: 'Remarks applying to different British schemes for the construction of Turkish Railways in Asia', F.O. 78/3999 (printed in Smith, Appendix IV, pp. 164-167); cf. (Alwyn Parker), 'The Bagdad Railway Negotiations', Quarterly Review, ccxxviii. 498.

² Smith, pp. 116-118.

³ Memorandum by Captain Fairholme, dated 16 Feb. 1894 (enclosed in Chapman (Director of Military Intelligence) to Sanderson (Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office), Private, 19 Feb. 1894, F.O. 78/4560.

occupied territories on the Egyptian model.¹ There was, in consequence, little likelihood of his according the necessary concessions to companies that were purely or predominantly British. Nor, indeed, was there much chance that such companies would be able to carry out major schemes even if Imperial objections were overcome. Notwithstanding the immense financial resources of the City, adequate capital for an extensive railway system in Turkey was not obtainable in Great Britain. The excitement felt in some quarters - notably by Joseph Chamberlain - about the untouched 'mine of wealth' in Asia Minor,² had not penetrated the walls of the leading financial houses of London. Possessing more favourable opportunities for investment elsewhere, and doubtless recalling the Turkish bankruptcy of the 'seventies, the latter preferred to steer clear of entanglements in a region as corruptly and inefficiently administered as the Ottoman Empire.³

A solution to these difficulties appeared to have presented itself when British and German financiers at Constantinople came to an agreement, in the late summer of 1888, for equal partnership in an important Anatolian concession. Not merely were the demands on British capital thereby reduced, but the obstacle of Abdul Hamid's suspicions was surmounted. Until the Turkish government had irrevocably committed itself, the scheme was ostensibly to remain altogether German;⁴ and

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private and Confidential, 19 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers; cf. H. Holborn, Deutschland und die Türkei, 1878-1890, p. 84.

² Notes by Chamberlain on an interview with Abdul Hamid, 5 Nov. 1886 (excerpt printed in J.L. Garvin, The Life of Joseph Chamberlain, ii. 449-450).

³ E.L. Woodward, Great Britain and the German Navy, p. 143.

⁴ Smith, p. 127.

as far as he trusted anyone, the Sultan trusted Germans, believing them to have no political designs on his territory.¹ There was, moreover, a third advantage in prospect: the existence of a German economic stake in Asiatic Turkey would be as valuable from the British standpoint as the railways themselves, for it might be expected to increase the interest of the Berlin government in opposing Russian encroachment,² and to serve as a deterrent - a 'scarecrow' - to the potential invader. Accordingly, White looked upon the partnership plan with a benevolent eye. In financial circles in London, however, it was regarded with reserve, and, in the upshot, the full capital for the British share in the concession was not forthcoming. By 1890, the Anatolian Railway Company had fallen entirely into the more aggressive hands of Alfred Kaula and the Deutsche Bank.³

At the time, this failure of her finance was far from appearing to threaten Great Britain's interests in a political or strategic sense. Even if her own capitalists did not participate, it seemed to her reassuring that a major railway into the interior of Asia Minor should at last be under construction, and that Germans should now be playing a prominent rôle on the Asiatic approaches to the Straits. It was Russian aggression, and French and Russian influence in the Ottoman Empire, that the British feared; and especially since their own influence was so weak, they naturally welcomed the counterpoise to their antagonists provided by the strengthened

¹ Holborn, p. 85; Ford to Rosebery, No. 387 Confidential, 26 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4417.

² Smith, pp. 129, 133; cf. G.W.F. Hallgarten, Imperialismus vor 1914, 1. 235.

³ Smith, pp. 129-131, 133; cf. Woodward, pp. 143-144.

position of a friendly Germany.¹

It was not until the late autumn of 1892 that the question of railways in Asiatic Turkey again came to the fore as an issue of international importance. Then, however, it did so with a vengeance, and from November of that year to the following spring, despite the brief recrudescence of the Egyptian controversy in January, acute rivalry for railway concessions constituted the chief problem confronting European diplomacy at Constantinople. In 1889 the Germans had obtained the transfer to their control of an existing British line between Haidar Pasha and Ismidt,² and the Anatolian concession which they had already secured authorized an additional three hundred miles of construction from Ismidt to Angora. The Angora extension made rapid progress, and the groundwork for the scramble of 1892-'93 was laid by a proposal from Abdul Hamid for a further prolongation of the line in the direction of Baghdad.³ After investigating the technical difficulties, which were great, and the prospects for a profit, which were small, the German financiers demurred; but the Wilhelmstrasse was warned by its Constantinople embassy that failure to comply with the Sultan's request might cause a revulsion at the Palace against Germany's interests and influence in general.⁴ From this dilemma, by May of 1892,

¹ V. Bérard, Le Sultan, l'Islam et les Puissances, pp. 208, 210; G.E. Kirk, A Short History of the Middle East, p. 92.

² Sir E. Pears, 'The Bagdad Railway', Contemporary Review, xciv. 572.

³ P.T. Moon, Imperialism and World Politics, p. 241; E. Lindow, Freiherr Marschall von Bieberstein als Botschafter in Konstantinopel, 1897-1912, p. 41.

⁴ K. Helfferich, Georg von Siemens: Ein Lebensbild aus Deutschlands grosser Zeit, iii. 61.

the Kaula group had found a means of escape. Their proposals, as submitted to the foreign ministry in Berlin, called for a limited extension towards Baghdad of about four hundred kilometres, from Angora to Caesarea, coupled with the building of a branch line from Eskishehr, a point on the Ismidt-Angora railway, southwards via Afioun-Karahissar to Konia. Even when these plans were first put forward, however, the German financiers expressed doubt that they could carry out both sections of the project without some form of financial support from their government,¹ and whatever genuine intention they may initially have had of constructing the Caesarea extension within the imminent future appears to have quickly evaporated.² With reference to Caesarea and Baghdad, the Germans' objective from the commencement of the scramble in November was no more than to exclude competitors, on what Sir Clare Ford described as the 'dog-in-the-manger principle'.³ The only line in which Kaula had an immediate positive interest was the Eskishehr-Konia branch.⁴ Not merely was this railway expected to be relatively easy and inexpensive to build, but since Konia lay in the heart of an important agricultural region, it held out the promise of bringing profitable new traffic to the Haidar Pasha-Ismidt-Angora trunk.⁵

¹ Ibid., iii. 61-62.

² P. Imbert, 'Le Chemin de Fer de Bagdad', Revue des Deux Mondes, 5th Period, xxxviii. 659.

³ Ford to Rosebery, No. 386 Confidential, 26 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4417.

⁴ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 67 (Cambon to Ribot, 15 Dec. 1892).

⁵ 'Note in Explanation of the Conflicting Claims at Constantinople for a Concession to build a Railway Line to Konia', by Sir E. Vincent (of the Imperial Ottoman Bank), dated 30 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4435.

At first sight, it would seem that the building of a Konia railway alone ought not to have extricated the German concessionaires from their embarrassments, since it failed to meet the original request from the Palace for an extension of the Anatolian line beyond Angora. Abdul Hamid, was, however, willing to accept the substitute.¹ There were excellent reasons for him to do so. Even if the Sultan had been thoroughly sincere in his professed desire for a Baghdad railway, the construction of a line to Konia would almost certainly have appeared in his eyes to be an advantageous scheme. Although in 1892-'93 the Konia project was planned by the Germans as a mere branch, it was in fact the first step on a possible alternative route to Baghdad.² Indeed, it was the first step on the route which was afterwards adopted.³ What is of particular significance in the present context is that the Ottoman government had been aware of the potentialities of a Konia line long before the Kaula syndicate sought the right to begin building in that direction. As early as 1880, the Turkish ministry of public works had examined the relative merits of railways to Baghdad via Eskishehr and Angora on the one hand, and Eskishehr, Konia and Aleppo on the other; and the report prepared by the ministry had strongly recommended that the second project should be preferred to the first.⁴ Furthermore, because of its anxiety on military

¹ J.B. Wolf, The Diplomatic History of the Bagdad Railroad, p. 16.

² S. Schneider, Die Deutsche Bagdadbahn, p. 23; H.J. Whigham, The Persian Problem, p. 239.

³ A. Brisse, 'Les intérêts de l'Allemagne dans l'Empire ottoman', Revue de Géographie, 1. 310 (map); Wolf, p. 17.

⁴ Unsigned Memorandum, entitled 'Kaula Concession', from the Intelligence Division of the War Office, dated 17 Jan. 1893

grounds that any railways in Turkish territory should be kept far distant from the Russian border, St. Petersburg had extracted assurances from Abdul Hamid in 1890 that there would be no extension eastwards from Angora, along the northern route into Mesopotamia.¹ The Russians would have been happiest if there had been no railways at all in Turkey; they were by no means desirous of seeing the 'Sick Man' restored even partially to health and vigour.² But a southern route, such as that through Konia, was at least tolerable to them. It is scarcely probable that Abdul Hamid was prepared to break his word and defy his neighbour on this matter: a ruler who feared to offend the Tsar by strengthening the defences of his own capital was unlikely to countenance the building of strategic railways on the approaches to the Transcaucasian frontier. In these circumstances the puzzle is not that the Sultan consented to the substitution of a Konia line for the extension beyond Angora, but rather that he himself did not propose the Konia scheme in the first instance.³

The explanation apparently lies in Abdul Hamid's well-known cunning. He felt little or no real interest in the choice of route for its own sake, for the reason that he felt little or no real interest in the idea of a Baghdad railway. The belief held by many of his contemporaries, and afterwards

(with Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 8, 17 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4486).

¹ A. Chéradame, The Baghdad Railway, p. 5.

² R. von Kühlmann, Erinnerungen, p. 364; Wolf, p. 16.

³ In H. Feis, Europe: The World's Banker, 1870-1914, p. 344, the impression is given that the Sultan did propose the Konia scheme, and that it was with reference to Konia that the Germans showed hesitation on technical and financial grounds. This is altogether wrong; Feis has confused the Konia project with the proposed extension from Angora.

widely accepted by historians, that the Sultan was genuinely enthusiastic about railways as a means of promoting the economic and political rejuvenation of his Empire, was never shared by Sir William White and has been shown to be probably unfounded.¹ What had motivated the Ottoman despot in bestowing the Anatolian concession on the Kaulla group in 1888 was not an appreciation of the advantages of improved communications; significantly, the concession was granted only after the Germans had offered a substantial loan to the Turkish exchequer, and even this inducement seems to have been effective only because Turkey was confronted with an unusually serious shortage of funds.² The initiative which the Sultan later took in approaching the Germans with his request for an extension beyond Angora did not necessarily imply any change whatever in his attitude towards railway projects. There is but one interpretation of his action which is convincing in the light of all the facts: that by putting pressure on Kaulla to undertake the difficult and costly Angora-Baghdad scheme, he hoped to cause the German syndicate to bring forward counter-proposals, for his agreement to which he could exact a price in the form of a further loan.

Matters developed substantially in accordance with the Sultan's plan. After the Germans, fearful of the consequences of disappointing Abdul Hamid altogether, had decided on the Konia alternative, they encouraged him to accept the new scheme by offering to arrange a loan conditional on the granting of the concession. The Sultan was once more in need of ready cash, and had been negotiating for a large sum with the

¹ Smith, pp. 110-111, 115-116.

² Ibid., pp. 116, 125, 128; (Alwyn Parker), 'The Bagdad Railway Negotiations', Quarterly Review, cexxviii. 493-494; cf. Feis, p. 319.

Imperial Ottoman Bank.¹ The terms demanded by the Bank had not been looked upon favourably at the Palace, and when the languishing negotiations finally collapsed, in November 1892, the Germans seized their opportunity. Their financial proposals, by making the award of the Konia concession an imminent probability, inaugurated the acute phase of railway rivalry among the Powers in the early 'nineties.²

The projected German branch line posed a major threat to both French and British railway interests. A predominantly French group of entrepreneurs, headed by a Belgian named Nagelmackers, had plans for a Konia railway of their own, to be constructed from Panderma on the Sea of Marmora and connected, through an arrangement to be examined later, with the Mediterranean coast at Smyrna.³ The French embassy supported this scheme, and, prior to Kaulia's intervention, Cambon had high hopes of its acceptance by the Turks. The German application altered the prospects completely: the French and German projects could not co-exist, not only because the competition of two Konia lines would have ruined both, but because their planned routes actually coincided for a distance of more than 250 kilometres. Accordingly, after the formal submission of the German terms on 4 December, Cambon embarked on a determined effort to frustrate Kaulia's designs - an effort in which he was assisted, at his own request, by repeated representations from the French foreign minister to the Ottoman ambassador in Paris. Through December and early

¹ Ford to Rosebery, No. 334 Confidential, 5 Nov.; No. 345 Confidential, 14 Nov. 1892, F.O. 78/4417.

² Ford to Rosebery, No. 335 Confidential, 7 Nov.; No. 344 Confidential, 14 Nov.; No. 345 Confidential, 14 Nov. 1892, F.O. 78/4417.

³ Helfferich, iii. 63; below, p. 82.

January, the Quai d'Orsay and its Constantinople embassy left no diplomatic stone unturned to destroy the Kaulla programme and rescue the Nagelmackers syndicate.¹

The British stake in the Konia controversy consisted of investments in the Smyrna-Aidin and Smyrna-Cassaba railway companies. The original concession for the line from Smyrna to Aidin had been granted in 1856, and the company had afterwards been permitted an extension to Dineir, farther inland.² Although it had secured no authority to do so, its ultimate ambition was to continue building in the same direction, until the railway reached Konia.³ It was obvious, therefore, that the success of Kaulla's scheme would gravely impair the Aidin company's future chances of prosperity. Up to this point the problem was simple enough, but the whole situation was complicated by the existence of the Smyrna-Cassaba company and by a combination into which it had recently entered. The Smyrna-Cassaba concession had been accorded to an English group in 1863, and an extension had been granted nine years later. As with Aidin, the ultimate intention of the Cassaba company was to extend to Konia.⁴ Since the directors of both lines had their eye on exploiting the same area, there was naturally intense rivalry between the two. Whereas the various

¹ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 67 (Cambon to Ribot, 15 Dec. 1892); No. 69 (Cambon to Ribot, 21 Dec. 1892); No. 74 (Cambon to Ribot, 28 Dec. 1892); No. 76 (Ribot to Cambon, 29 Dec. 1892); No. 79 (Ribot to Cambon, 4 Jan. 1893).

² W. von Pressel, Les Chemins de Fer en Turquie d'Asie, p. 53.

³ 'Note in Explanation of the Conflicting Claims at Constantinople for a Concession to build a Railway Line to Konia', by Sir E. Vincent (of the Imperial Ottoman Bank), dated 30 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4435.

⁴ Ibid.; see also W. von Pressel, p. 54.

German groups interested in Turkish railways had joined forces, agreeing upon collective proposals which then received full support from the German embassy,¹ British railway enterprise in the Smyrna hinterland had suffered grievously from an orgy of reciprocal throat-slitting. Whenever representatives of either the Aidin or the Cassaba company presented an application to the Ottoman government, their countrymen of the competing line endeavoured to discredit and defeat it.² By the end of 1892, this struggle between the Smyrna railways for the traffic of Konia had passed into a new phase. While the Aidin company still remained both independent and exclusively British, Smyrna-Cassaba had formed an alliance with the French-dominated Nagelmackers group,³ the plan being that Cassaba's existing line from Smyrna into the interior should be linked with Nagelmackers' proposed line from Panderma to Konia.⁴ This scheme would in effect have created, though under French auspices, the Smyrna-Konia railway which both British companies had long envisaged. British and French economic interests had now become tangled up together, a circumstance which proved dangerous for the relations between Great Britain and Germany.

Although Rosebery did not realize it at the time, it was as a result of Kaulla's threat to the Cassaba-Nagelmackers

¹ (Alwyn Parker), 'The Bagdad Railway Negotiations', Quarterly Review, ccxxviii. 494-495; see also Anonymous, 'German Methods in Turkey', *ibid.*, ccxxviii. 298-299.

² Ford to Rosebery, No. 386 Confidential, 26 Dec. 1892 (with enclosed Memorandum), F.O. 78/4417.

³ *Ibid.*, *rich.*, *iii.* 63.

⁴ 'Note in Explanation of the Conflicting Claims at Constantinople for a Concession to build a Railway Line to Konia', by Sir E. Vincent, dated 30 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4435.

coalition that the Foreign Office was first led to commit itself to its ill-fated intervention in the railway scramble. With regard to the railways the Imperial Ottoman Bank and its President, Sir Edgar Vincent, played an independent rôle, representing no interests but their own. At one time they had offered to throw their whole weight behind Kaulla, in exchange for a share in the profits from the Eskishehr-Konia concession.¹ This suggestion coming to nought, they had allied themselves with Nagelmackers and the French.² In December 1892 their goal was to enlist support from every possible quarter to protect Cassaba-Nagelmackers from the Germans. On the 23rd, therefore, Vincent addressed to Rosebery an urgent appeal for diplomatic action to defend 'English interests' against the Kaulla menace. Carefully omitting to mention Cassaba's French affiliations, he asserted that the Smyrna-Aidin and Smyrna-Cassaba lines were both 'owned almost exclusively in England' - true, though misleading - and that they would suffer 'by an amount which I estimate at a minimum of two millions Sterling' if the German concession to Konia were granted.³

In 1888, when Kaulla had been seeking his first concession in Asia Minor, White had abstained, with Salisbury's approval, from giving assistance to a British group in conflict with the German syndicate.⁴ Everything had then been subordinated to the supreme objectives of getting a railway

¹ Memorandum by Nicolson, Private and Confidential, dated 19 Jan. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 25 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477).

² Helfferich, iii. 63.

³ Vincent to Rosebery, 23 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4435.

⁴ Smith, pp. 128-129.

system constructed, and of erecting a Teutonic barrier - in the form of financial interests which Berlin would find it difficult to abandon - against a Russian advance on the Straits from the Asiatic side.¹ At the end of 1892, however, Military Intelligence had evidence that St. Petersburg was reducing its forces in Transcaucasia, and that there was no threat of a major Russian offensive in Asia Minor.² Not sharing his predecessor's sense of impending danger in that direction, Rosebery felt free to give priority to other worries: he knew that he could not ignore the fate of £2,000,000 of British capital without inviting criticism both in the press and in Parliament.³ The board of the Smyrna-Cassaba company included several members of both Houses,⁴ and the President of the Aidin company sat in the Commons.⁵ As yet, moreover, the Foreign Secretary was unaware of the two factors which might have held him back from heeding Vincent's plea: the commitments of Cassaba to the French, and the deep interest taken by the German government, indeed by the Kaiser personally, in the success of the Kaula project.⁶ The upshot was that the decision as to intervention was at once prompt and affirmative. Rosebery reversed the attitude of Salisbury: in-

¹ W.M. Ramsay, The Revolution in Constantinople and Turkey, pp. 142, 304; above, p. 74.

² Captain Grierson to the Director of Military Intelligence, Secret, 8 Nov. 1892 (printed on 9 Nov. 1892), F.O. 65/1456.

³ G.P. xiv (2), No. 3972 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 14 Jan. 1893); Wolf, p. 16.

⁴ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 67 (Cambon to Ribot, 15 Dec. 1892).

⁵ Right Hon. David Plunket, M.P. for Dublin University.

⁶ Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 11 Jan., F.O. 343/3 (Malet Papers); No. 17A Secret, 12 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1292.

stead of trying to pave the way for a new growth of German investment in Ottoman Asia, he made the protection of British investment his primary object. On Christmas Day he instructed Sir Clare Ford by telegraph to 'try and delay any railway concession to Kaulla' until further notice;¹ and on the 29th he sent a despatch to Constantinople in which he ordered a policy of 'opposition' as well as of 'delay'. 'Do what is in your power', he told the ambassador, 'to prevent the concession being granted, as being prejudicial to British interests.'² Since he was later to assure Berlin that nothing more than delay had been intended, Rosebery's use of the word 'prevent' is worthy of particular emphasis.

Before Christmas, acting on his own initiative and without informing London, Ford had already sought to impress upon both Porte and Palace the disadvantages which British railways would face if the Kaulla programme were implemented.³ On receiving his first instructions, those of 25 December, he carried them out with what appears to have been unaccustomed energy,⁴ and on 5 January he communicated to the Porte the sense of Rosebery's subsequent despatch.⁵ This move became known almost at once to Prince Radolin, the German ambassador: later on the same day he telegraphed to the Wilhelmstrasse that the British embassy was opposing 'Konzessionserteilung

¹ Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 79, 25 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4418.

² Rosebery to Ford, No. 271, 29 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4411; Tel. No. 1, 4 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4485.

³ Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 116, 26 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4419.

⁴ Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 117, 28 Dec. 1892, F.O. 195/1753; G.P. xiv (2), No. 3964 (Radolin to the German Foreign Office, 29 Dec. 1892).

⁵ Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 1, 5 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4486.

an Kaula . . . mit der Begründung, dass englische Interessen geschädigt wurden . . .¹

Events now moved with rapidity and drama. On the afternoon of 6 January the German foreign minister, Marschall, made a statement on the railway issue to Sir Edward Malet, Great Britain's ambassador in Berlin. Speaking 'very earnestly', he announced that if the fact was as reported by Radolin, he must regard it as an 'inimical act towards Germany', which would 'render impossible the continuance of the cordial co-operation which had been of so much benefit to both countries and to Europe in general'.² The next morning the British were given a demonstration of Marschall's meaning. Only a few days before, Anglo-German co-operation with respect to Egyptian affairs had been continuing on a warm and friendly basis.³ Now, early on 7 January, the German Consul-General in Cairo called on Lord Cromer and told him that in view of Great Britain's attitude in Asia Minor, there would be no further German backing for her wishes in Egypt.⁴ Germany was threatening the complete abandonment of the Egyptian policy which she had hitherto followed, and which had long been one of the most important pillars of Great Britain's international position. That this sudden outburst was the result of a desire on

¹ G.P. xiv (2), No. 3965 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 6 Jan. 1893, quoting Radolin to Marschall, 5 Jan. 1893).

² Malet to Rosebery, Tel. No. 1 Confidential, 6 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1296; cf. G.P. xiv (2), No. 3966 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 7 Jan. 1893).

³ G.P. viii, No. 1814 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 26 Dec. 1892); No. 1815 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 28 Dec. 1892); Rosebery to Malet, No. 310, 28 Dec. 1892, F.O. 64/1272.

⁴ Cromer to Rosebery, Tel. No. 12 Confidential, 7 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4517B.

the part of the Berlin government to protect Kaulla's Konia project against British obstruction, and of a decision to do so by exerting the strongest diplomatic pressure on London to cease interfering, would appear on the surface to be self-evident. That the outburst related to Konia is, indeed, the generally accepted interpretation,¹ but the evidence of the Foreign Office archives reveals that there is no truth in it. In his pronouncement to Malet on 6 January, Marschall said nothing whatever about the Konia controversy; and a day or two later, when the matter was raised on British initiative, he avoided a discussion by professing to be unaware of any German designs in that direction.² Instead of Konia, the ground of complaint which he cited against Great Britain on the 6th had to do with an alleged opposition by the British embassy to the concession which Kaulla was still seeking, but not intending to use within the foreseeable future, for the line first proposed by Abdul Hamid - the extension from Angora to Baghdad.³

Before we plunge into the dark tangle of German misconceptions on the subject, the attitude actually adopted by the British towards the Angora-Baghdad project must be briefly explained. When Rosebery had ordered on 25 December that an effort should be made to 'delay any railway concession' to the Kaulla group, he had plainly overlooked the fact that

¹ W.L. Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1890-1894, pp. 291-293; E. Schütte, Freiherr Marschall von Bieberstein: Ein Beitrag zur Charakterisierung seiner Politik, p. 41; Wolf, pp. 16-17; Helfferich, iii. 66.

² Malet to Rosebery, No. 11 Confidential, 12 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1293.

³ Malet to Rosebery, Tel. No. 1 Confidential, 6 Jan., F.O. 64/1296; No. 8 Confidential, 7 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1293.

Kaulla was applying for the extension from Angora as well as for the Eskishehr-Konia branch. The instructions to Ford were a direct response to Vincent's appeal in behalf of the Smyrna lines, and that appeal had afforded the Foreign Secretary no motive for obstructing the Germans on any point other than Konia. A prolongation of the Angora railway towards Baghdad, it was obvious, could not affect the Aidin or Cas-saba companies in the slightest degree. Ford, realizing this, had interpreted Rosebery's telegram of the 25th as obliging him to intervene only against the Konia portion of the Kaulla programme.¹ That the ambassador was correct in taking this view is clear from subsequent communications which he received from the Foreign Office.²

Ford's personal opinion on Angora-Baghdad was in harmony with his interpretation of his instructions. A Baghdad concession had been sought for some time by a group of English investors, represented in Turkey by a Mr. Staniforth; and in early 1892, just after Sir Clare's arrival at Constantinople, Staniforth had been in touch with the British embassy. The advice then given by the new ambassador had been that the British applicants should attempt to come to terms with their German rivals. Doing as suggested, Staniforth negotiated at Berlin with Georg von Siemens of the Deutsche Bank, and soon obtained what he thought to be an assurance that the participation of his associates in the German Baghdad scheme would be willingly accepted.³ Siemens' supposed promise, if it had

¹ G.P. xiv (2), No. 3964; Ford to Rosebery, No. 25 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

² Rosebery to Ford, No. 271, 29 Dec. 1892, F.O. 195/1744; Tel. No. 4, 9 Jan. 1893, F.O. 195/1778.

³ Ford to Rosebery, No. 25 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

been implemented, might have seriously prejudiced the German position in the railway scramble: in the summer of 1892 it was precisely in a possible combination of the Kaulla group with Staniforth's that the astute Cambon saw his best chance of discrediting German proposals in the eyes of the Anglo-phobe Sultan.¹ The Germans in Constantinople doubtless appreciated this danger in a way that those in Berlin did not, and understood that it would be folly to risk the Sultan's displeasure for the sake of British co-operation in a project that was not in any event to be undertaken for years to come. Thus, when Staniforth returned triumphant from Germany to the Ottoman capital, it was only to have his illusions shattered by the discovery that Kaulla himself would have nothing to do with him.² White's old policy of Anglo-German partnership, which Ford had tried by his advice to resurrect, had now, for the second time, fallen to the ground; and Ford was confronted with the choice which he had hoped to make unnecessary, between embarking on a futile struggle with the German embassy, and quietly acquiescing in complete German control of the Baghdad concession. He chose the latter course, apparently giving the Staniforth group some token semblance of support³ but exerting no serious pressure at the Porte in its behalf.⁴ Indeed, if it had not been for the complication presented by the Konia branch, he would have been prepared to side actively with the Germans. We have noticed that he con-

¹ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 4 (Cambon to Ribot, 25 Aug. 1892).

² Ford to Rosebery, No. 25 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

³ G.P. xiv (2), No. 3963 (Radolin to Caprivi, 23 Dec. 1892).

⁴ Ford to Rosebery, No. 25 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

sidered Kaulla to be proceeding on the 'dog-in-the-manger' principle with reference to Baghdad:¹ the inability of the German applicants to make prompt use of a Baghdad concession was well known to him.² But the ambassador thought it preferable that the line into Mesopotamia should be promised to Kaulla and left unbuilt for some time, than that it should remain the centre of a continuing contention - in which he may have feared that the French, who had Baghdad aspirations of their own,³ might eventually prevail. In January 1893 he expressed the view that had the Kaulla scheme been 'confined to the Baghdad trunk line, the British embassy here could not have acted otherwise than by seconding the German embassy in the matter'.⁴

What, then, led Marschall to make his allegation that the action of the British embassy was directed against the Angora-Baghdad project? The explanation lies in the wording of Radolin's telegram of 5 January. Already, in late December, the German diplomat had telegraphed that Ford was trying to delay the Konia concession pending the arrival of further instructions from London.⁵ At this Marschall had not protested, nor even made a friendly approach to the Foreign Office with a view to ensuring that the instructions, when sent, would be

¹ Above, p. 76.

² Ford to Rosebery, No. 386 Confidential, 26 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4417.

³ 'Un Diplomate' (H. Cambon), Paul Cambon: Ambassadeur de France, p. 137.

⁴ Ford to Rosebery, No. 25 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

⁵ G.P. xiv (2), No. 3964 (Radolin to the German Foreign Office, 29 Dec. 1892).

as favourable as possible to German interests.¹ Now, on 5 January, when Radolin reported Ford's additional action on the issue, there was a significant difference in his language: he omitted on this occasion all reference to the Konia concession, and alluded instead to British objections to the Kaulla concession - 'Konzessionserteilung an Kaulla'.² Ford's intervention having in fact been confined, as we have seen, to the Konia half of Kaulla's application, this phraseology was gravely misleading. Why the German ambassador used it is by no means clear: conceivably it was a case of sheer carelessness, though Malet may well have been right in speculating afterwards that the Turks, hoping to sow dissension between the British and German embassies, had deliberately promoted a misunderstanding.³ In any event, whatever the reason for Radolin's language, it evidently created the impression in Marschall's mind that Great Britain was attempting to obstruct not merely the branch project, but also the plan for eventual extension of the trunk line beyond Angora - in other words, that the British were seeking to frustrate the whole conception of a German railway to Baghdad.

In this context the news that Ford had made use of the words 'prejudicial to British interests' assumed an importance much greater than would otherwise have been the case. Whereas in the Smyrna hinterland there were established, recognizable British economic interests at stake, the same was not true of the territory beyond Angora. Here there were no existing British railways: the Staniforth application was an application and nothing more, and even in the absence of conflicting

¹ Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 11 Jan. 1893, F.O. 343/3.

² G.P. xiv (2), No. 3965; above, pp. 85-86.

³ Malet to Rosebery, Private, 14 Jan. 1893, F.O. 343/13.

German claims, Marschall knew that it would have no real chance of being accepted.¹ It was natural for the foreign minister to conclude, therefore, that the interests which the British considered to be menaced were not economic but political; and from the text of the Radolin telegram it appeared also that Ford's objections had been put forward in a political form - 'namens seiner Regierung'.² In speaking to Malet, Marschall repeatedly stressed, with much indignation, this supposed political character of the British intervention.³

The distinction between economic and political representations by an embassy is fundamental to an understanding of the Anglo-German incident. In the conversation with Malet on 6 January, the German foreign minister explicitly recognized that it was customary and legitimate for the Constantinople embassies to give diplomatic backing to the schemes of their respective nationals, and he made it clear that his protest was not against British competition with Germany on an economic plane.⁴ What he was unwilling to tolerate, however, was an intervention that went beyond the usual advocacy of one's own projects, and which apparently threw the prestige of Great Britain into the scales against German enterprise as such - against the very idea of German penetration of Asiatic Turkey. It was in these terms that France had been opposing Kaulla: not, in the words of the French foreign min-

¹ Malet to Rosebery, No. 8 Confidential, 7 Jan., F.O. 64/1293; cf. Rosebery to Malet, No. 10, 10 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1292.

² G.P. xiv (2), No. 3965.

³ Malet to Rosebery, Tel. No. 1 Confidential, 6 Jan., F.O. 64/1296; Private, 14 Jan. 1893, F.O. 343/13.

⁴ G.P. xiv (2), No. 3966 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 7 Jan. 1893); Malet to Rosebery, Tel. No. 1 Confidential, 6 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1296.

ister, 'dans l'intérêt de telle ou telle société, mais dans un intérêt politique'.¹ From the Quai d'Orsay Berlin expected nothing better; France was a known and accepted antagonist, whereas the British had hitherto been favourable to German aspirations in Asia Minor, and had been profiting from Germany's support of their Egyptian supremacy. Understandably, Marschall looked upon Ford's reportedly hostile attitude at Constantinople with deep resentment, as evidence of a treacherous contempt for the principle of reciprocity.² It seemed to him that the Liberal government, unlike Salisbury's, was regarding Germany as an opponent, not as a friend, in the East - that Rosebery had made up his mind to resist, as injurious to Great Britain's political position, the expansion of German influence towards Baghdad and the Persian Gulf. Seen in this light, Marschall's denunciation of Ford's conduct as a 'feindseliger Akt', destructive of the basic assumptions of Anglo-German co-operation,³ becomes readily comprehensible. Germany decided upon a reversal of her Egyptian policy not as a means of blackmail on an economic issue - as Sir Edward Grey, Rosebery's Parliamentary Under-Secretary, was afterwards to imply in his memoirs⁴ - but rather as a riposte to what appeared a far-reaching political challenge on the part of the British.

This misreading of Rosebery's attitude was supplemented by a second and related grievance. In his instructions to the

¹ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 79 (Ribot to Cambon, 4 Jan. 1893).

² Cf. Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 11 Jan. 1893, F.O. 343/3.

³ G.P. xiv (2), No. 3966 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 7 Jan. 1893).

⁴ Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Twenty-Five Years, i. 9-11; cf. L. Ragey, La Question du Chemin de Fer de Bagdad, pp. 17-18, 20.

Ford to Rosebery, No. 25.

German Consul-General at Cairo on 6 January, Marschall asserted not simply that the British embassy at Constantinople was being 'offensively hostile' in the railway question, but that it was promoting French designs to the detriment of Germany.¹ Despite the fact that there had been no collusion with Cambon,² Ford had given the Wilhelmstrasse a modicum of justification for such a suspicion. As the Cassaba-Nagelmackers combination and the exclusively British Aidin company, notwithstanding their rivalry, had a major common interest in opposing the German extension to Konia, it was of course inevitable that in protecting the latter group against Kaula, Ford should also give aid and comfort to its predominantly French competitor. The truth was, moreover, that the ambassador did not so much as make an attempt to confine his assistance to the Aidin line. Unlike Rosebery, he was fully cognizant of Cassaba's French orientation, and he knew that Aidin had by far the greater claim on his sympathy.³ Yet he was unwilling to abandon Cassaba altogether, for it still involved a significant amount of British capital. Throughout the entire first half of the railway controversy, until nearly the middle of January, he allowed it to retain some place, albeit a subordinate one, in his representations to the Porte.⁴

¹ G.P. viii, No. 1816 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 7 Jan. 1893, quoting Marschall to Leyden, 6 Jan. 1893); cf. Cromer to Rosebery, Tel. No. 12 Confidential, 7 Jan., F.O. 78/4517B; Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 3, 8 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4485.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 29 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ Ford to Rosebery, No. 386 Confidential, 26 Dec. 1892 (not received at the Foreign Office until 7 January), F.O. 78/4417.

⁴ Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 116, 26 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4419; Ford's Pro-Memoria to the Grand Vizier, dated 14 Jan.; Memorandum by Sir A. Sandison, dated 16 Jan. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 15, 16 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477); see

By the 6th, this consequence of a coincidental and limited concurrence of French and British interests had been magnified at Berlin into the adoption by Great Britain of a new general policy - a policy favouring French over German enterprise 'in all railway schemes in Asia Minor'.¹

From Marschall's standpoint, Great Britain's volte-face in the East seemed clearly to necessitate not only protest but prompt retaliation. It has been said, with reference to the foreign minister's later activities as ambassador at Constantinople, that he treated the Baghdad railway as his 'Lieblingskind';² and even as early as 1893 his mind may well have been moving in that direction. What was probably decisive in determining German reaction, however, was the enthusiasm of the Kaiser himself for the project. The visit of Wilhelm II to Constantinople in 1889 had both symbolized and strengthened his interest in Turkey, and he had subsequently played a part in some aspects of the railway negotiations.³ Therefore, if the pressure put on the Ottoman authorities to reject the German programme were to prove effective, Marschall had reason to fear that Wilhelm would interpret the defeat as a personal affront.⁴ Indeed, whether the pressure was effective or not, it was predictable that his attitude

also O. Waterfield (Chairman of the Smyrna-Cassaba Company) to Rosebery, 11 Jan.; 8 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4500.

¹ G.P. viii, No. 1816. The translation quoted is that of E.T.S. Dugdale, German Diplomatic Documents, 1871-1914, ii. 180.

² R. von Kühlmann, Erinnerungen, p. 364.

³ Ford to Rosebery, No. 13 Confidential, 11 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

⁴ M.W. Tyler, The European Powers and the Near East, 1875-1908, pp. 179-180; G.P. xiv (2), No. 3965.

towards it would be one of intense vexation.¹ Under these circumstances, the foreign minister doubtless realized that to show any hesitation or weakness in meeting the British challenge would be to risk incurring the Kaiser's dissatisfaction. Prince Bismarck had already been accusing the government of excessive complaisance towards Great Britain,² and especially since the minister had his eye on succeeding Caprivi as Chancellor,³ he may well have concluded that it would be prudent, when informing the Kaiser of what had happened, to accompany his tidings with proof of his firmness and energy in defending the German position.

This hypothesis provides a rational explanation for a fact otherwise puzzling: that Marschall acted on 6 January with such sudden violence, without waiting to verify what he had heard from Constantinople. Rosebery observed later that the proper procedure would have been for the German minister to ask Malet for the truth about Great Britain's policy, and then await a reply from London before taking further steps.⁴ But Marschall had no time to spare. If he were to obtain the desired evidence of firmness before facing the Kaiser, haste was imperative: although Wilhelm was absent on a shooting expedition when the Radolin telegram arrived, the minister knew that he was about to return, and that he would have to be told of the situation not later than the forenoon of the

¹ Marschall implied as much to Malet in the conversation on 6 January: Malet to Rosebery, Private, 14 Jan. 1893, F.O. 343/13.

² Malet to Rosebery, Private, 7 Jan. 1893, F.O. 343/13.

³ Prince von Bülow, Memoirs, iv. 649.

⁴ Rosebery to Malet, No. 17A Secret, 12 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1292.

7th.¹ When Marschall spoke to the British ambassador on the 6th, he was working against a deadline less than twenty-four hours away. Thus the sole chance of averting an incident lay in categorical - and immediate - assurances by Malet as to the limited purpose of Ford's proceedings. The chance was lost: although Malet was aware that Ford had not been inactive in the railway question, he was uninformed regarding the details of the controversy, and as a consequence he altogether failed to appreciate the relatively narrow scope of British involvement.² Confronted with the charge that Great Britain had been opposing Germany with respect to the Angora-Baghdad project, he hazarded a doubt that the intervention had really borne the 'political form ascribed to it', but otherwise made no attempt to dispute the accuracy of Marschall's allegation. Instead, seeking to justify what Ford had supposedly done, he maintained:

The question of the construction of a railway from Angora to Baghdad was a very serious one for H.M. Government, as it brought into play the whole question of our communication with India, which was a vital one for us. He [Marschall] must not be surprised if we attached the most serious importance to it. Without knowing what had happened at Constantinople, I could well understand that it might have been necessary to take some step . . . to prevent a concession being given without obtaining guarantees which would safeguard our interests . . .³

In the light of what has already been recounted, it is

¹ Malet to Rosebery, Private, 14 Jan. 1893, F.O. 343/13.

² Malet to Rosebery, No. 8 Confidential, 7 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1293. It was not until three days after the Marschall-Malet conversation that Rosebery sent his ambassador copies of all the relevant correspondence: Rosebery to Malet, No. 8 Confidential, 9 Jan. 1893 (with enclosures), F.O. 244/501.

³ Malet to Rosebery, No. 8 Confidential, 7 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1293.

evident that a more unfortunate rejoinder was scarcely conceivable. The ambassador's language seemed to mean, at the very least, that one of Great Britain's leading diplomatists discerned a potential threat to her Imperial security in the extension of the German railway into Mesopotamia. True, it did not necessarily follow that this anxiety was shared by Rosebery, nor that his policy was governed by it; nevertheless, whatever Malet might say about the 'form' of the British representations at Constantinople, his remarks can only have lent increased credibility to the view suggested by the Radolin telegram, that their substance and purpose were political. Thinking the facts to be as the telegram had implied, and being well acquainted with the Kaiser's temperament, Marschall could now see only one sure way of impressing his master favourably on the following morning - and that was to do something dramatic without much delay.¹ A few hours later, the German Consul-General called on Cromer.

After learning of the events at Berlin and Cairo, Rosebery acted quickly to restore harmonious Anglo-German relations. Great Britain, it was truthfully explained to the Wilhelmstrasse, had no inclination whatever to interfere with the Baghdad scheme, and nothing could be further from her wishes than to oppose the influence of Germany in the Ottoman Empire. With reference to the Konia concession, it was stated with less truth that London had sought no more than to bring about a postponement, in order that the interests of British investors might be 'considered'. Having thus redefined his

¹ Rosebery suspected, without any evidence, that Marschall acted on 6 January under orders from Wilhelm II: Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 11 Jan.; Private, 18 Jan.; Private, 1 Feb. 1893, F.O. 343/3. This theory fits the circumstances much less satisfactorily than the explanation suggested here. Cf. Malet to Rosebery, Private, 14 Jan. 1893, F.O. 343/13.

stand, the Foreign Secretary appended a proposal for the establishment of direct contact on the railway issue between the British and German embassies at Constantinople.¹

This communication, in both its parts, evoked a favourable response at Berlin. Marschall readily agreed to the suggested consultations between Radolin and Ford; moreover, despite his pretended ignorance of Kaulla's plans regarding Konia, he instantly accepted Rosebery's assurances, professing himself 'greatly gratified' at the light which they had thrown on the situation.² Already the relations of the two Powers appeared to be returning to an even keel, and while the first ambassadorial meeting on the question, which took place on the 10th, failed to achieve any progress towards a reconciliation of the economic interests involved, it did contribute much to clearing the air of lingering suspicions.³ After the discussion, far from having found Ford's attitude politically anti-German, Radolin was inclined to the opinion that his colleague was objecting to the Konia concession against his own convictions, and only because of the pressure

¹ Rosebery to Malet, Tel. No. 1 Confidential, 7 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1296; cf. G.P. xiv (2), No. 3969. Ford and Radolin, though they saw each other frequently, had not hitherto discussed the railway controversy: Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 2, 9 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4486.

² Malet to Rosebery, No. 11 Confidential, 12 Jan., F.O. 64/1293; Thornton (at the Berlin embassy) to Rosebery, unnumbered telegram, 9 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1296.

³ As late as 9 January Radolin apparently believed a baseless allegation of Abdul Hamid's to the effect that his British colleague was trying to intimidate the Ottoman government with implied threats of a naval demonstration at Smyrna: G.P. xiv (2), No. 3970. One historian, accepting Radolin's statement at face value, records this absurdity as a fact: Wolf p. 16. Actually, if anyone hinted at a naval demonstration, it was not Ford but probably Sir Edgar Vincent. See Rosebery

exerted by British capitalists.¹ This, too, was an error,² but a fortunate one in the circumstances. With Marschall, by the 13th at the latest, fully reassured that the point at issue was indeed the branch line to Konia, not the Angora-Baghdad trunk,³ and with the German representative on the spot now attaching the blame for Ford's interference to an entirely non-political factor, it is not surprising to find that the friendly spirit in which the ambassadors explored their differences at Constantinople was matched by a further improvement in the atmosphere at the Wilhelmstrasse. Malet, who had had to leave Berlin on the 7th to attend a royal wedding at Sigmaringen, returned to discover on the 13th that 'in his general tone' Marschall had 'completely receded' from his earlier anger.⁴ The announcement to Cromer of six days before, made on Marschall's orders, had expressed Germany's wish to withhold her previously promised consent to an increase in the Egyptian army, and the wish had not been carried out only because consent happened already to have been communicated in a binding form.⁵ Now, however, the foreign minister told Malet that the German Consul-General at Cairo

to Malet, Private, 1 Feb. 1893, F.O. 343/3; Ford to Rosebery, No. 25 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

¹ G.P. xiv (2), No. 3971 (Radolin to the German Foreign Office, 11 Jan. 1893).

² Ford to Rosebery, No. 386 Confidential, 26 Dec.; No. 387 Confidential, 26 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4417; No. 25 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

³ Malet to Rosebery, No. 15 Confidential, 14 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1293.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Cromer to Rosebery, Tel. No. 12 Confidential, 7 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4517B; G.P. viii, No. 1816.

had been sent no instructions to do anything more than 'speak to Lord Cromer' about the railway dispute.¹ The supposed British policy which had provoked it having turned out to be unreal, Marschall was eager, even at the cost of sacrificing veracity, to remove as much of the sting as he could from his Egyptian retaliation.

Despite this encouraging sign, however, the optimism which Rosebery had felt as early as the 11th, when he observed that the Kaula incident was 'apparently settled',² did not withstand the test of events. Behind the British proposal for negotiations between the ambassadors there had lain the hope that a compromise might be arranged in the form of a junction between the Eskishehr-Konia and Smyrna-Aidin railways.³ While discussion on this possibility continued, Sir Clare Ford considered it necessary to guard against the danger of a fait accompli. Although his German colleague seemed genuinely willing to agree to a junction, Ford feared that if the Konia concession were once settled in favour of the Kaula syndicate - and the conditions for a loan thereby met - the Turks would resist an extension of the British line with such determination that not even joint action by the British and German embassies would suffice to secure it. 'It seems to me . . .', he remarked, 'that any concession that we care to obtain must be obtained before Mr. Kaula's

¹ Malet to Rosebery, No. 15 Confidential, 14 Jan., F.O. 64/1293; Tel. No. 4, 14 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1296.

² Rosebery to Cromer, Tel. No. 10, 11 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4517A.

³ Minute by Sir T.H. Sanderson (Assistant Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office), dated 7 Jan. 1893 (with Ford to Rosebery, No. 386 Confidential, 26 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4417); cf. Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 4, 9 Jan. 1893, F.O. 195/1778.

⁴ Ibid., No. 3974 (Rosebery to the Emperor)

scheme is actually sanctioned.'¹ Accordingly, after being informed that the Ottoman government had definitely decided to grant Kaulla his concessions, but intended to give no immediate study to proposals for prolonging the Aidin railway,² the ambassador made new representations at the Porte to the effect that British and German railway interests should be dealt with 'at one and the same time'. In doing this, on 14 January, he again mentioned not only the Aidin company, but also the British financial stake in the Cassaba company.³ By the 16th suspicions of Anglo-French collusion had been revived in full force on the German side, and the Wilhelmstrasse indignantly notified its London embassy that Ford was repaying Germany's previous support of Great Britain vis-à-vis France by assisting the French Nagelmackers group against Kaulla, in exchange for help being given to British enterprise by Paul Cambon.⁴ On the next day the embassy complained in this sense to Lord Rosebery.⁵

¹ Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 5, 13 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4486.

² Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 3, 11 Jan., F.O. 78/4486; No. 15, 16 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

³ Ford's Pro-Memoria to the Grand Vizier, dated 14 Jan. 1893 (copy enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 15, 16 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477). In H. Nicolson, Sir Arthur Nicolson: First Lord Carnock, pp. 94-95, evidence is cited which would appear to indicate that Ford had lost interest in the railways, and made these representations only under pressure from Sir Arthur Nicolson, who had arrived at Constantinople as First Secretary on 10 January. This seems unlikely: on the 14th, by his own admission, Nicolson had not yet mastered the railway question, but he wrote that the ambassador was 'pushing it vigorously'. Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 14 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers.

⁴ G.P. xiv (2), No. 3973 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 16 Jan. 1893).

⁵ Ibid., No. 3974 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 17

Apart from a denial of the accusation, the response of the Foreign Secretary was to execute a further retreat from his previous policy - a retreat which has been interpreted in the past as one forced upon him by Great Britain's dependence on German backing in Egyptian issues.¹ This view is not lacking in plausibility. Rosebery could not hope to allay Marschall's suspicions on a second occasion as readily as he had on the first: indeed, as long as Ford went on working so assiduously for British railway interests to the embarrassment of their German rivals, and especially as long as he displayed any solicitude whatever for the Cassaba company - of whose French affiliations Rosebery had by now become aware² - it must have seemed probable at the Foreign Office that German distrust of British policy would endure. Now the German Consul-General, though 'personally very friendly' to Cromer, had not yet received instructions to resume his customary pro-British attitude;³ and while the restoration of the status quo ante at Cairo had been apparently a mere matter of time after Marschall's acceptance of Rosebery's explanations, the renewed suspicion at Berlin threatened, if not promptly dispelled, to postpone it indefinitely. In view of Great Britain's unsatisfactory relations with both Paris and St. Petersburg, the prospect was not one to be faced with equanimity. German co-operation, as Cromer had long

Jan. 1893); Rosebery to Malet, No. 23 Secret, 17 Jan. 1893, F.O. 244/501.

¹ W.L. Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1890-1894, p. 294; Grey of Fallodon, i. 10-11; Rugey, *loc.cit.*

² Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 4, 9 Jan. 1893, F.O. 195/1778.

³ Cromer to Rosebery, Tel. No. 16, 12 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4517B; G.P. xiv (2), No. 3974 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 17 Jan. 1893).

maintained, was of the highest value to the British position on the Nile. 'Berlin, and not Cairo, is the real centre of gravity of Egyptian affairs' - so the pro-consul had told Rosebery in 1886, remarking that he looked upon the friendship of Bismarck as the 'key to the whole situation'.¹ The passage of nearly seven years had not freed him from his need for German support; on the contrary, just at the moment when the railway complications first arose, he was particularly anxious to secure it in the Caisse de la Dette on a number of questions 'of considerable financial importance'.² Therefore, at the very outset of the incident, he had urged strongly upon the Foreign Secretary the desirability of re-establishing a 'good understanding' between London and Berlin. 'If the Germans and ourselves get on badly here,' he reminded his chief, 'the only people who will profit will be the French and Russians.'³ By the 17th this warning had acquired new weight, for the political crisis created in Egypt by Abbas Hilmi, the young Khedive, was becoming acute.⁴ The longer British isolation continued, the more the Khedive would be strengthened in his resolve to win independence from Cromer's control. Moreover, since the French embassy at Constantinople could be counted upon to try and persuade Ab-

¹ Sir E. Baring (Cromer) to Rosebery, 9 Feb. 1886 (printed in Marquess of Zetland, Lord Cromer, p. 128; cf. p. 265).

² Cromer to Rosebery, Tel. No. 13 Confidential, 7 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4517B.

³ Cromer to Rosebery, Tel. No. 12 Confidential, 7 Jan.; cf. Tel. No. 13 Confidential, 7 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4517B. Cf. also G.P. xiv (2), No. 3967 (Leyden to the German Foreign Office, 8 Jan.); No. 3968 (Leyden to Caprivi, 8 Jan. 1893).

⁴ Cromer to Rosebery, Tel. No. 20, 16 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4517B. See also above, p. 30.

dul Hamid to encourage Abbas,¹ the aid of Prince Radolin in counteracting Cambon's influence with the Sultan was much to be desired. In these circumstances, Rosebery had no prudent course open to him but to make whatever concessions were necessary in Asia Minor to reassure Germany of his benevolent acquiescence in her penetration of that region;² and it must have been evident that if his concessions were to be effective, they would have to entail the imposition of narrow limits on the British ambassador's future rôle in the Konia scramble.

All this is true, and when Rosebery carried out his retreat, on the 17th, he must indeed have felt himself to be acting under severe pressure. But it is also true that days before the Berlin government had communicated its fresh complaint, and for reasons quite unconnected with German susceptibilities, thinking at the Foreign Office had already begun to move in the direction of more restricted participation in the Konia dispute. On the 12th it had been learned that the Cassaba company was contemplating an arrangement with Kaulla,³ and shortly afterwards Sir Thomas Sanderson, the Assistant Under-Secretary, had pointed out that if it achieved its objective of a junction with the German Konia line at Afioun-Karahissar, the Smyrna-Aidin line could profit little from obtaining a similar junction at Tchai - the location proposed by Ford. 'The two lines would apparently run

¹ Cf. D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 110 (Cambon to Develle, 18 Jan. 1893); No. 113 (Cambon to Develle, 19 Jan. 1893).

² Cf. Langer, *loc. cit.*

³ O. Waterfield (Chairman of the Smyrna-Cassaba Company) to Lister, 11 Jan. 1893 (received at the Foreign Office on the 12th), F.O. 78/4500; cf. Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 5, 13 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4486.

almost parallel', he observed, 'at a distance of forty miles from one another, and would starve one another.'¹ In other words, continued diplomatic assistance to Cassaba's British investors would be tantamount not only to support of what was primarily a French interest, but also to an indirect attack on the more important investment in the entirely British Aidin enterprise.² Obviously, therefore, it was on balance to Great Britain's advantage that Ford should do nothing further for Cassaba; and even with reference to Smyrna-Aidin itself, Sanderson doubted that the ambassador should 'keep on hammering'.³ He considered that there was nothing in Sir Clare's renewed representations which could give Germany 'reasonable ground of offence', but noting that the company had neither solicited the Foreign Office for aid, nor troubled to keep Ford fully informed as to its wishes, he questioned whether the case really called for the 'expenditure of such energy as seems to be necessary to ensure a favourable result'.⁴

Since there is no proof that the Foreign Secretary agreed with Sanderson's advice, the evidence is not conclusive; but it is sufficient to throw serious doubt on what may be called

¹ Minute by Sanderson (with Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 5, 13 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4486).

² The total capital of the Cassaba company was approximately £1,500,000, whereas that of the Aidin company was about £3,600,000: 'Note in Explanation of the Conflicting Claims at Constantinople for a Concession to build a Railway Line to Konia', by Sir E. Vincent, dated 30 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4435.

³ Minute by Sanderson (with Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 4, 13 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4486).

⁴ Minute by Sanderson (with Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 5, 13 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4486).

the 'capitulation' theory of Rosebery's concessions to the Germans. That the revival of suspicion at Berlin did no more than, at most, to precipitate changes of policy already contemplated for other reasons is an equally tenable hypothesis. The two changes which Sanderson had recommended, at least by implication, on their own merits - a circumscription of Ford's activity with reference to Smyrna-Aidin, and the complete abandonment of Cassaba - were precisely the points which constituted the supposed British surrender of 17 January.¹ The Cassaba company Rosebery had regarded as being of but secondary importance since the time when he had first learned of its entanglement with the French;² and as for Aidin, while he instructed Ford not to press its claims 'too strongly', he still intended to achieve the purpose for which he had originally intervened - protection for himself against any charge of indifference to British financial interests. The Constantinople embassy was to remain active, albeit cautiously so, in behalf of the Aidin group, seeking some 'satisfaction d'amour propre' sufficient to pacify the investors 'to some extent' and to spike the guns of potential critics.³ Rosebery's sacrifices on the 17th, it would appear, amounted to something rather less than the unqualified decision to give way which is recorded in the memoirs of his Parliamentary Under-Secretary.⁴

¹ G.P. xiv (2), No. 3974; Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 8, 18 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4485.

² Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 4, 9 Jan.; Tel. No. 7, 17 Jan. 1893, F.O. 195/1778.

³ G.P. xiv (2), No. 3974; Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 7, 17 Jan. 1893, F.O. 195/1778.

⁴ Grey of Fallodon, i. 10-11. Feb. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

In the event, Ford was unable to secure even the token success for which his chief was hoping. By the 16th, before the British retreated, the French ambassador had already conceded victory in the Konia scramble to Kaulla and Radolin, and was turning his attention to a quest for compensation elsewhere.¹ By the 18th Cambon's judgment had been confirmed, and Ford found himself confronted with a settlement of the controversy in which nothing whatever was awarded to the Aidin company.² Although Radolin assured the British embassy that he had obtained Kaulla's consent to a junction between the Konia and Aidin lines, and that he was 'pressing and would continue to press' for the acquiescence of the Turks,³ neither German advocacy nor Ford's own expressions of hope that Aidin would be 'fairly treated' proved effective in extracting permission from the Sultan for an extension of the British railway.⁴ Sir Clare's gloomy prediction, that British proposals would make no headway once Kaulla's were approved, was fully borne out by the ambassador's subsequent experience.

Meanwhile, in the last two weeks of January, relations between Great Britain and Germany returned at least superficially to normal, and the German co-operation with the British at Cairo and Constantinople - so much more important in

¹ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 101 (Cambon to Develle, 16 Jan. 1893); cf. 'Un Diplomate' (H. Cambon), Paul Cambon: Ambassadeur de France, pp. 137-138.

² Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 11, 19 Jan., F.O. 78/4486; No. 26 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

³ Memorandum by Nicolson, Private and Confidential, dated 19 Jan. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 25 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477); cf. Nicolson to Villiers, Private and Confidential, 19 Jan. 1893, Villiers Papers.

⁴ Ford to Rosebery, No. 50, 13 Feb. 1893, F.O. 78/4477.

Rosebery's eyes than the fate of Smyrna-Aidin¹ - was resumed. After the decision of the London cabinet on the 23rd to increase the garrison in Egypt, Radolin played a conspicuous part at the Palace in nullifying Cambon's endeavours to bring about an Ottoman protest to the Powers;² and at the end of the month the German Consul-General called again on Lord Cromer, with a message more welcome than that of the 7th: that the railway incident might be considered 'closed'.³ Closed it was, but its consequences, and those of the scramble which had occasioned it, were only beginning to make their appearance.

Perhaps the most clearly discernible result of the incident lies in its damaging effect on the atmosphere of Anglo-German intercourse. Driving home not merely the weakness of the British position in Egypt, but also the apparent inclination of Germany to exploit it with gratuitous crudity and ruthlessness, the affair left behind at the Foreign Office what Sir Edward Grey was to remember more than thirty years afterwards as a 'sense of discomfort and a bad taste'. The archives afford no ground for disputing Grey's opinion that the world policy of Great Britain was uninfluenced by what had happened in any 'conscious' way;⁴ yet the impression pro-

¹ G.P., viii, No. 1830 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 8 Feb. 1893).

² Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 19 Secret, 28 Jan., F.O. 78/4486; Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Feb. 1893, Villiers Papers. Cf. G.P. viii, No. 1826 (Marschall to Radolin, 31 Jan.); No. 1831 (Marschall to Radolin, 9 Feb. 1893). For Cambon's activities, see D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 133 (Cambon to Develle, 25 Jan.); No. 139 (Cambon to Develle, 26 Jan. 1893).

³ Cromer to Rosebery, Tel. No. 51, 30 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4517B.

⁴ Grey of Fallodon, i. 11.

duced, especially on Rosebery personally, seems to have been very deep. The sentiments of the Foreign Secretary can be conveyed most vividly in his own words. A few days after the first German communication at Cairo, he poured forth his wrath in a private letter to the ambassador in Berlin:

I confess I am profoundly disgusted by this German outburst . . . The German Foreign Minister informs our Ambassador that we have dealt a blow, apparently of a treacherous kind, and destroyed the good understanding between England and Germany. At the same time we receive from Egypt the intelligence that Germany is endeavouring to revoke her consent to the International agreement - all this without a word of warning, and without asking a word of explanation, because forsooth we have conspired with France against Germany at Constantinople. Surely we may well ask ourselves what is the 'cordiality' of an understanding that is carried on in such a fashion? I agree that this transaction has dealt a blow to our good understanding, but not in the way Baron von Marschall intended it.¹

The anger which the Foreign Secretary thus expressed at Marschall's behaviour was doubtless intensified on the 17th by the Germans' reiterated allegation of Anglo-French collusion, and by the fact that the modifications then made in British railway policy were carried out in the presence of, if not because of, an apparent danger of further reprisals from Berlin. It seems reasonable to assume, moreover, that Rosebery's awareness of being dependent on the Triple Alliance,² and his consequent sense of helplessness in the face of the danger, rendered his inner resentment all the more keen. Be that as it may, he did not soon forget, nor did he forgive, the rough and tactless manner in which his supposed

¹ Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 11 Jan., F.O. 343/3; cf. No. 17A Secret, 12 Jan. 1893, F.O. 64/1292.

² See G.P. viii, No. 1823 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 30 Jan. 1893).

friends had treated him. Months later, in conversation with the German ambassador, he was still reproachful.¹

However great the loss of popularity which the Germans suffered at London, the aftermath of the Kaulla incident did not fail to bring them some tangible advantages. Notwithstanding the probable lack of causal connection between the complaints from Berlin and the British concessions of 17 January, subsequent British policy in Asia Minor was plainly influenced by a reluctance to risk any recurrence of German displeasure.² Whereas he had previously been unaware of the official interest taken by the Kaiser and the Wilhelmstrasse in the promotion of Turkish railway projects, Rosebery had now been made acutely conscious of Germany's touchiness on that category of issues. His fear of arousing parliamentary and editorial criticism seems henceforth to have been outweighed, or at least balanced, by the new fear of offending Great Britain's necessary supporter in Egypt. An additional reason for treating German interests with deference was the advice of the Intelligence Division of the War Office, which the Foreign Secretary consulted shortly after his action on the 17th.³ The Director of Military Intelligence, General E.F. Chapman, explained his attitude a few weeks later to the military attaché at Constantinople:

The question of railway concessions interests me greatly, but I feel that it is somewhat beyond our province to

¹ Villiers to Malet, Private, 7 June 1893 (bound by error with the correspondence of January 1893), F.O. 343/3; cf. G.P. viii, No. 2017 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 2 June 1893).

² Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 21, 9 Feb.; Tel. No. 27, 22 Feb. 1893, F.O. 78/4485; cf. Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Feb.; Private, 16 Feb. 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 15 Secret, 25 Jan. 1893, F.O. 195/1778.

express an opinion on matters which have the close attention of the Ambassador. My own view is that if we wish to make our influence at the Porte of real use to the country, we must work in harmony, and in close alliance, with Germany. I think the Emperor is so bent upon thwarting Russia at Constantinople that he will willingly approve of a joint policy, and I think he will also go with us in Persia to keep Russia from the Persian Gulf. If we have Germany with us in both these ideas, we shall win.¹

Despite his diffidence about meddling in a diplomatic question, Chapman was naturally ready enough to give counsel when it was sought, and he replied to Rosebery's inquiry by urging strongly that Great Britain should act in 'complete accord' with Germany regarding railway schemes in Asiatic Turkey. This recommendation the Foreign Secretary communicated to Sir Clare Ford with the evident intention that it should be followed.² Between them, Intelligence and the incident deflected British diplomacy on the Bosphorus away from Rosebery's initial concern for British enterprise, and turned it instead towards acceptance, and indeed grudging support, of Germany's virtual monopolizing of the railway development of Asia Minor. In so doing, in so facilitating the expansion of German economic interests in the Sultan's Asiatic provinces, they brought British action once again into harmony with Sir William White's concept of a Teutonic bulwark against Russia on the Eastern approaches to the Straits.³

¹ Chapman to Chermiside, Private, 14 Feb. 1893, W.O. 106/16. Cf. also Chapman to Lieutenant-General Brackenbury, Private and Confidential, 15 June 1893, W.O. 106/16.

² Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 15 Secret, 25 Jan. 1893, F.O. 195/1778.

³ See above, pp. 74, 83-84; Smith, pp. 129, 133, 142-143.

Although White's policy had been resurrected in effect, however, this result had come about only as an incidental and apparently unintended by-product of a course adopted on other grounds. With the decline in the threat of overland attack through Asia Minor, the idea which White and many others had held in the 'eighties, that a vast investment in the interior of that region would make a government such as Germany's more likely to cry 'À bas les armes!' to an aggressor,¹ had ceased to have any detectable influence on British official thinking. It had been at least plausible to argue that solicitude for investments might lead Germany to bring pressure to bear on Russia if great Russian armies were waging a protracted campaign through Anatolia, but it would have been quite unconvincing to maintain that the same consideration would cause Berlin to act against the accomplished fact of a coup de main undertaken, as St. Petersburg would doubtless announce, merely to open the Straits. In the outcome of the railway rivalries among British, French and Germans, Sir Arthur Nicolson saw no political significance whatever: he believed that it did not matter 'two straws' who built the lines, 'as I hope our commerce will chiefly profit by them'. At Constantinople, in the heat of a scramble, this view was, as Nicolson admitted, a heresy,² but it

¹ Ibid., pp. 110, 129, 131-132, 133, 142-143; cf. also above, pp. 74, 83-84.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Feb. 1893, Villiers Papers. In H. Nicolson, pp. 94-95, Sir Arthur is portrayed as being much disturbed, on both political and commercial grounds, at the prospect of Great Britain's being excluded from participation in Asia Minor railway construction. Sir Arthur's biographer has erred: in reality it was not Nicolson but Sir Clare Ford who was worried about this eventuality: Ford to Rosebery, No. 386 Confidential, 26 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4417.

was a heresy endorsed by Colonel Chermiside and subsequently by the Intelligence Division. Such an attitude implied as much lack of interest in promoting a German financial involvement in Asiatic Turkey as in the fate of British railway enterprise, the exclusion of which from the Sultan's provinces was dismissed by Intelligence as being of only 'minor' importance.¹ Nor did the Foreign Office, even after abandoning its opposition to the Konia project, feel any greater enthusiasm than the military for German railways as such. From the political standpoint it was judged to be a 'matter of indifference whether the lines are English or German'.² While ~~the~~ German capital was thought to be politically as good as British, there was not the slightest suggestion that it might in any way or degree be preferable.³

British policy was determined, then, by factors quite unrelated to the possible advantages of giving Berlin a larger stake in the security of Asia Minor. That a railway network in Ottoman Asia should be completed by somebody still seemed desirable for the sake of Turkey's own economy and administration as well as of British trade, and also because such a network might conceivably make feasible a defence of Asia Minor after Russian seizure of the Bosphorus.⁴

¹ Memorandum by Captain Fairholme, dated 16 Feb. 1894 (enclosed in Chapman to Sanderson (Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office), Private, 19 Feb. 1894, F.O. 78/4560.

² Minute by E. Barrington, dated 31 Mar. 1894 (with Plunket (President of the Aidin company) to Kimberley, 29 Mar. 1894, F.O. 78/4560).

³ Ibid.; Rosebery to Malet, No. 70 Confidential, 1 Mar. 1893, F.O. 64/1292.

⁴ Memorandum by Captain Fairholme, dated 16 Feb. 1894 (enclosed in Chapman to Sanderson, Private, 19 Feb. 1894, F.O. 78/4560.

Of those who wished to build railways, it was the Germans who had the most extensive and practicable programme of construction, backed up with the wherewithal to make at least some immediate progress. Moreover, as the Germans were so intensely interested in railways, British support of their schemes was a not unpromising method of imparting new strength to Anglo-German diplomatic friendship at Constantinople. This was the consideration which chiefly governed the advice of General Chapman. Judging from the fact that his support of the Germans was minimal and accorded with a bad grace,¹ the Foreign Secretary himself was influenced less by such hopes of advancing a friendship than by fear of a further German outburst.

Of these motives, the consequence was that British entrepreneurs, in so far as their interests clashed in any way with those of the Kaulla syndicate, now found themselves cold-shouldered by their own government,² while the latter assisted to some extent their German rivals. In March 1893 the Smyrna-Aidin company remedied the omission cited by Sanderson as a justification for withholding full diplomatic backing, and formally applied to the Foreign Office for aid. What the Aidin directors insisted on asking of the Turks, however, was the long-discussed extension to Tchai, and it was by now apparent that to this scheme the German financiers were unalterably opposed, on the ground that it would

¹ Rosebery to Malet, No. 70 Confidential, 1 Mar. 1893, F.O. 64/1292.

² The attitude adopted towards British capitalists was described by a Foreign Office official in 1894 as having been rather 'aloof': Minute by E. Barrington, dated 31 Mar. 1894 (with Plunket to Kimberley, 29 Mar. 1894, F.O. 78/4560).

tap their line too close to Konia. Kaulla would accept nothing more advantageous to the British than an extension to meet the Konia railway farther north, at Afioun-Karahissar - a proposal on the basis of which Smyrna-Aidin refused even to negotiate.¹ The upshot was that Rosebery declined to authorize support of the British company in the absence of willingness on its part to come to an understanding with the German group;² and while he relented somewhat during the summer, it was only to the extent of approving very cautious representations by Nicolson, then chargé d'affaires, in which an extension of the Aidin line was urged on the Turks in general terms, with no reference to any particular terminus.³ With that vague advocacy - of which the circumspect Nicolson was careful to inform the German embassy⁴ - the company which had been the object of such marked solicitude little more than six months earlier had now to be content. It was not until the spring of 1894 that the Aidin directors found a sympathetic hearing for their pleas, and began receiving a substantial amount of fruitless assistance in their quest for the Tehal concession.⁵

¹ Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 52, 21 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4486; Plunket to Rosebery, 16 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4500.

² Foreign Office to Plunket, 5 June 1893, F.O. 78/4501.

³ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 327, 13 July 1893, F.O. 78/4481; Rosebery to Nicolson, No. 193, 28 July 1893, F.O. 78/4476.

⁴ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 327, 13 July 1893, F.O. 78/4481.

⁵ Foreign Office to Plunket, 4 Apr., F.O. 78/4560; 14 Oct. 1894, F.O. 78/4562; Kimberley to Currie, No. 104, 4 Apr., F.O. 78/4537; No. 320, 23 Oct. 1894, F.O. 78/4538; No. 75 Confidential, 21 Feb. 1895, F.O. 78/4605; Currie to Kimberley, No. 171, 17 Apr., F.O. 78/4540; No. 506, 3 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4543; Currie to Barrington, Private, 3 Oct. 1894,

The new British attitude of subservience to German railway interests was similarly exemplified by the response to a fresh appeal from the Staniforth group. Staniforth had come forward at the beginning of 1893 with a revised version of his long-standing scheme for a line to Baghdad: having originally suggested a route obviously incompatible with Kaulla's concession - from a port on the Black Sea to Angora, and thence into Mesopotamia¹ - he now hoped to reach Baghdad by building from Alexandretta via Aleppo and Biredjik.² In early February, on Ford's requesting instructions, Rosebery authorized a measure of support for Staniforth's application to the Turks, but only on the understanding that the proposal did not 'involve any conflict with Germany'.³ Up to a point this condition was fulfilled: Paul Cambon was seeking his compensation for Germany's Konia victory in the acquisition of a concession in Syria, providing for a line from Damascus to the Euphrates which, like Staniforth's, would pass through Aleppo and Biredjik;⁴ and Prince Radolin was glad enough to make difficulties for his French colleague by supporting the Alexandretta-Biredjik portion of the British scheme against him.⁵ But in consequence of their own Meso-

F.O. 78/4543; Private, 19 Feb. 1895, F.O. 78/4647.

¹ G.P. xiv (2), No. 3963 (Radolin to Caprivi, 23 Dec. 1892).

² Ford to Rosebery, No. 31 Confidential, 28 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4477; Tel. No. 28, 8 Feb. 1893, F.O. 78/4486.

³ Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 21, 9 Feb. 1893, F.O. 78/4485.

⁴ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 114 (Cambon to Develle, 19 Jan. 1893); No. 171 (Cambon to Develle, 21 Feb. 1893); Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 9, 18 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4486.

⁵ Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 26 Secret, 6 Feb. 1893, F.O. 78/4486.

potamian ambitions, the Germans were unwilling to endorse Staniforth's application in its entirety. This created a somewhat delicate situation. Nicolson, who was fully in accord with the policy of restraint now being followed by the Foreign Secretary, suspected that Ford was disregarding Rosebery's proviso and pressing for Ottoman acquiescence in British construction 'right on to Baghdad'. Alarmed, he privately warned the Foreign Office on 12 February that 'we shall run across the German path again if we don't take care'. 'I don't think any actual harm has as yet been done,' he added, 'and I intend to do my utmost to prevent any further action.'¹ Ford, apparently, soon showed greater prudence, for a few days later Nicolson's uneasiness had evaporated.² In this case, too, memories of the unpleasantness at Berlin and Cairo demonstrated the effectiveness of their influence on British railway diplomacy.

That influence was not merely a negative factor, holding the British back: its positive aspect was shown later in the same month, when a further obstacle arose to the execution of the Kaula programme. Under the terms of the concession just awarded, the Ottoman authorities had guaranteed to the German syndicate a specified income per kilometre for both the Angora-Caesarea and Eskishehr-Konia lines; and it had been stipulated that the Turkish revenues assigned to meeting this obligation should be administered by the Council of the Public Debt. Now the British representative on the Council was Vincent Caillard, an ally of Sir Edgar Vincent's Ottoman Bank. In the proposed rôle of the Council Caillard

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Feb. 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 16 Feb. 1893, Villiers Papers.

thought he detected a heaven-sent opportunity of obstructing Kaulla's plans, or at any rate of extracting some quid pro quo for the Bank as a condition of his co-operation.¹ Accordingly, he raised the cry that the kilometric guarantees which the Sultan had promised were such as would be disastrous to the financial position of the Ottoman government.² With little waste of time, the Wilhelmstrasse complained of this development to the Foreign Office.³ The complaint was not justified: Caillard was a nominee of the British Council of Foreign Bondholders, not of the Crown, and Whitehall had neither control over, nor responsibility for, his policies.⁴ If the Foreign Secretary were to intervene in the matter, therefore, it would not be a case of enforcing neutrality on an over-zealous governmental agent, but rather one of participating in the dispute on the German side. Rosebery still smarted from the blows struck by Berlin in January, and despite the advice of Intelligence he was loath to go far along the path towards an actively pro-German stand. As he himself afterwards intimated to the German ambassador, he considered it an 'unusual' proceeding for the

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Feb.; Private, 27 Feb. 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Memorandum by Colonel Chermiside, entitled 'Current Railway Concession Questions' (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 60, 24 Feb. 1893, F.O. 78/4477); 'Memorandum on the Recently Granted Railway Concessions in Asia Minor', by V. Caillard (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 65, 27 Feb. 1893, F.O. 78/4477).

³ Rosebery to Malet, No. 64 Confidential, 22 Feb. 1893, F.O. 64/1292; Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 27, 22 Feb. 1893, F.O. 78/4485.

⁴ Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 43 Secret, 9 Mar. 1893 (with minutes), F.O. 78/4486.

Berlin government, 'having obtained advantages to the exclusion of all British interests', to expect assistance from Great Britain in facilitating their enjoyment of those advantages.¹ The Germans, however, were plainly annoyed, and the Foreign Secretary, not being prepared to risk renewed friction, instructed Sir Clare Ford without delay to do what he 'properly' could to modify Caillard's attitude.² Ford, it appears, conscientiously complied. Unwilling to give Kaulla more aid than he thought necessary for safety, Rosebery declined to entertain a subsequent suggestion from Berlin that he put pressure on Caillard through the Council of Foreign Bondholders in London; but even the Germans admitted that the British did everything that could be done at Constantinople.³ Within three weeks, though not before Prince Radolin had had recourse to the most violent threats against the Council of the Public Debt - brandishing 'his hammer of Thor', in Nicolson's phrase, 'and threatening to smash the Public Debt to atoms'⁴ - the Kaulla syndicate got its way.⁵ With the help of the British embassy, Kaulla's sedulous enemy of two months earlier, the last barrier to complete German success in the railway scramble had been triumphantly surmounted - and this without the slightest compensation

¹ Rosebery to Malet, No. 70 Confidential, 1 Mar. 1893, F.O. 64/1292.

² Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 27, 22 Feb. 1893, F.O. 78/4485.

³ Rosebery to Malet, No. 70 Confidential, 1 Mar. 1893, F.O. 64/1292.

⁴ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 11 Mar. 1893, Villiers Papers.

⁵ Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 46, 10 Mar.; Tel. No. 48, 14 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4486.

to British economic interests.

The Kaula programme being as extensive as it was, the success thus consummated represented a victory for Germany of decisive proportions. The French were almost altogether excluded from Asia Minor. The Nagelmackers group did secure a concession for extension of the Cassaba line to Afioun-Karahissar,¹ but this gain, jeopardized in 1893-'94 by disagreements between Nagelmackers and the Cassaba directors,² was finally nullified by the action of the Germans in preventing a junction between the French railway and their own. The Cassaba and Konia lines remained narrowly separated from each other at Afioun-Karahissar until the French company was obliged to accept terms which, while not depriving it of its nominal identity, gave German financiers effective control.³ It was southwards that France found her opportunities: from the moment in January 1893 when her position in the Asia Minor scramble became clearly hopeless, she had begun concentrating her attention on Syria⁴ - an outcome in which Radolin was quick to discern a portent of territorial acquisitions to come.⁵ As for the British, they were left

¹ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 114; No. 171.

² Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 327, 13 July 1893, F.O. 78/4481; Rosebery to Currie, Tel. No. 9 Confidential, 15 Feb. 1894, F.O. 78/4545; Currie to Rosebery, Tel. No. 18 Confidential, 20 Feb. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

³ Sir V. Chirol, The Middle Eastern Question, or Some Political Problems of Indian Defence, pp. 190-191.

⁴ 'Un Diplomate' (H. Cambon), Paul Cambon: Ambassadeur de France, pp. 137-138; cf. pp. 126-127; see also Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 12, 24 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4486; above, p. 117.

⁵ Ford to Rosebery, Tel. No. 26 Secret, 6 Feb. 1893, F.O. 78/4486. At London, however, the Intelligence Division saw

with Smyrna-Aidin. Notwithstanding the German encroachment on its hinterland, this company was said in 1894 to be 'fairly confident' of holding its own with regard to traffic.¹ But it was now cut off from the deep interior: without a junction with the German system - and as to the chances of such a junction being permitted the Constantinople embassy was pessimistic even after its eventual resumption of diplomatic support² - the British railway could have no strategic, and only limited commercial, importance.³ By contrast, with their existing line to Angora and their concessions beyond, and with the line to Konia (completed in 1896), the Kaulla syndicate not merely commanded the interior of Asia Minor, but thereby controlled key sections of the possible routes from the Bosphorus to Baghdad. The award of the Angora concession in 1888 had represented the first major step in Asia towards the opening of a Berlin-Baghdad railway.⁴ The concessions of 1893, and that for the Konia

'no sufficient reason' to oppose the French concession in Syria: Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 15 Secret, 25 Jan. 1893, F.O. 195/1778.

¹ Confidential Memorandum by A. Block, dated 21 Feb. 1894 (enclosed in Currie to Rosebery, No. 95, 24 Feb. 1894, F.O. 78/4539).

² Currie to Plunket, Private and Confidential, 2 Oct. 1894 (copy enclosed in Currie to Barrington, Private, 3 Oct. 1894, F.O. 78/4543).

³ Cf. Smith, p. 112; H.L. Hoskins, British Routes to India, p. 449.

⁴ Turkey's railways on the European side of the Straits, between Constantinople and the Austro-Hungarian frontier, were already controlled by the Deutsche Bank and its allies at the time of the Konia controversy: E.M. Earle, Turkey, the Great Powers, and the Bagdad Railway, p. 33.

project in particular, represented the second major step: by 1914, whereas the Haidar Pasha-Angora line had still not been extended beyond the latter terminus, the Konia branch had become a part of the great unfinished trunk into Mesopotamia.¹

The foundations had been laid for Germany's future penetration in the East. The Foreign Office, as we have seen, resented what had happened, and Ford's successor at Constantinople made a habit of telling Radolin, in tones of no little bitterness, that Great Britain could 'never forgive' the Germans for having shoved her out of the field of Turkish railway construction.² Resentment, however, was not accompanied by fear: in the early 'nineties British fears were still of Russia and of the fall of the Straits to the Tsar. *Call both of Golts and of the other German officers attached to the Ottoman forces.*³ In the event, the recall did not take place, but Golts's difficulties were significant as a symptom of changing conditions. At the beginning of June, on returning to the Turkish capital after a sojourn in Berlin, Kaulla was surprised at the 'Verstärkung' towards Germany which he encountered at the Palace;⁴ and almost simultaneously, acting in defiance of Radolin's advice, the Sultan issued an irade conferring the Syrian concession (Bassorah-Sidon) on French interests supported by Cambon.⁵ 'I am afraid', wrote Nicolaou, 'the Palace is drifting for the time on a

¹ Feis, map facing p. 348; cf. Wolf, p. 17.

² G.P. ix, No. 2189 (Radolin to Hohenlohe, 5 Dec. 1894); E.T.S. Dugdale, German Diplomatic Documents, 1871-1914, ii. 223.

³ *Ibid.*; D.D.F., 1st ser., ii, No. 482 (London to Constantinople, 2 May 1893).

THE STRAITS:

NEGOTIATIONS AT CONSTANTINOPLE

Germany had won her victory in the Konia scramble without much time to spare: in the spring of 1893 her influence at Constantinople appreciably declined, while that of France and Russia correspondingly increased. In late May Lord Rosebery heard that Franco-Russian 'intrigues' against Goltz Pasha, head of the German military mission in Turkey, had recently become so successful as to render his position 'impossible', and that the Kaiser was therefore contemplating the recall both of Goltz and of the other German officers attached to the Ottoman forces.¹ In the event, the recall did not take place, but Goltz's difficulties were significant as a symptom of changing conditions. At the beginning of June, on returning to the Turkish capital after a sojourn in Berlin, Kaula was surprised at the 'Verstimmung' towards Germany which he encountered at the Palace;² and almost simultaneously, acting in defiance of Radolin's advice, the Sultan issued an iradé conferring the Syrian concession (Damascus-Biredjik) on French interests supported by Cambon.³ 'I am afraid', wrote Nicolson, 'the Palace is drifting for the time on a

¹ Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 49 Secret, 24 May 1893, P.O. 78/4485; Chapman (Director of Military Intelligence) to Currie (Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office), Private, 24 May 1893, P.O. 78/4501.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 5 June 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ Ibid.; D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 252 (Cambon to Develle, 31 May 1893).

Franco-Russian current.¹ The Russians promptly took advantage of this altered orientation of the Padishah's policy to renew a diplomatic campaign for concessions regarding use of the Straits - concessions to which Great Britain offered firm opposition.

Before we examine the details of Russia's proposals and of the British resistance to them, some attention must be paid to the reasons for the strengthened position now enjoyed by the Franco-Russian combination. During the latter half of 1892 and the early months of '93, Abdul Hamid's attitude had been anything but friendly towards St. Petersburg. In particular, appreciating the value of a well-disposed buffer state on his European frontier, the Sultan had displayed marked sympathy for the anti-Russian régime of Prince Ferdinand and Stambouloff in Bulgaria. Stambouloff himself, though obtaining no tangible favours,² was received with cordiality at the Palace;³ moreover, when a Bulgarian industrial and agricultural exhibition was opened at Philéppopolis just afterwards, in late August of '92, the Sultan sent a special representative to the ceremony - a gesture which, like the reception of the Premier, occasioned much gratification at Sofia.⁴ Further Imperial courtesies were bestowed upon the

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 5 June 1893, Villiers Papers.

² D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 5 (Cambon to Ribot, 25 Aug. 1892).

³ Ford to Salisbury, No. 259 Confidential, 18 Aug. 1892, F.O. 78/4415; cf. Lowther to Salisbury, No. 118, 14 Aug. 1892, F.O. 78/4444.

⁴ Lowther to Rosebery, No. 125, 25 Aug.; No. 139 Confidential, 1 Oct. 1892, F.O. 78/4444; Ford to Rosebery, No. 328 Confidential, 29 Oct. 1892 (encloses partial text of a speech delivered by Prince Ferdinand on 27 October), F.O. 78/4416.

vassal Principality during the ensuing winter,¹ and they were accompanied by a more practical expression of Abdul Hamid's goodwill: in an attempt to persuade the Bulgarian Exarch at Constantinople to use his influence with the Bulgarian clergy against Stambouloff, the Russian embassy was thwarted, after an initial success, by the intervention of the Palace.² Paradoxically, it was this Turkish promotion of warm relations with a Russophobe Sofia which appears to have been responsible in part for the subsequent improvement in Russia's position on the Bosphorus. A pro-Bulgarian policy inevitably entailed giving offence to St. Petersburg, and notwithstanding the prudent precautions taken by the Sultan to minimize provocation,³ the Tsar retaliated by adopting an ostentatiously cold demeanour towards the Ottoman government. In the midst of a flurry of rumours about Russian naval and military preparations, Abdul Hamid fell prey to a mood of nervous despondency, and reacted sharply against the course which had brought him into danger. Abandoning his cultivation of Stambouloff's friendship, he set out to conciliate Alexander III.⁴ The Turkish ambassador at the Tsar's capital was instructed in May 1893 to sound the Russians regarding their

¹ Ford to Rosebery, No. 62, 26 Feb., F.O. 78/4477; No. 76, 6 Mar., F.O. 78/4478; Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 27 Mar. 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Dering to Rosebery, No. 4, 11 Jan.; No. 15, 4 Feb.; No. 37, 13 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4506; D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 174 (Cambon to Develle, 24 Feb. 1893).

³ Morier to Rosebery, No. 238, 5 Oct., F.O. 65/1421; Lowther to Rosebery, No. 145, 10 Oct.; No. 147, 12 Oct., F.O. 78/4444; Ford to Rosebery, No. 328 Confidential, 29 Oct. 1892, F.O. 78/4416.

⁴ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 5 June 1893, Villiers Papers.

intentions in the Bulgarian question, so that Constantinople might 'shape its policy in conformity with the common interests of Turkey and Russia'; and while this move was elaborately camouflaged, for British and Austrian benefit, as an independent action of the Porte, there was little doubt at the British embassy that Abdul Hamid himself had been implicated.¹ Soon the Sultan was behaving openly in a manner offensive to Sofia, but well calculated to appease St. Petersburg.² Not only were Turco-Bulgarian relations an indirect cause of the new 'current' which Nicolson now detected at the Palace, but the deterioration of those relations through deliberate Ottoman discourtesy constituted a conspicuous warning to Russia's opponents of the strength which the current had attained.

By themselves, however, the Tsar's annoyance at Turkish friendliness to Sofia, and the Sultan's consequent fright, do not provide the full explanation for the change which had taken place by June in the relative influence of the Continental Powers at Constantinople. Germany was not losing ground merely because Russia (and with her France) was gaining; on the contrary, it seems probable that the French and Russians were able to make the gains they did only because Germany's position was being weakened at this time by events in the German Empire itself, over which Paris and St. Petersburg had no control. The Germans were not genuinely popular in Turkey: their influence had been derived primarily from the prestige of their arms, and from the Sultan's belief that the Kaiser was a fellow autocrat, whose personal friendship was equival-

¹ Secret Memorandum by Nicolson, dated 12 May 1893, Nicolson Papers.

² Dering to Rosebery, No. 70 Confidential, 6 June, F.O. 78/4507; Tel. No. 19, 6 June 1893, F.O. 78/4508.

ent to a guarantee of steadfast support from the government at Berlin.¹ In the spring and early summer of 1893, both these bases of Germany's strength were undermined by a controversy in the Reichstag and the country over proposed increases in the military establishment. One Army Bill was defeated in committee in mid-March, and a compromise Bill which was then substituted, providing for a somewhat smaller augmentation of forces, was rejected by the Reichstag as a whole on 6 May. A dissolution and election made possible a narrow victory for the proposal in July,² but the damage at Constantinople had already been done. The public outcry against a measure endorsed by the Kaiser,³ and the refusal of the Reichstag obediently to adopt it, made Abdul Hamid realize, apparently for the first time, that Germany, too, was a constitutional State, and that the authority of Wilhelm II was not absolute. Moreover, the arguments used by the Chancellor in advocating passage of the Bill inspired doubt in the Sultan's mind as to the reality of German military predominance on the Continent, of which he had hitherto been confident. 'He has seen Caprivi openly confirm in Parliament', wrote Nicolson, 'what the enemies of the Triple Alliance have been insisting on continually at the Palace here, that France is stronger in a military sense than Germany, and that France and

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 5 June 1893, Villiers Papers; Memorandum by A. Block, dated 23 Feb. 1893 (enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 78 Secret, 7 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4478).

² J.A. Nichols, Germany after Bismarck, 1890-1894, pp. 251-257; R. Theis, Die Wehrpolitik des Deutschen Reiches unter Reichskanzler Graf Caprivi und Fürst Hohenlohe, p. 34.

³ On the extent of the initial public opposition to Caprivi's military proposals, see A. Rosinski, Fürst Bismarcks Kampf gegen den Grafen Caprivi, p. 30.

Russia combined are a match for the other group.¹ Certain no longer either of the ability of the Kaiser to control German policy in Turkey's interest, or of the effectiveness of German protection in the face of the Franco-Russian coalition, Abdul Hamid felt himself much more exposed than would otherwise have been the case to the displeasure of the Tsar on the Bulgarian issue.

Bulgaria, however, was no longer one of the burning issues in European politics, and it was not there that Nicolson apprehended the main consequences of Ottoman appeasement. As the First Secretary reported privately to the Foreign Office, the real danger was at the Straits:

The Austrian ambassador has learnt from several well-informed sources that the Sultan . . . is meditating whether it would not be the wiser policy to come to terms with Russia, whom he fears the most and from whom he thinks he could obtain the surest guarantees. This idea . . . would no doubt be countenanced by the French. It is quite possible that the Sultan will take no really serious plunge - indeed his want of decision may be considered a permanent factor in any problem - but while in this mood he may give away some substantial favours; and the question of the passage of the Straits by munitions of war is again being mooted by the Russians.²

As early as June 1892, a year before Nicolson penned this warning, Sir Clare Ford had heard that there existed a danger of Turkey's making concessions to Russia with regard to the transport through the Straits of war materials.³ In a new Russo-Turkish commercial treaty then being drawn up, the

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 5 June 1893, Villiers Papers; cf. R.J. Sontag, Germany and England, Background of Conflict, 1848-1894, p. 278.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 5 June, Villiers Papers; cf. Ford to Rosebery, No. 237 Secret, 5 June 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

³ Ford to Salisbury, No. 194 Confidential, 12 June 1892, F.O. 78/4414.

draft of Article XVII, which it was rumoured that the Turks might accept, had been so phrased as to embody the substance of Russia's desires.

Since the Straits were Ottoman territorial waters, Turkey exercised sovereignty over them, and was entitled, subject to the terms of whatever treaties she herself might sign, to impose what restrictions she wished on cargo passing through them.¹ In a Circular issued to the Powers on 17 April 1888, the Ottoman government had laid down a requirement that it be given notice of the intended transit of merchantmen 'chargés d'armes ou de munitions de guerre destinés à des gouvernements étrangers', and that permission for the passage be obtained in each case. The Powers, with one exception, had agreed to these provisions. The exception, of course, was Russia, which invoked a commercial convention concluded in 1862 as a ground for declining to recognize Turkey's right to be informed of, or to impose any conditions on, the transit of vessels with military materials.² In the early 'nineties the Turks were in practice admitting the Russian contention, but since the commercial agreement in question had long since lost its validity,³ Russia's position was enviable neither in law nor in logic. Against the countries which had accepted the Circular the

¹ Sir J. Headlam-Morley, Studies in Diplomatic History, p. 212.

² Ford to Rosebery, No. 324 Confidential, 21 Oct. 1892 (encloses copy of the Turkish Circular); No. 353, 18 Nov. 1892 (encloses copy of the Russian reply to the Porte, dated 24 Apr. 1888), F.O. 78/4473.

³ 'Memorandum respecting Affairs of South-Eastern Europe, August 1892 to October 1893', by F. Bertie, Confidential, dated 15 Oct. 1893 (copy enclosed in Rosebery to Monson, No. 150 Confidential, 5 Dec. 1893, F.O. 120/701).

Turks continued to enforce their right, and they still considered themselves entitled to enforce it against Russia whenever they should deem that policy expedient.¹

In these circumstances St. Petersburg showed itself desirous of negotiating an accord which would provide the existing Russian claim to free passage of munitions with an unchallengeable legal basis. Under the treaty of 1862 the Porte, while retaining authority to prohibit the importation of arms, munitions and gunpowder into the Ottoman dominions, had renounced the power to include in such a prohibition 'les canons et munitions de guerre que le Gouvernement Impérial de Russie pourrait se trouver dans le cas de faire passer en transit par les Dardanelles et le Bosphore, pour les ports de Russie'.² It was this clause which was read by the Russians to mean that once already the Tsar had gained for war materials an unrestricted freedom of transit. At the British embassy such an interpretation was conceded to be 'possible', but quite apart from the fact that the treaty was no longer in force, doubt was expressed that the terms of 1862 could be 'strained' so far as to preclude the Porte from exercising the degree of 'surveillance' demanded in the Circular.³ Privately, it appears, the same doubt was felt at St. Petersburg: in 1892 the Russians were seeking not merely to revive the clause ratified by Turkey thirty years before, but to revive it in an amended form. Formally

¹ Ford to Salisbury, No. 194 Confidential, 12 June 1892, F.O. 78/4414; Howard (chargé d'affaires at St. Petersburg) to Rosebery, No. 237 Secret, 25 Sept. 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

² Russo-Turkish Commercial Treaty of 3 February 1862, Article XIV (printed in G. Noradounghian, Recueil d'Actes Internationaux de l'Empire Ottoman, iii. 176).

³ Ford to Rosebery, No. 353, 18 Nov. 1892, F.O. 78/4473.

reaffirming the ban which the Sultan had laid upon the conveyance through Ottoman territory of arms and explosives, the draft Article XVII specified as exceptions 'les armes, munitions et fournitures de guerre de toute espèce que le Gouvernement russe se réserve comme par le passé le droit de faire transporter librement par les Détroits . . . sur des bâtiments marchands nationaux ou étrangers à destination des ports russes'. The British embassy regarded the use of the word 'librement' as a 'distinct and important innovation'.¹ Further dangerous innovations were detected in a paragraph of the same Article exempting from the Turkish prohibition on munitions 'bâtiments de commerce russes se rendant d'un port appartenant à l'Empire de Russie à un autre port du même Empire par les Détroits . . . dont le passage en transit sans arrêt leur reste toujours libre quels que soient les marchandises et les passagers à bord'. The two expressions occasioning particular concern to Ford and his advisers were 'sans arrêt' and 'passagers'. In the absence of any precise definition, the latter word could apparently be interpreted to include soldiers. As for 'sans arrêt', the British perceived that its insertion, like that of 'librement', was intended to destroy Turkey's claimed right to exercise surveillance over Russian traffic in the Straits. If a Russian ship entering the waterway without permission were to be stopped, Ford reasoned, the new language could be invoked as proof that the Ottoman action was unjustified, and that the vessel could not lawfully be prevented from proceeding whether permission had been granted or not. Moreover, this would be true even if the vessel in

¹ Ford to Salisbury, No. 194 Confidential, 12 June 1892, F.O. 78/4414.

question were carrying 'passagers' as well as munitions. The sole limitation on Russia's freedom in either case was that contained in the final section of the draft Article, which stipulated that the Ottoman authorities be informed in advance of projected voyages; and since even this proviso, which differed significantly from the Circular in omitting any reference to permission, had been added only at Turkish instigation, there could be no certainty that the Russian delegates would ultimately consent to sign it.¹

In the early summer of 1892, in brief, British diplomacy at Constantinople was confronted with an attempt on the part of St. Petersburg, not without some apparent prospect of success, to secure an absolutely unconditional right of free passage through the Straits for merchant ships carrying troops, arms and military supplies from one Russian port to another. Whereas the British maintained that the treaty of 1862 had been intended to allow transport only of munitions inward-bound to the Black Sea, the arrangement now proposed would plainly eliminate all doubt that movement was permissible in the opposite direction as well - from Odessa, for example, to Vladivostok.² On learning of the situation, Ford immediately voiced unofficial objections at the Porte to the draft Article in its existing form. With the assistance of the Secretary-General of the Ottoman Department of Foreign Affairs, who was particularly disturbed by the implications of the word 'passagers', the ambassador extracted an admission from the Turkish foreign minister that Russia's pro-

¹ Ibid.; Ford to Rosebery, No. 324 Confidential, 21 Oct. 1892, F.O. 78/4473.

² Ibid.; Ford to Salisbury, No. 194 Confidential, 12 June 1892, F.O. 78/4414.

posals, if accepted, would be prejudicial to the claims of the Sultan. A similar admission was elicited, with rather greater ease, from the Grand Vizier. From both ministers assurances were forthcoming that the Ottoman government had not given its approval to the suggested concessions, and the Grand Vizier insisted to Ford that the Porte was determined to stand firm against Russian pressure.¹ This was all very well, but the British embassy thought it unsafe to let the matter rest. True, Ford predicted that his representations, supported as they were by his German and Austrian colleagues, would produce a beneficial effect on Turkish thinking,² and a report which reached the embassy shortly afterwards, at the end of June, seemed to justify the forecast. Even then, however, the ambassador was not entirely confident of having averted the danger. Neophyte though he was in Eastern diplomacy, he had been sufficiently educated by this time to realize that opinions professed by the Porte meant little when opposed by Russian influence at the Palace. He therefore decided that as a supplement to the unofficial action already taken, it would be desirable that Turkish resistance be 'fortified' through a more formal expression of views from the 'interested Powers'.³

In London, meanwhile, Lord Salisbury too had come to the conclusion that something more should be done. In 1891, on Turkey's arriving at an agreement with St. Petersburg respecting the terms under which the Russian 'Volunteer Fleet' could pass the Straits,⁴ the British government had

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ford to Salisbury, No. 214 Confidential, 30 June 1892, F.O. 78/4473.

⁴ H.S. Edwards, The Career and Correspondence of Sir William

proclaimed the principle that privileges in the waterway which were accorded to any one Power were ipso facto accorded to all.¹ To this formula Salisbury now had recourse once again: he instructed Ford, on 30 June, to repeat it to the Porte. Evidently the Foreign Secretary had not paid close attention to the wording of the controversial draft. If Russia had gained the right, as was supposed, to send her merchantmen freely through the Straits 'd'un port appartenant à l'Empire de Russie à un autre port du même Empire', it would have been meaningless for the British merely to claim the same right, for they had no ports in the Black Sea. Fortunately Ford, or one of his subordinates, appreciated this point in time, and the ambassador requested authorization from Salisbury to add that concessions granted to Russia would be enjoyed equally by British ships 'whatever their provenance or destination'. The Foreign Secretary concurred, and it was in this form that the British position was eventually communicated to Turkey in the latter part of July. Ford's suggestion for further action by the whole group of 'interested Powers' was not followed up, but his message to the Porte amounted to a threat that Great Britain at least would respond to Ottoman acceptance of the draft Article by rescinding the recognition which she had formerly given to the Circular of 1888.²

White, pp. 251-252; G. Young, Corps de Droit Ottoman, iii. 60-61; cf. C. Phillipson and N. Buxton, The Question of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, p. 171.

¹ C.L. Smith, The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople, 1886-1891, pp. 136, 146.

² Ford to Salisbury, Tel. No. 87 Confidential, 21 July, F.O. 78/4419; No. 241, 26 July (encloses text of message to Porte); Salisbury to Ford, Tel. No. 48, 22 July 1892, F.O. 78/4473.

For the remainder of the summer the Russo-Turkish negotiations dragged on inconclusively, without causing the British any more anxiety.¹ Before the Liberals assumed power in August, the issue had sunk completely into the background of Foreign Office problems - so completely, indeed, that the permanent officials did not remember, or did not consider it necessary, even to inform their new chief of what had been happening. Rosebery remained in ignorance that the question existed until he heard of it from the Austrian ambassador at the beginning of November, by which time the Russians had returned vigorously to the offensive.²

Russia's resumption of pressure on Turkey in the autumn of 1892 can be attributed to the same cause which presumably was responsible for the complacency among Rosebery's advisers. The Russophobic phase through which the policy of the Sultan was then passing found expression not only in closer relations with Bulgaria, but also in a firmer stand on the use of the Straits. In August, in accordance with St. Petersburg's interpretation of the legal position, a Danish steamer carrying arms and ammunition for the Russian government attempted to pass up the waterway without requesting permission. The Turks now upheld the stipulations of their Circular in no uncertain terms: the offending vessel was brought under fire from one of the Dardanelles forts, and was detained by the Ottoman military authorities.³ Two other

¹ Ford to Rosebery, No. 324 Confidential, 21 Oct. 1892 (received at the Foreign Office on 2 November), F.O. 78/4473.

² Ibid.; Paget to Rosebery, No. 200 Confidential, 31 Oct. 1892 (with minute by Rosebery), F.O. 78/4473; Rosebery to Barrington (chargé d'affaires at Vienna), No. 119 Confidential, 2 Nov. 1892, F.O. 7/1183.

³ Russell (Vice-Consul at the Dardanelles) to Ford, No. 21,

Danish ships with similar cargoes later passed unmolested, but in early September Russia was given reason to believe that the incident had been more than a mere isolated case of local initiative, and indeed that it foreshadowed the adoption at Constantinople of a strongly anti-Russian posture with regard to the transport through the Straits of military supplies. Acting on direct instructions from Abdul Hamid, who suspected that the Russians might be plotting to arm the Armenians, the Porte reiterated the requirements laid down in the Circular, and demanded of St. Petersburg that special permission be sought in future for each shipment of war material. It added, moreover, that in the event of such permission being granted, the vessel in question would be escorted by a Turkish ship as long as it remained within territorial limits.¹

The Sultan's sudden self-assertiveness did not lead in the event to a general enforcement of his claims, but at the time the blunt, insistent tone of the Turkish communication made it appear probable that even on a de facto basis the Palace would no longer be willing to acquiesce in what Russia considered to be the exercise of her rights. In this situation St. Petersburg evidently concluded that it was now more important than ever to obtain acceptance of the words 'librement' and 'sans arrêt', and also that the sole chance of doing so lay in browbeating Constantinople into compliance. Abdul Hamid's reception of Stambouloff gave the

21 Aug. 1892 (copy enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 265, 24 Aug. 1892, F.O. 78/4473).

¹ This information was communicated to the Foreign Office on 12 September by the German embassy in London: Rosebery to Trench (chargé d'affaires at Berlin), No. 204 Secret, 12 Sept. 1892, F.O. 78/4473.

Russians an additional motive for being disagreeable, and by the third week of October they had not merely resumed in earnest the Straits negotiations, but had adopted a more unfriendly and intransigent attitude than had been usual in previous discussion of the issue.¹

It was on 2 November that Rosebery received from Count Deym, the Austrian ambassador in London, his first news of Russia's attempts to amend the Straits clauses.² At this period Alexander III personally was by no means as greatly irritated over the Bulgarian question as he was to become within the next few months,³ and the good relations between Constantinople and Sofia - which, as we have seen, were not reflected until the winter in practical Turkish support of Stambouloff⁴ - were not yet arousing his anger to the same degree as was afterwards to be the case. To the harsh tone of Russian delegates Abdul Hamid naturally attached less weight than he was to attach in the spring to the manifest wrath of the Tsar himself. Moreover, the struggle over the Army Bill being still in the future, the Sultan's faith in German military strength was as yet unshaken. Thus there seemed no imminent likelihood of a Turkish surrender. The Porte, Deym assured the Foreign Secretary, was 'extremely alive to the danger' of the proposed concessions.⁵ On the

¹ Ford to Rosebery, No. 324 Confidential, 21 Oct. 1892 (received at the Foreign Office on 2 November), F.O. 78/4473.

² Paget to Rosebery, No. 200 Confidential, 31 Oct. 1892 (with minute by Rosebery), F.O. 78/4473); Rosebery to Barrington, No. 119 Confidential, 2 Nov. 1892, F.O. 7/1183.

³ See below, pp. 211-213, 215. ⁴ Above, pp. 125-126.

⁵ Rosebery to Barrington, No. 119 Confidential, 2 Nov. 1892, F.O. 7/1183.

other hand, Vienna did not fail to recognize that in the face of Russian importunity, Ottoman resolution might eventually falter; and Count Kálnoky, Austria's foreign minister, suggested that any symptoms of a yielding disposition among the Turks should be countered with a further repetition of the familiar formula - that rights granted to one Power would automatically be granted to all. Rosebery saw no merit in Kálnoky's plan: on Deym's outlining to him the terms of the draft Article, he had grasped at once the point initially overlooked by Salisbury, that for a country without Black Sea ports the privileges sought by Russia would be useless.¹ More practicable than the Austrian scheme was an idea put forward by Ford: that Great Britain might make explicit the threat already implied by her communication in July, and announce that if the draft were approved by the Porte, British vessels would no longer be bound by the Circular of 1888. Like Kálnoky's, however, this suggestion was intended by its author to be held in reserve, and implemented only if the Turks were giving way.² Since neither Ford nor the Austrians saw any immediate risk, Rosebery decided to content himself for the time being with a policy of watchful waiting. He instructed his representative on the Bosphorus merely to keep an observant eye on the progress of the negotiations, and to maintain contact on the subject with the German and Austro-Hungarian embassies at Constantinople.³

¹ Ibid.; Paget to Rosebery, No. 200 Confidential, 31 Oct. 1892 (with minute by Rosebery), F.O. 78/4473.

² Ford to Rosebery, No. 324 Confidential, 21 Oct. 1892, F.O. 78/4473.

³ Rosebery to Ford, No. 230 Confidential, 8 Nov. 1892, F.O. 195/1744.

As it turned out, the negotiations made no progress at all during the next several months: apparently finding the opposition of Porte and Palace insurmountable, the Russians allowed the issue to sink back into a dormant state.¹ In early 1893 it was Bulgaria, not the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, which occupied the foreground as a source of Russo-Turkish friction. What diplomatic activity there was on the Straits Question was confined to the side of Russia's antagonists among the Powers. At the beginning of December 1892, the Italian foreign minister 'spontaneously' promised to instruct his ambassador in Turkey, the thoroughly pro-British Count Collobiano,² to join in watching Russia's efforts, and if necessary to 'act in concert with his German, Austrian, and especially with his British, colleagues'.³ With this development the coalition of embassies against Russia attained its highest possible numerical strength. Despite unanimous recognition of a need for alertness, however, it had as yet no plan of operations, no agreed set of measures to encourage the Turks in their resistance, or if occasion demanded to deter them from making concessions.

A move to remedy the deficiency was soon undertaken by Austria-Hungary. Having come to agree with Rosebery that reiteration of Salisbury's formula would provide no answer to the present problem, Kálnoky had hit upon an alternative course of action. From the outset it had been the Austrian

¹ Ford to Rosebery, No. 32 Confidential, 30 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

² See Ford to Rosebery, No. 293, 20 Sept. 1892, F.O. 78/4416.

³ Vivian to Rosebery, No. 253 Confidential, 2 Dec. 1892, F.O. 45/684; Tel. No. 69 Confidential, 2 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4473.

view that the question of free passage for war materials could not properly be settled by Turkey and Russia alone, with other governments entitled to intervene only by exercising influence on the Turks. In Vienna the problem was held to be one affecting the interests of the Powers in general.¹ Kálnoky's new proposal was derived from that principle: the Porte should be told, he believed, that 'in the event of its being contemplated to grant to Russia any privileges or concessions going beyond those already accorded, they should be made known to the other Powers, who should be consulted thereupon'. Towards the turn of the year the Austrians informed Turkey of what they had in mind. Since a formal request from other interested governments to be consulted would obviously have placed the Ottoman authorities in a stronger position to withstand Russian pressure, the reaction of the Grand Vizier was favourable. Thus encouraged, Kálnoky submitted his idea to the British on 2 January 1893.²

After receipt of the Austrian suggestion, the view first taken at the Foreign Office was that it would be preferable to do something more drastic - not merely to express the opinion that the Porte 'should' consult the Powers before making concessions, but to insist that it 'must' consult them, and to support the demand with a threat to reconsider 'present engagements with regard to the Straits'. Rosebery decided that Ford should be instructed to discuss the matter with his Austrian colleague, Baron Calice, and 'endeavour to

¹ Ford to Salisbury, No. 214 Confidential, 30 June 1892, F.O. 78/4473.

² Paget to Rosebery, No. 2 Confidential, 3 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4592 (copy in F.O. 7/1197).

ascertain if other Powers would join in similar language'. Even when these orders were formulated, however, they held no promise of leading to a useful result, and the Foreign Secretary wisely discarded them before they were sent.¹ If joint representations were to be effective, the participation of Germany was all but indispensable.² But the Wilhelmstrasse had just made its charge that Great Britain was attacking German railway interests in Asia Minor, and on that ground it had already withdrawn all backing from British policy in Egypt.³ Until the railway controversy had been settled to the satisfaction of Berlin, it was evident that to seek German aid on any Eastern problem would be to court a rude rebuff. On reflection, Rosebery concluded that the best plan would be to put forward no suggestions for the moment, but simply to 'remind' Ford of his existing instructions and ask him to submit a report with respect to his action upon them.⁴ In complying with his chief's request, the ambassador stated that there had been no recent exchanges between the Russian and Ottoman negotiators.⁵ The Foreign Secretary, presumably reassured, appears to have

¹ Paget to Rosebery, No. 2 Confidential, 3 Jan. 1893 (with minutes, including two by Rosebery), F.O. 78/4592.

² Cf. below, p. 236.

³ Above, pp. 86, 93. Paget's despatch (cited in Note 1 above) in which Kálnoky's proposal was set forth, was received at the Foreign Office on 7 January, the day of the German action at Cairo.

⁴ Paget to Rosebery, No. 2 Confidential, 3 Jan. 1893 (with minutes by Rosebery); Rosebery to Ford, No. 6 Confidential, 12 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

⁵ Ford to Rosebery, No. 32 Confidential, 30 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

paid no further attention to the question as long as this period of inactivity lasted. The consequence was that when the Russians renewed their pressure in the more favourable circumstances of the late spring, Great Britain had still not enlisted the co-operation of the Triple Alliance in any definite scheme for counter-measures.

Even after learning of Russia's fresh efforts, the British refrained from making good their omission. Despite his allusion to a 'Franco-Russian current' at Yildiz, and to the possibility of Abdul Hamid's giving away some 'substantial favours', Sir Arthur Nicolson - now about to become chargé d'affaires - thought it probable that he would be able to avert Turkish concessions by himself, through nothing more than a display of his own alertness. If the Sultan were 'really up to some trickery', Nicolson reasoned, he would become alarmed and 'creep back under his shell' as soon as it was brought home to him that the British embassy was awake.¹ With this method of handling the situation Rosebery seems to have been favourably impressed, for his instructions to the chargé d'affaires were simply that the latter should be vigilant.² These matters rested for much of the summer of 1893, Nicolson continuing to be sanguine.

Meanwhile the Austrian ambassador was becoming increasingly uneasy. Hitherto, whatever the Turks might think of the small importance of sea power when weighed against predominance on land, they had at least believed that in her chosen element - particularly in the Mediterranean - Great

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 5 June 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Rosebery to Nicolson, No. 148 Secret, 20 June 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

Britain was supreme. As the summer progressed, however, events conspired to undermine this conviction. Calice found that the accidental loss of the battleship Victoria, and the criticisms being levelled by British publicists at the alleged weakness of the Navy, were both making a deep impression on the Ottoman authorities. St. Petersburg was on the point of establishing a Mediterranean squadron, and it began to be suspected at Constantinople that the addition of Russia's warships to those of France might appreciably alter the local balance of maritime strength. The Austrian did his best, in conversation with Turkish officials, to belittle the significance of the Russian decision - but not, he feared, with much success. On 12 August he warned Nicolson that the Russo-French sympathies at the Palace might be further aggravated by the apparent change in the naval position.¹

The British diplomat's immediate reaction to Austrian anxieties was conditioned by his enduring faith in the irresolution of Abdul Hamid. The restraint which the latter had shown in his advice to the Khedive in July had indicated afresh that this faith was well-founded, and that so long as Great Britain treated Turkey with firmness - as she had just done in the case of the Armenian professors - the Palace would hesitate to embark on any major new departure inimical to British interests.² Therefore, while he did not dismiss Calice's forebodings as altogether groundless, Nicolson felt confident that if they came true in any degree, what would happen would amount merely to another of the familiar 'tack-

¹ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 390 Confidential, 13 Aug. 1893, F.O. 78/4482.

² See above, pp. 44-45.

ings and veerings' of Imperial policy - not to the adoption of a 'determined course' favourable to Russia.¹ Yet as August drew on the chargé d'affaires commenced to qualify his optimism. Although he still expected no sweeping revision of the zigzag diplomacy so far pursued, he started thinking that to prevent the Sultan's temporary pro-Russian tendencies from finding expression in some limited concessions might now prove a more difficult task than he had anticipated in June. The Russians were pressing with greater energy than ever for the free passage of war materials: their embassy, Nicolson informed the Foreign Office, was clearly desirous of hastening a final decision on the disputed Article. By the last days of the month he was 'not without apprehension' lest the Turks might be ready to accept St. Petersburg's terms.²

The disquiet of the trusted and unexcitable Nicolson impelled Rosebery to go for the first time beyond exhortations to vigilance, and to authorize a more minatory declaration on the transit issue than he seems hitherto even to have contemplated. Instead of confining himself to threatening repudiation of the Circular of 1888 and 'present engagements with regard to the Straits', the Foreign Secretary ordered the British embassy to tell the Porte that if it were to comply with Russia's wishes, the result would be to 're-open the Eastern Question, and thus compel Her Majesty's Government to review their position in regard to the Ottoman Empire'. No hint was given of what the outcome of such a review

¹ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 390 Confidential, 13 Aug. 1893, F.O. 78/4482.

² Nicolson to Rosebery, Tel. No. 168, 19 Aug.; No. 414 Confidential, 29 Aug. 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

might be: the Sultan - cowardly, imaginative and prone to nightmares - was to be left to speculate uneasily on the nature of Great Britain's secret intentions.¹

The fact that the British took the issue of free transit for military commodities so seriously requires a word of explanation. The stand which London adopted had nothing to do with a desire to hinder in any way the strengthening of Russia's position in the Far East. In that context not even the free passage of soldiers - and in 1893 the controversy was apparently restricted to materials² - would have been important. Since the beginning of 1889 Russia had in practice been sending troops through the Dardanelles on frequent occasions, from the Black Sea ports to her Pacific provinces, and this continued to be done throughout the period of the Gladstone and Rosebery administrations.³ Whether or not the passage was formally free could make no difference to the Far Eastern balance of power: what was significant was that the Russian forces reached their destination. While Rosebery objected to the Turks' giving up their right of control over military traffic of any kind, he did not demand that in normal circumstances permission for use of the Straits should ever actually be withheld. In 1893 the Turks were again maintaining their claims in the Straits only 'academically',⁴

¹ Ibid. (with minute by Rosebery); Rosebery to Nicolson, No. 258 Confidential, 30 Sept. 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 5 June, Villiers Papers; Ford to Rosebery, No. 237 Secret, 5 June 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

³ Admiralty Memorandum by L.A. Beaumont, dated 1 May 1895, Spencer Papers (envelope marked 'Mediterranean Station: Strategy, etc.').

⁴ Howard (chargé d'affaires at St. Petersburg) to Rosebery, No. 237 Secret, 25 Sept. 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

and against this policy the British made no protest. In the event of an Anglo-Russian war, it is true, the Foreign Secretary might well have asked Abdul Hamid to impose an effective ban on the movement of enemy men and arms through his waters; but so long as Great Britain had command of the Mediterranean, such a ban could not be really necessary, or indeed of much value. If, on the other hand, Great Britain were to lose command of the Mediterranean, there could be no hope whatever that Turkey would brave the displeasure of the Tsar at London's behest. Thus the Sultan's renunciation of his claims - the renunciation which Rosebery was so anxious to avert - would in itself have entailed no direct threat to British interests. These would have been prejudiced only in so far as Ottoman security was undermined, the Turks made to feel more exposed to Russian pressure, and the opening of the Straits to Russian warships made more probable.

It was precisely such a danger which the Foreign Office feared might arise from the proposed concessions. Should Russian merchantmen, whatever the Turks' suspicions in any particular case, be entitled to pass down the Bosphorus with arms 'librement' and 'sans arrêt' - that is, without risk of being stopped for inspection - then there could be no way of ensuring that Russia was not sending an assault force into the Straits in addition to munitions. Amongst the most important of Turkey's 'internal concerns', wrote one of Rosebery's subordinates, was 'that necessary provision for her own safety against surprise or treachery which would be jeopardized by the abandonment of all right of control over ships navigating her waters'.¹ The official did not discuss

¹ 'Memorandum respecting Affairs of South-Eastern Europe, August 1892 to October 1893', by F. Bertie, Confidential, dated 15 Oct. 1893 (copy enclosed in Rosebery to Monson,

possibilities in detail, but perhaps it was thought that if disguised troop transports could be brought unchallenged into the Sea of Marmora, the Russians might attack the Dardanelles forts from the rear in co-ordination with a seizure of the Bosphorus defences by troops landed on the Black Sea coast. The fact that an increased Turkish sense of vulnerability would strengthen Russia's influence was no doubt borne in mind.

The degree to which British efforts were effective in influencing Turkey against concessions is by no means clear. Rosebery's menacing communication was delivered to the Porte by Sir Clare Ford after the latter's return to Constantinople in October,¹ and by mid-November the anxiety at the Foreign Office had given place to confidence that Turkey would not yield.² Yet the truth is that some time before the communication was made the Russian diplomatic offensive had already become bogged down; and the prevalence of cholera at the Ottoman capital had probably contributed more to this development than had the opposition of Calice and Nicolson. The epidemic eliminated all likelihood that Russia's continuing pressure for an early decision would prove successful, for Abdul Hamid soon became so abjectly terrified at the thought of contracting the disease that he was in no mental condition to decide anything. Even before the middle of September papers awaiting the Sultan's action were reported to be 'accumulating by the hundreds', and for weeks thereafter the ruler remained 'quite absorbed with microbes and

No. 150 Confidential, 5 Dec. 1893, F.O. 120/701).

¹ Ford to Rosebery, No. 487 Confidential, 25 Oct. 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

² Deym to Kálnoky, No. 35A-E Confidential, 15 Nov. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

bacilli'.¹ The upshot was that with respect to relations between Turkey and the Powers, politics at Constantinople lay in the doldrums through most of the autumn. Although noteworthy events were transpiring elsewhere, on the Bosphorus such calm prevailed that on one occasion the Austrian ambassador, usually content with the 'smallest crumbs', confessed to Nicolson that he was 'nonplussed as to how to fill up his bag'.² True, into the midst of this tranquillity there fell the pebble of an alleged proposal from St. Petersburg for a secret Russo-Turkish entente - to be cemented, so the story ran, by a gift from the Tsar of five million roubles. From the outset, however, the report that such a proposal had been put forward was looked upon with scepticism both at the British embassy and at the Foreign Office in London;³ and the scepticism turned out to be fully justified. Not only was the story discovered to be unverifiable, but investigation by the British and Austrians indicated that it was a hoax wilfully perpetrated by the Ottoman official from whom Nicolson had heard it.⁴ To no appreciable extent did it disturb the 'singularly quiet' political atmosphere at the Sultan's capital.⁵

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 13 Sept.; Private, 12 Oct.; Private, 9 Nov.; Private, 25 Nov. 1893, Villiers Papers.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Oct. 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ Nicolson to Rosebery, Tel. No. 185 Very Secret, 26 Sept. (with minutes by Currie and Rosebery), F.O. 78/4486; No. 458 Secret, 27 Sept. 1893, F.O. 78/4482.

⁴ Ford to Rosebery, No. 513 Secret and Confidential, 9 Nov. 1893 (encloses Secret and Confidential Memorandum by A. Block, dated 7 Nov. 1893), F.O. 78/4483.

⁵ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Oct.; Private, 9 Nov. 1893, Villiers Papers.

THE STRAITS:

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE?

In England, meanwhile, Lord Rosebery had been worrying about the possibility of almost immediate war. The privileges which Russia was trying to obtain through the peaceful exercise of influence were paltry indeed in comparison with what she could hope to win by arms. In the background, for several years, had hovered the threat of a Russian coup de main against the Bosphorus, and in 1893, as summer drew towards its close, the danger seemed both real and imminent.

Since, in the event, a coup de main never materialized, there exists a temptation, not always overcome, to dismiss the British fear of it as unjustified, and to assume that the prospect of such an attack was little more than an illusion conjured up by the over-active imaginations of scare-mongers.¹ That alarm was sometimes excessive must be admitted; but, on the other hand, it must be stressed that the anxieties of military Intelligence, and of Lord Rosebery, were far from being based on mere mirage. In 1885 Tsar Alexander III had made it known within the Russian government that he wished preparations to be undertaken for a new attempt on Constantinople:

À mon avis [he had written], nous devons avoir un seul et unique but: c'est l'occupation de Constantinople, pour nous établir, une fois pour toutes, dans les Détroits et savoir qu'ils seront toujours entre nos mains. Cela, c'est dans les intérêts de la Russie et cela doit être

¹ Cf. J.A. Spender, Fifty Years of Europe, pp. 138-139; C.L. Smith, The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople, 1886-1891, pp. 145-147.

notre but: tout le reste qui se passe dans la péninsule balkanique est pour nous secondaire. . . En ce qui concerne spécialement les Détroits, le moment n'est certainement pas encore venu, mais il nous faut être prêts et préparer tous les moyens . . .¹

At this time Far Eastern expansion had yet to become the dominant theme of Russian policy, and Alexander was still apparently thinking in terms of an effort to reach the Straits by land. 'C'est n'est que pour cette question', he continued, 'que je consentirai à mener une guerre sur la péninsule balkanique.'² But it was not long before the idea of a coup de main from the sea began to replace that of a Balkan campaign: as early as 1886 the first rehearsal for such an amphibious assault was carried out by the Russians on the coast of the Crimea.³ In 1893 the evidence at Rosebery's disposal, albeit in large part circumstantial, constituted not only conclusive proof that it was a sea-borne attack which St. Petersburg was contemplating, but also strong grounds for believing that the enterprise would be successful.

The essential facts had been ascertained by the British military and naval authorities before the Gladstone ministry came into office. In the late 'eighties, Intelligence knew, a Russian plan of operations for a coup de main on Constantinople had been secretly purchased by the Turkish military attaché at St. Petersburg; and apparent preparations for putting

¹ Alexander III to General Obrouchew, 24/12 Sept. 1885 (translated from the Russian of the Krasnyi Arkhiv, xlvi. 180-181, by A.N. Mandelstam, and printed in A.N. Mandelstam, 'La Politique Russe d'Accès à la Méditerranée au XXe Siècle', Recueil de Cours, xlvii. (1934, I), Académie de Droit International, p. 620).

² Ibid.

³ 'Report on a possible "coup de main" by Russia against Constantinople', sent by the War Office to the Admiralty on 2 Jan. 1892, Adm. I/7135.

some such plan into execution had made considerable progress by 1891. The army divisions stationed at certain Black Sea ports, it was observed, were maintained at an establishment of more than 10,800 non-commissioned officers and men, whereas the establishment of other divisions in the same part of the country was less than 7,500. These high effectives at such places as Odessa and Sebastopol were equalled only by those of units on the German and Austrian frontiers, where unusual strength could be readily explained by defensive requirements. No defensive interpretation appeared to be tenable in the case of the forces on the Black Sea, for they could not anticipate an immediate attack on the outbreak of war, and their reserves, unlike those of the frontier garrisons, were close at hand. It followed, in the view of Intelligence, that the high effectives must be intended 'to enable these divisions to be embarked for a rapid offensive blow as quickly as possible';¹ and this conclusion was supported by what London had learned of the training to which the troops in question were being subjected. For several years they had been given regular practice in embarkation, disembarkation and the handling of 'special boats';² moreover, in the summer of 1891, the British Consul at Sebastopol had noticed that the men of both artillery and infantry were receiving 'a good deal of rowing drill'.³ The organization of joint naval and military operations, wrote the military attaché at Constantinople, had been 'studied, rehearsed and perfected' by the

¹ Extract from Intelligence Division Memorandum, Secret, dated 23 Oct. 1891, F.O. 78/4592.

² Ibid.; Extract from Secret Memorandum by Colonel Chermiside, dated 18 Nov. 1891, F.O. 78/4592.

³ Supplementary Intelligence Division Memorandum, Secret, dated 28 Oct. 1891, F.O. 78/4592.

Russian forces.¹ Nor was that all: while troops were being trained, the necessary transport for the expedition was being made ready. By 1891 twelve of the largest ships belonging to the Russian Steam Navigation Company had been fitted with special equipment for the carrying of troop-boats - a measure which was judged in London to be 'evidently not defensive'.²

If the belief that the Russians were preparing a coup de main was well-founded, and this can scarcely be disputed, the further belief at the War Office that such an assault would probably succeed was based on a similar array of facts which, on the surface at least, seemed almost equally convincing.³ The garrison of Constantinople included no more than about 14,000 infantry, 2,600 cavalry, and artillery of which only eight batteries could be turned out horsed. There could be no doubt but that a substantial portion of these forces would be retained by the Sultan as a personal guard,⁴ and in any event their quality was questionable - in part because Abdul Hamid habitually sent his ablest young officers to remote outposts of the Empire, where he hoped that they would find it difficult to plot against him.⁵ The Intelligence

¹ Extract from Secret Memorandum by Colonel Chermiside, dated 18 Nov. 1891, F.O. 78/4592.

² 'Report on a possible "coup de main" by Russia against Constantinople', sent by the War Office to the Admiralty on 2 Jan. 1892, Adm. I/7135.

³ Cf. Extract from Secret Memorandum by the Adjutant-General, dated 10 Dec. 1891, F.O. 78/4592.

⁴ 'Report on a possible "coup de main" by Russia against Constantinople', sent by the War Office to the Admiralty on 2 Jan. 1892, Adm. I/7135.

⁵ Selma Ekrem, Turkey Old and New, p. 38; 'An Eastern Resident', 'Sultan Abd-ul-Hamid', Contemporary Review, lxxvii. 46.

Division was showing no unreasonable pessimism, therefore, when it calculated that slightly more than 20,000 Russian troops, with about 2,200 horses, would suffice for the initial phase of an invasion. Sea transport for such numbers would present no problem: the twelve vessels specially equipped would supply by themselves the greater part of the needed tonnage, and the Russian Steam Navigation Company also controlled dozens of smaller steamers, all of which could be requisitioned by the government.¹

To make the outlook still brighter for the Russians, there was no prospect that their expeditionary force would encounter any effective Turkish resistance in transit. For several years Russia had been energetically constructing a Black Sea fleet,² and by the early 'nineties she had attained a position of unquestioned supremacy in those waters. Indeed, she was virtually unopposed, for apart from a number of torpedo boats a Turkish fleet could hardly be said to exist. On Abdul Hamid's accession it had been the Ottoman Empire which commanded the Black Sea, and at that time the Turks could make a plausible claim to being the third strongest naval Power in the world. The new Sultan, however, distrusted the navy for the part which it had played in the deposition of Abdul Aziz in 1876, and he set out to render it incapable of posing a similar threat to himself. Not only did he forbid practice cruises, condemning the warships to an existence of permanent inactivity in the Golden Horn, but he dispensed with the services of the two hundred British engineers and

¹ 'Report on a possible "coup de main" by Russia against Constantinople', sent by the War Office to the Admiralty on 2 Jan. 1892, Adm. I/7135.

² Secret Memorandum on the Increase of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, by Captain Grierson, dated 28 Sept. 1893, F.O. 78/4592; Sir G. Sydenham Clarke, Russia's Sea-Power, pp. 112-113.

skilled workmen who had hitherto been employed in the Ottoman naval arsenal. The result of this calculated neglect was that the ships, and particularly their boilers, deteriorated rapidly.¹ Assisted by the failure of leading Turks to understand the value of maritime predominance,² Abdul Hamid had succeeded by the end of the 'eighties in transforming his battle fleet into an impotent farce.³ Nor were any effective steps being taken in the early 'nineties to restore the situation: in fact, of the money which the Ottoman authorities did set aside during that period for the use of the navy, a large proportion was reportedly diverted into the private pocket of the minister of marine.⁴ Thus the only danger which the transports of a Russian expeditionary force needed to fear was that of attack by torpedo boats as they approached the Turkish coast, and in the opinion of British naval intelligence (expressed in March 1892) the Russians' escorting warships would prove ample to ward off this threat without serious difficulty.⁵

The condition of the defences on the approaches to Constantinople was no less discouraging than that of the Ottoman navy. The principal Turkish batteries on the Bosphorus were

¹ Simmons to Salisbury, Private, 17 Sept. 1891, F.O. 358/6 (Simmons Papers); Sir E. Pears, Life of Abdul Hamid, pp. 185-186; Sir E. Pears, Forty Years in Constantinople, pp. 170-171.

² Above, pp. 55-56.

³ G. Young, Constantinople, p. 215; A.J. Marder, British Naval Policy, 1880-1905, p. 153; 'An Eastern Resident', loc. cit.

⁴ Currie to Kimberley, No. 161 Confidential, 11 Apr. 1894, F.O. 78/4540.

⁵ Extract from Secret Joint Report by the Directors of Military and Naval Intelligence, dated 18 Mar. 1892, F.O. 78/4592.

completely open to the rear, and overlooked by high land within easy rifle range, so that they would have been certain to fall quickly under an infantry assault. Even without an assault, indeed, the Russians could have used rifle fire from the heights behind to prevent the Turks from working their guns. Thus an expeditionary force landed in two detachments, on each side of the northern entrance to the strait, would have experienced little difficulty in opening an absolutely safe route to the capital for the Russian Black Sea fleet. In addition, if the Russians were prepared to accept any risk to their ships at all, they had at their disposal an alternative course of action - that of naval measures against Constantinople before the landing of troops. Apart altogether from their vulnerability on the landward side, the Bosphorus batteries were so inadequate that warships coming from the north, in view of the favourable current, would probably have been able to run past them with little or no loss.¹ It was not without reason that the Belgian expert Brialmont, on examining the Straits fortifications in the autumn of 1892, pronounced those on the Bosphorus 'so little serious as to leave it practically undefended'² - a verdict with which qualified German officers fully concurred.³

¹ 'Report on the Defences of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles' (with supplementary paper), by Vice-Admiral Sir G. Tryon, Confidential, dated 27 June 1892 (received by the Foreign Office from the Admiralty on 22 July), F.O. 78/4435; Simmons to Salisbury, Private, 17 Sept. 1891, F.O. 358/6; cf. P. Rohrbach, Die Bagdadbahn, p. 7.

² Chermside to Ford, No. 26 Confidential, 12 Nov. 1892, F.O. 195/1759 (copy enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 352, 16 Nov. 1892, F.O. 78/4417); cf. Chermside to Ford, 26 Oct. 1892 (copy enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 326 Very Confidential, 26 Oct. 1892, F.O. 78/4416).

³ Trench (chargé d'affaires at Berlin) to Rosebery, No. 222

Over and above the advantages which would accrue to the Russian cause in any event from the weakness of the defenders' fleet and fortifications, a force bent on a seizure of Constantinople was expected at the War Office to achieve a high degree of surprise. The necessary shipping, it was estimated in 1891, could be assembled in the Black Sea ports within two days, and it was assumed that within seven days from the issuing of orders the expedition would be ready to begin its thirty-six hour voyage to the invasion beaches near the Bosphorus. These figures, moreover, were stated to have been computed with a view to arriving at the 'maximum time for preparation which Russia's enemies would have', and it was considered to be readily conceivable that a coup de main might come 'like a bolt from the blue'. Not only would the high effectives of the units at Sebastopol and Odessa render it needless to call up reserves, but under pretext of manoeuvres it would be possible for the expeditionary force actually to board its transports without giving an unmistakable alarm. On previous occasions, the Intelligence Division recalled, the Russians had been able to embark troops for exercises without causing the Turkish military authorities to move a man, or even to proclaim a state of increased alert.¹

The Director of Naval Intelligence was more inclined than his Army colleagues to see obstacles to the anticipated attack, and while he was convinced that a surprise blow at Constantinople was being contemplated by the Tsar's commanders, he believed that as yet - in January 1892 - Russian prepara-

Confidential, 14 Oct. 1892, F.O. 64/1275.

¹ Extract from Intelligence Division Memorandum, Secret, dated 23 Oct. 1891, F.O. 78/4592; 'Report on a possible "coup de main" by Russia against Constantinople', sent by the War Office to the Admiralty on 2 Jan. 1892, Adm. I/7135; cf. Rohrbach, loc.cit.

tions were far from adequate.¹ This relatively cheerful view, however, appears not to have been very deeply held, for two months later Naval Intelligence concurred with its military counterpart in a joint report of the utmost pessimism. The conclusions therein stated were substantially identical with those accepted earlier at the War Office: that a coup de main was likely to be attempted, and that it was almost certain to succeed.² True, in the course of exchanges with the War Office before the report was drawn up, the Admiralty had maintained in principle that Great Britain could thwart the Russian plan by naval intervention, and this claim was reiterated in the new document. But from the beginning the Admiralty's contention had been rendered nugatory for all practical purposes by the provisos with which it was qualified. The war, it was stipulated, would have to be against Russia alone; Ottoman co-operation or benevolent neutrality would have to be assured; and the Mediterranean fleet would have to be warned in sufficient time for ships to reach the enemy's intended points of disembarkation before his troops were ashore.³ Of these conditions, not one could be guaranteed. In September 1891, admittedly, Salisbury had been quite hopeful that his 'watchmen' would be able to give 'fairly early notice of any important movement' from the Black Sea ports;⁴ but subsequently the fear had been expressed at the

¹ Minute by the Director of Naval Intelligence, dated 5 Jan. 1892 (with War Office to Admiralty, 2 Jan. 1892, Adm. I/7135).

² Marder, p. 159.

³ Minute by the Director of Naval Intelligence, dated 5 Jan. 1892 (with War Office to Admiralty, 2 Jan. 1892); Admiralty Minute, dated 25 Jan. 1892; Admiralty to War Office, Secret, 30 Jan. 1892, Adm. I/7135.

⁴ Salisbury to Simmons, Confidential, 30 Sept. 1891, F.O. 358/6.

War Office that the Russian authorities, through their control of telegraphic communications, would be able to prevent any warning from being transmitted.¹ As for the attitude of the Sultan, his willingness to allow British vessels to pass up the Dardanelles was in doubt even before the aggravation of Anglo-Turkish friction during 1892-'93.² The unfriendliness of the government in Paris added a final flood of gloom to a dismal prospect. Even if France did not declare war, there would be a danger that she might; and so long as that danger was present, the Directors of Naval and Military Intelligence agreed, the mere existence of her powerful warships at Toulon would immobilize the British for an action beyond the Straits. To commit the necessary vessels in the East, at the 'extreme end of a line of somewhat precarious communications', would be to give the French at least a temporary naval preponderance in the Western Mediterranean, and perhaps to expose Great Britain to a 'grave menace' in the Atlantic and the Channel. The Intelligence Directors saw no reason to believe that any 'permissible' reinforcement of the Mediterranean fleet from existing resources would 'materially alter the situation'. Unless London was acting in concert with the Quai d'Orsay, they asserted, 'the road to Constantinople, for a British force bent on a belligerent operation, lies across the ruins of the French fleet'.³ Nor did

¹ 'Report on a possible "coup de main" by Russia against Constantinople', sent by the War Office to the Admiralty on 2 Jan. 1892, Adm. I/7135.

² Simmons to Salisbury, 25 Sept.; Salisbury to Simmons, Confidential, 30 Sept. 1891, F.O. 358/6; cf. Marder, pp. 154-156. On the increase of friction, see Chapter II.

³ Secret Joint Report by the Directors of Military and Naval Intelligence, dated 18 Mar. 1892 (quoted in Marder, pp. 159-

their report suggest that to fight a successful preliminary engagement against the French would solve the problem, for such was not thought to be the case. While the British were fully occupied in reducing the Toulon fleet to 'ruins', probably in Western Mediterranean waters, the Russians would be marching into the Ottoman capital - with the result, Military Intelligence anticipated, that whatever Turkish resistance there might have been would collapse completely. Russia would then, in all probability, follow up her victory by seizing the defences of the Dardanelles; and once she had garrisoned these positions, it was feared in London that 'no combination' of British sea and land forces would suffice to oust her.¹

In short, through their study in 1891-'92 of the naval and military aspects of the Straits Question, the War Office and Admiralty experts had demolished the basic assumptions of their country's traditional Near Eastern policy - provided, of course, that their reasoning was sound. Salisbury saw the situation clearly. If the opinion of the Intelligence Directors held good, he wrote in June 1892, 'the protection of Constantinople from Russian conquest must cease to be regarded as a great aim of British policy, for we cannot defend it, and our policy is a policy of false pretences'. But the Conservative Foreign Secretary, sceptical of the cauchemars of professional officers, was less than fully convinced by the Intelligence analysis, and he called for further examination

160); cf. Chapman (Director of Military Intelligence) to Roberts (Commander-in-Chief in India), Private and Confidential, 19 Oct. 1892, W.O. 106/16.

¹ Intelligence Division Memorandum, dated 22 Oct. 1891 (quoted in Marder, p. 158); cf. Simmons to Salisbury, 25 Sept. 1891, F.O. 358/6.

of the problem.¹ The Admiralty, which had initially endorsed the Intelligence Directors' conclusions without qualification, now conceded that if Turkey were an ally, so that the British force needed at the Straits would be small, the risk of French intervention could be accepted.² Since, however, Turkey was not an ally, nor likely to become one, the arguments of Intelligence retained their validity. When the danger of a coup de main again attracted anxious attention in 1893, the Foreign Office seems to have been dependent, for an authoritative assessment of British capabilities, on the utterly pessimistic joint report of the preceding year.³

There were two occasions in the early 'nineties when uneasiness became acute in influential quarters lest the Russians might unleash their expected attack on Constantinople within the immediate future. The year 1893 saw the second of those occasions; the first had been in 1891. Between the Straits scare of '91 and that of two years later, however, a marked difference is visible. The former had been by origin a scare of soldiers, Austrian as well as British, abetted by the European press.⁴ Salisbury had eventually become convinced that the danger was real: in October he warned Lord Lansdowne, the Viceroy in India, that the evidence pointed to an 'early effort on the part of Russia to make her-

¹ Minute by Salisbury, dated 4 June 1892 (quoted in Memorandum by F. Bertie, dated 19 Oct. 1893, F.O. 78/4592).

² Admiralty to War Office, Secret, 20 May 1892 (with a revision of the original version), printed copy in F.O. 78/4434.

³ Memorandum by F. Bertie, dated 19 Oct. 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

⁴ Extract from Secret Memorandum by Captain Callwell, dated 12 Oct. 1891; Colonel Dawson to the Director of Military Intelligence, Secret, 30 Jan. 1892, F.O. 78/4592; Smith, p. 147.

self mistress of the Straits' - an effort which he thought would probably be accompanied by a diversionary expedition against the Indian frontier.¹ But this warning represented a victory for the alarmists which had not been easily won: only a few weeks previously the Foreign Secretary had been arguing strongly against the view that the Tsar would risk taking action. Citing the fact that if the British fleet were to pass the Dardanelles and break through into the Black Sea, the invading Russian troops would be cut off both from reinforcement and from retreat, Salisbury had imagined himself in the Russians' shoes: 'Unless we are able to be first at the Dardanelles (which will be hardly possible), or are able to make the Turks keep the English out - which depends on the Sultan's temper, on the fidelity of the Dardanelles commander, on the skill and courage of the English Admiral - unless in one of those two ways we can cork up the Dardanelles, our expeditionary force on the Bosphorus will be prisoners of war.' Thinking that unpredictable as Abdul Hamid's conduct was, the chances of British ships being able to pass were sufficiently great to give the Russians pause, the Foreign Secretary had reasoned that at least as long as Bulgaria remained unfriendly towards St. Petersburg, a coup de main on the Ottoman capital was unlikely to be attempted.²

Whereas the scare of 1891, originating with the military, had made progress at the Foreign Office only against considerable resistance, that of 1893 was one which the Foreign Office appears to have been responsible in a very large degree for

¹ Rose L. Greaves, Persia and the Defence of India, 1884-1892, pp. 192-193 (quotes Salisbury to Lansdowne, Private, 21 Oct. 1891, Salisbury Papers).

² Salisbury to Simmons, 21 Sept.; Confidential, 30 Sept. 1891, F.O. 358/6.

fomenting. Salisbury's Liberal successor, instead of opposing the alarmist attitude, played the rôle of its leading exponent.¹ In part the contrast can doubtless be attributed to personal qualities: Rosebery, unlike Salisbury, was a man of nervous and excitable temperament, inclined to dwell upon risks rather than to minimize them, and matters had not been improved by the insomnia to which he had fallen prey after the death of his wife in 1890.² But it would be both superficial and unfair to the Foreign Secretary to ascribe his anxiety primarily to a flaw in character. In the late summer of 1893 there were better reasons than ever in the past for believing that the threat of a coup de main should be taken seriously. The simplest of these reasons was the fact that Russia had had time to remedy the deficiencies in her military and naval arrangements. Preparations for the coup itself, not clearly adequate before, were now held without qualification to have reached the necessary level,³ and preparations for dealing with the possible consequences of a coup had likewise made conspicuous progress.

One basis for previous British hopes had been the presumed fear of the Russians that seizure of Constantinople would

¹ Rosebery to Campbell-Bannerman, 26 Aug.; Confidential, 1 Sept.; Private, 12 Sept. 1893, Add. MS. 41226; Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 30 July; Campbell-Bannerman to Spencer, Confidential, 17 Aug.; Private, 5 Sept. 1893, Spencer Papers; Chapman to Sir R. Buller (Adjutant-General), Confidential, 5 Aug. 1893, W.O. 106/16.

² A. Ponsonby, Henry Ponsonby: His Life from His Letters, p. 262; J.A. Hammerton, Lord Rosebery, Imperialist, pp. 116-117; J. Buchan, Lord Rosebery, 1847-1930, p. 8.

³ 'Memorandum respecting Affairs of South-Eastern Europe, August 1892 to October 1893', by F. Bertie, Confidential, dated 15 Oct. 1893 (copy enclosed in Rosebery to Monson, No. 150 Confidential, 5 Dec. 1893, F.O. 120/701).

lead to complications with the Central Powers.¹ In 1893, however, St. Petersburg seemed to be in a much stronger position than in '91 to restrain Vienna and Berlin from intervention, and if need be to fight them successfully. In the earlier year, both the Austrian Chief of Staff and the head of Austrian Intelligence had regarded '93 as the period when the waging of an offensive war by Russia against the Austro-German group might cease to be militarily 'impossible'.² As 1892 ended, the evidence at the disposal of British Intelligence officers tended to confirm the prediction of their colleagues on the Danube. The Director of Military Intelligence (General Chapman), while he did not expect that war would break out, calculated that in the course of the coming year Russia would 'probably attain the measure of efficiency which may be taken as her extreme limit'.³ Though admitting that there had been delays in the delivery of new-model rifles, Intelligence Division memoranda painted a disquieting picture of what that 'measure of efficiency' might be, and stressed as well the massive augmentation of forces which the Russians had been carrying out on their Western frontiers. The reinforcement of garrisons in Western Russia had already been noticeable in the 'eighties,⁴ but was now proceeding on a more alarming scale. 'This year', commented one British ex-

¹ Cf. Colonel Chermiside to the Director of Military Intelligence, 21 May 1893 (extract enclosed in Director of Military Intelligence to Foreign Office, 6 June 1893, F.O. 65/1456.

² Extract from Secret Memorandum by Captain Callwell, dated 12 Oct. 1891, F.O. 78/4592.

³ Chapman to Roberts, Private and Confidential, 19 Oct. 1892, W.O. 106/16.

⁴ M. Moukhtar Pacha, La Turquie, l'Allemagne et l'Europe, p. 68.

pert on 8 November, 'and especially the period of it since the close of the manoeuvres in September, has been marked by the largest move westwards of Russian troops within my recollection'. Adding that the movements had affected nearly a quarter of Russia's infantry and artillery, he continued:

The above movements mark, I might almost say, the final stage of Russia's preparation for war as far as the concentration and distribution of the army in place is concerned. The frontier districts are now packed as full of troops as they can hold, the troops in the interior districts have been pushed westwards as far as possible, and have been distributed on a carefully thought out plan along the main railway lines leading westwards . . . A more comprehensive and carefully-arranged plan has never been known, and never has a plan been more systematically and logically carried out to its fullest extent than that of the redistribution and reorganization of the Russian Army, which is at the moment receiving its finishing touches.¹

Two months later, in January 1893, the same officer laid stress once again on the unusual scale of the westward movements in the year just terminated, and explained with impressive statistics the magnitude of Russia's concentrations on the German and Austro-Hungarian borders.² In view of the extent to which her programme of preparations against the Central Powers had now been implemented, it went without saying that Russia might be expected to behave with an enhanced self-confidence on the international stage, and that there would be an increased likelihood of her adopting a forward policy in the Near East. The Teutonic deterrent could no longer be counted upon to deter.

¹ Captain Grierson to the Director of Military Intelligence, Secret, 8 Nov. 1892, F.O. 65/1456.

² Memorandum by Captain Grierson, 'Twenty Years of Russian Army Reform and the Present Distribution of the Russian Land Forces', dated January 1893 (received at the Foreign Office on 10 Apr. 1893), F.O. 65/1456.

In addition to the military developments in the Tsar's Western territories, a possibly significant change had taken place during 1892 in the distribution of Russian forces in the Caucasus. From that region as a whole troops had been withdrawn, as part of the plan for concentration against Austria and Germany, with the result that the Caucasus garrisons were now scarcely more than equal in numbers to the forces which Abdul Hamid could put into the field in the same theatre. Clearly, therefore, there was no question of the Russians' undertaking any major offensive operations against the Ottoman provinces in Asia.¹ On the other hand, at the cost of completely denuding the Caucasian frontier with Persia, St. Petersburg had achieved a substantial net increase in the strength immediately available for local action on the Turkish border.² Such a transfer of troops from positions facing Persia to others facing Turkey was obviously consistent with the pattern to be expected if Russia was getting ready to make war on the Sultan. 'I think we have to keep a sharp look out,' warned General Chapman in this connection, 'and to watch her very closely.'³

It was not on land alone that the Russians had made important improvements in their preparedness since 1891. Salisbury's argument against the likelihood of a coup de main, based on the possibility that a British squadron might succeed in cutting Russian communications in the Black Sea, had not

¹ Captain Grierson to the Director of Military Intelligence, Secret, 8 Nov. 1892, F.O. 65/1456.

² Chapman to Sir T. Sanderson (Assistant Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office), Private, 31 Dec. 1892 (encloses Intelligence Division Memorandum on Russian troop movements, dated 31 Dec. 1892), F.O. 65/1431.

³ Chapman to Chermiside, 2 Jan. 1893, W.O. 106/16.

been fatally undermined by the subsequent joint report of the Intelligence Directors: for British experts to decide that the perils of intervention would be excessive was an altogether different matter from St. Petersburg's knowing that they had so decided. Yet before the summer of 1893 the argument had lost a good deal of its weight. It had done so in part because the Tsar had better grounds than formerly for expecting connivance from Abdul Hamid. The decline of British influence during the embassy of Sir Clare Ford, the further deterioration in Anglo-Turkish relations which had recently taken place over Egypt and Armenia, the 'Franco-Russian current' which became apparent at the Palace in the course of the spring - all these factors were bound to raise Russia's hopes. Such hopes, however, resting on nothing more solid or stable than the mood of the Sultan, could not offer St. Petersburg a satisfactory basis for a decision to attack. What was more significant was the fact that the Russians had by now provided themselves with weapons by means of which they could try and 'cork up' the entrance to the Black Sea, and thus protect the supplies and reinforcements of their expeditionary army, even if the Sultan were to refrain from taking active measures against the British fleet. Late in 1892 Rosebery had heard the news: that through the Straits to Sebastopol there had steamed two ostensible merchantmen under the Swedish commercial flag, ships which were in reality fast mine-layers newly constructed at Göteborg for the Russian government. Ford supposed that they were both intended for use at the Bosphorus;¹ at Berlin, on the other hand, the Kaiser predicted that while one dealt with the Bosphorus,

¹ Ford to Rosebery, No. 355 Confidential, 23 Nov. 1892 (encloses copy of a Memorandum confidentially communicated by the Austrian ambassador at Constantinople), F.O. 78/4417.

the other would be dispatched to Gallipoli to block the Dardanelles.¹ In either case, provided that the Russians had any confidence in their effectiveness, they would weaken the objection which Salisbury had seen to an attempt on Constantinople.

Notwithstanding his knowledge of Russia's strengthened position, in relation both to Great Britain at the Straits and to the Central Powers on land, Rosebery remained relatively calm through the spring of 1893. He was worried about French incursions into Siam, and wrote of the possibility that Russia might at some time attack Bulgaria.² But he was not yet warning the Service Departments of a probable imminent crisis either in those regions or at the Straits. Nervous by temperament the Foreign Secretary was, but he did not make the mistake of which Intelligence officers were sometimes guilty - that of reading into military and naval preparations a settled intention to wage aggressive war.³ An effort to acquire a capability, he realized, did not in itself imply a decision to use that capability; and from what he knew of the character of the Tsar, he had reason to hope that when matters came to the ultimate choice between war and peace, Alexander III might throw his personal authority into the scales to restrain the restless militarists around him.⁴ Nevertheless, at a time when a capability of

¹ Malet to Rosebery, Private and Secret, 17 Dec., F.O. 343/12; Rosebery to Malet, Private, 21 Dec. 1892, F.O. 343/3.

² Below, pp. 215-216.

³ Cf. Secret Memorandum on the Increase of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, by Captain Grierson, dated 28 Sept. 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

⁴ Chermiside to the Director of Military Intelligence, 21 May

attacking Constantinople was thought on the best available evidence to be in Russia's possession, it was inevitable that Rosebery should see danger in any indication that St. Petersburg had obtained a stronger motive than previously to act - especially if such an indication were accompanied by the sudden appearance of diplomatic circumstances peculiarly favourable to a coup de main. This combination of inviting circumstances and apparently increased motive arose in mid-summer, and it was only then that the Foreign Secretary became an alarmist.

As early as February 1893 rumours had been published in the Paris press that Russia was intending to send warships on a visit to a French port.¹ In July Rosebery received confirmation of the story from more reliable sources, along with the additional news that the port in question was Toulon, and that the Russian squadron, consisting of 'five vessels of war of a high class', would be stationed in the Mediterranean for at least a year.² At Constantinople Sir Arthur Nicolson was told by the German ambassador that the Russian Mediterranean force was in fact being planned as a 'permanent' institution.³ Particularly in the latter case, it was possible that St. Petersburg's decision had an extremely serious meaning for the Near Eastern situation. Admittedly, as far as

1893 (extract enclosed in Director of Military Intelligence to Foreign Office, 6 June 1893, F.O. 65/1456); cf. Anonymous, Lord Rosebery's Speeches, 1874-1896, pp. 253-255.

¹ Dufferin to Rosebery, No. 70, 4 Feb. 1893, F.O. 27/3118.

² Rosebery to Howard (chargé d'affaires at St. Petersburg), Tel. No. 85, 12 July; Howard to Rosebery, Tel. No. 82 Secret, 15 July; Tel. No. 83, 18 July 1893, F.O. 65/1448.

³ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 341 Secret (with postscript), 20 July 1893, F.O. 78/4481; cf. Sir H. Drummond Wolff, Rambling Recollections, ii. 402.

British intervention against a coup de main was concerned, the presence of Russian ships in the Mediterranean could make no difference: it meant merely that in the event of war, the British fleet in that theatre would have to reckon with a somewhat larger French fleet¹ - and we have noticed that the French fleet based on Toulon was already large enough, in the considered judgment of the Admiralty, to render the risks of intervention at the Straits unacceptable unless Turkey collaborated.² In another sense, however, the establishment of a Russian Mediterranean squadron did make a difference of major importance. It afforded evidence that the Tsar's government was now actively aspiring to become a naval Power in the waters lying (as a Russian would see them) beyond Constantinople, on the far side of the Dardanelles. If such an aspiration - of which there had been no material token in 1891 - were to be realized to the full, Russia would plainly have to secure free passage through the Ottoman waterway for her Black Sea fleet; and while an armed attack on the Straits was not the only procedure which she could adopt to that end, it certainly represented the simplest and most expeditious method of achieving her goal.

So much for the Russians' strengthened motive. Opportunity depended greatly on the attitude of France, for despite mine-layers and improved chances of co-operation from the Sultan, it was only if Russia were assured of French support that she could be entirely confident of immunity from British counter-action. In 1890, as a means of deterring a coup de

¹ Wydenbruck (Austro-Hungarian chargé d'affaires at London) to Kalnoky, No. 31D Confidential, 4 Oct. 1893 (quotes a comment by Sir Philip Currie, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office), W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

² Above, pp. 16-18, 159-161.

main, London had decided to keep part of the Mediterranean fleet within easy striking distance of the Dardanelles; and although this Levant Squadron had been reduced to a mere instrument of bluff, at least in the Admiralty's view, through the report of the Intelligence Directors in 1892, its continued presence near the Straits was a factor which Russian planners were still unlikely to ignore.¹ If France would agree to act or to threaten action, however, Russia could count without undue optimism upon the British having to concentrate their warships against the Toulon fleet in the West; the Levant Squadron would be withdrawn, and the Russian expeditionary force to the Bosphorus would be safe from interference.² Obviously the danger of a coup de main varied in direct relationship with the warmth of the friendship between St. Petersburg and Paris. It was no coincidence that the Straits scare of 1891 had followed the demonstrations of Franco-Russian amity in the summer of that year - notably the French naval visit to Cronstadt.³ In 1892 there had been no similar event, and rumours of a formal alliance between France and Russia, which circulated in the autumn, had been completely discounted at the British embassy on the Seine.⁴ For the moment, accordingly, there had been few worries about the Straits. Now, in 1893, came tidings of the impending assignation at Toulon: merely as a symbol of closer Russo-

¹ Marder, pp. 154, 159-160, 223-224.

² Cf. Spencer to Seymour (Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean), 14 Nov. 1893, Spencer Papers.

³ On Franco-Russian relations in 1891, see E. Flourens, Alexandre III: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, pp. 330-343; E. Toutain, Alexandre III et la République Française, pp. 385-386.

⁴ Dufferin to Rosebery, No. 256, 17 Sept., F.O. 27/3079; No. 336, 14 Nov. 1892, F.O. 27/3080.

French contacts, it was natural, perhaps inevitable, that it should resurrect the anxieties of two years before. Yet however cordial might be the atmosphere prevailing between the Republic and the Tsar, Great Britain normally had grounds for cheerfulness in the fact that their Mediterranean interests were not truly identical. Would France make up her mind to risk or accept war in order to render an attack on the Straits less dangerous for her partner? Before the summer of 1893 it did not seem very probable,¹ and the British were able to found hopes of saving Constantinople on the assumption that Paris was unlikely to give the Russians a prior pledge of armed assistance against a British intervention. If Russia once summoned up the courage to strike her blow at the Ottoman capital, Great Britain would not dispatch ships to oppose it - lest the French seize the opportunity of intervening against a weakened British fleet; but on the other hand, as long as she had no assurance of French willingness to stand by her, it might well be that Russia would not dare to strike - lest the British government brave all perils and order the Levant Squadron to the Black Sea. Such was the logic of the British bluff in the Eastern Mediterranean. It was a bluff that afforded a significant degree of protection against a coup de main, except in two hypothetical circumstances: that of France throwing herself fully into Russia's embrace with respect to Near Eastern policy, and that of France and Great Britain becoming embroiled in a conflict over some other issue.

Before the end of July Rosebery was confronted with a

¹ In 1892 the British Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean had even gone so far as to hope that before many years had passed France might adopt an anti-Russian policy on the Straits Question: Supplementary Paper by Sir G. Tryon with his 'Report on the Defences of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles', Confidential, dated 27 June 1892, F.O. 78/4435.

possibility of the first contingency, and with what appeared to be something worse than a possibility of the second. The fact that the French were to receive their Russian guests at a Mediterranean port was ominous; whereas Cronstadt had been nothing beyond a symbol of amity, the French and Russian fleets having no conceivable basis of common action in the Baltic, the coming Toulon visit could be interpreted as a symbol of intended naval and diplomatic collaboration in the Mediterranean area.¹ If Paris and St. Petersburg were ready to co-operate closely, on terms extending to Russian support for France regarding Egypt and French support for Russia at the Straits - the obvious bargain² - then manifestly the threat to Constantinople and the Dardanelles would be much more grave than in 1891. What contributed most to making the situation seem explosive, however, was a quarrel arising in a region far removed from the Near East. In the last days of July the Siamese question flared into crisis: France and Great Britain approached the brink of hostilities. The immediate prospect of war quickly passed,³ but the Foreign Secretary feared a recurrence: 'The serpent is scotched,' he remarked, 'but not killed. We shall have more trouble there yet, but not till after the French elections.'⁴ The elections were

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918, p. 344; cf. W.L. Langer, The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902, i. 46; Wolff, ii. 401-402.

² Sir J. Headlam-Morley, Studies in Diplomatic History, pp. 219-220.

³ Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 29 Confidential, 31 July 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114; Accounts and Papers, Siam No. 1 (1893), cix [C-7231], 798; Treaty Series No. 18 (1893), cix [C-7232], 102.

⁴ Rosebery to Gladstone, 10 Aug. 1893, Add. MS. 44290; cf. G.P. viii, No. 1762 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 24 Oct. 1893).

scheduled to be held in the latter part of August;¹ Rosebery was still thinking in terms of a fairly imminent danger. For Russia, it appeared, opportunity might be about to coincide with motive: if she was going to take advantage of her previous preparations in order to make a new bid for those ancient objectives, the mastery of Constantinople and the freedom of the Straits, she would have to decide soon to take all necessary last-minute measures and to get poised for swift action.

Almost from the morrow of the Siam crisis evidence began accumulating that the decision had been taken. During that tense period of late July, although Rosebery was already gravely disturbed about the Mediterranean situation,² General Chapman had made out a case for a relatively calm view. 'The assembly of a Russian squadron in the Mediterranean', he admitted to Rosebery's private secretary on the 29th, 'is a very serious matter'; and he advised both the strengthening of the Mediterranean fleet and the reinforcement of the garrison in Malta. But he did not abandon the opinion which he had expressed in the preceding autumn, that war in 1893 was unlikely. 'There are no movements of Russian troops in the S.E. of Europe,' he pointed out, 'and I do not think we need have any cause for uneasiness if the proper steps are taken in time.'³ In early August the grounds for such confidence began to be undermined. By the 4th Goltz Pasha, the German Sub-Chief of the Ottoman General Staff, was anxious about rumours

¹ Annual Register for 1893, p. 328.

² Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 29 July; Secret, 30 July 1893, Spencer Papers.

³ Chapman to Villiers (Private Secretary to the Earl of Rosebery), Private, 29 July 1893, W.O. 106/16. For Chapman's opinion in 1892, see Chapman to Roberts, Private and Confidential, 19 Oct. 1892, W.O. 106/16.

of accelerated work in the Russian Black Sea arsenals.¹ At the Foreign Office the reports were not taken lightly. On the 5th Chapman felt it necessary to alert the Adjutant-General:

The F.O. have information that makes them think it possible that the Russian Black Sea Fleet may attempt to pass the Dardanelles, and join the Squadron that is to come from America [that is, the Squadron that was to visit Toulon]. In this event, if France and Russia chose to declare war, our fleet, being inferior in force, must for a time retire from the Mediterranean.²

Before long the Foreign Office information was being confirmed: through the next few weeks, up to the middle of September, the War Office received a number of reports which were described as being 'clearly' indicative of 'general and ever-increasing naval and military activity in Southern Russia'.³ If the Anglo-French dispute in Southeast Asia were to be revived in an acute form, or if France attacked on another pretext, the Tsar's commanders were apparently resolved to be in a position to pounce without delay. 'The present disposition and ethics of the French', Rosebery had remarked in late July, 'make anything possible.'⁴ Russia had two possible courses of action at the Straits - one was to seize them and hold them for future use, whether offensive or defensive; the other was to order her fleet into the Mediterranean and challenge the British forthwith. If France, though perhaps supporting the Russians by threats, preferred to avoid war, the former pro-

¹ Nicolson to Rosebery, Tel. No. 158, 4 Aug., F.O. 78/4486; No. 373 Confidential, 4 Aug. 1893, F.O. 78/4481.

² Chapman to Buller, Confidential, 5 Aug. 1893, W.O. 106/16.

³ War Office to Foreign Office, 15 Sept. 1893, F.O. 78/4502; cf. Memoranda communicated by the German ambassador in London, dated 29 Aug. 1893 (with minute by Rosebery), F.O. 64/1308.

⁴ Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 29 July 1893, Spencer Papers.

cedure was probable. On the other hand, if the French were eager for a trial by battle, Russia might be expected to contribute to the common effort by sending her Black Sea fleet immediately beyond the Straits. Since the latter was what Rosebery was anticipating,¹ he had to reckon with the obvious danger that, when war broke out, the Toulon fleet might steam eastwards to join forces with the Russians after they had emerged from the Dardanelles.² 'We are approaching a grave juncture in Mediterranean affairs,' the Foreign Secretary wrote in late August. 'Before November 1 the situation may be more than serious.'³

Rosebery had a clear idea of what ought to be done to meet the seeming emergency. His first object was of course to deter the French and Russians from commencing hostilities; his second was to ensure that if war came, the Service Departments would know their own minds and be able to conduct the campaign from its initial stages without any potentially disastrous muddle. With the latter purpose in view he insistently urged his colleagues at the Admiralty and War Office - Lord Spencer and Henry Campbell-Bannerman respectively - to have war plans drawn up for the eventuality of a conflict with a Franco-Russian coalition.⁴ With a view to the provision of deterrents, he had recourse to the scarecrow of an Anglo-Italian naval alliance, and to proposals for the sending of

¹ Campbell-Bannerman to Spencer, Confidential, 17 Aug. 1893, Spencer Papers.

² Harder, pp. 219, 225; see also pp. 182, 184.

³ Rosebery to Campbell-Bannerman, 26 Aug. 1893, Add. MS. 41226.

⁴ Campbell-Bannerman to Spencer, Private, 5 Sept.; 20 Sept. 1893, Spencer Papers; Spencer to Campbell-Bannerman, 17 Sept. 1893, Add. MS. 41228; Rosebery to Campbell-Bannerman, Confidential, 1 Sept. 1893, Add. MS. 41226.

military and naval reinforcements to the Mediterranean theatre. Such reinforcements were intended also to be a genuine preparation for a struggle, but their primary function was conceived to be one of impressing would-be aggressors with British resources and determination.¹

With reference both to war plans and to additional forces for the Mediterranean, Rosebery's desires were frustrated by apathy and optimism in the Service Departments. At the War Office General Chapman, without giving way to panic, showed himself fully awake to ugly possibilities, but Campbell-Bannerman was profoundly sceptical of the supposed Russian menace.² As for the Adjutant-General, he was Sir Redvers Buller, afterwards to win fame of a sort in South Africa; Buller occupied himself during the scare by shooting grouse.³ 'Your ^uconcellors', Rosebery complained to Campbell-Bannerman in September, 'care more, I think, for grouse than the Empire.'⁴ At the Admiralty similar complacency reigned: it was not until mid-September, weeks after the Foreign Secretary had begun to sound the alarm, that Spencer enquired of his subordinates whether any plans whatever for the case of a Russo-French coalition were in existence. He then discovered that they were, but would 'probably need revision'.⁵ In Novem-

¹ Campbell-Bannerman to Spencer, Confidential, 17 Aug. 1893, Spencer Papers.

² Ibid.; Chapman to Buller, Confidential, 5 Aug.; Chapman to Villiers, Private and Confidential, 12 Aug. 1893, W.O. 106/16.

³ Campbell-Bannerman to Spencer, Confidential, 17 Aug. 1893, Spencer Papers.

⁴ Rosebery to Campbell-Bannerman, Private, 12 Sept. 1893, Add. MS. 41226.

⁵ Spencer to Campbell-Bannerman, 17 Sept. 1893, Add. MS. 41228.

ber the First Lord had a clear conception of the main naval movements which would have to be carried out on the imminence of hostilities: the Levant Squadron to meet the rest of the Mediterranean fleet at Malta, the combined Mediterranean forces to effect a junction with the Channel Squadron at Gibraltar.¹ On many points, however, there were still no firm decisions,² for although it had been agreed in August that there should be a study, by the Joint Committee on Naval and Military Preparations, of the steps to be taken when war seemed near, actual consideration of the problems involved had proceeded at a leisurely pace.³

The outcome of the Foreign Secretary's efforts with respect to Mediterranean reinforcements was yet more unsatisfactory. For his suggestion at the end of July that the garrison of Malta be increased, General Chapman had a plausible case. Though reports of activity in Russian arsenals had not yet been received, and Chapman's tone was less excited than Rosebery's, the combination of Anglo-French tension with heightened Russian interest in the Mediterranean caused the General to recognize a 'possibility' that the Toulon fleet might be augmented by battleships from the Black Sea. Should the British be thereby compelled to withdraw their squadrons

¹ Spencer to Seymour, 14 Nov. 1893, Spencer Papers.

² See the Secret Notes of a meeting held at the Foreign Office on 27 April 1894, attended by the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office and the Directors of Military and Naval Intelligence (enclosed in Chapman to Simmons, Secret, 13 Mar. 1896, F.O. 358/6).

³ Campbell-Bannerman to Spencer, Confidential, 17 Aug.; 20 Sept. 1893, Spencer Papers, R.H. Vetch to Sir A. Halliburton, undated (enclosed in Halliburton to Chapman, 18 Sept. 1893), copy in W.O. 106/16.

temporarily from Mediterranean waters, Malta would be isolated in the midst of an enemy lake. It was largely with this danger in mind that Chapman, with the approval of the Admiralty and of Rosebery, pressed his recommendation.¹ On 12 August, however, the General had to report to the Foreign Office that the plan for a strengthened garrison, along with a proposal to give Malta a reserve of supplies adequate for four months, had been vetoed by Campbell-Bannerman. At first the Secretary for War justified his stand by stating that he was 'unaware of any ground for these alarms'.² But a few days later he received a 'serious communication' from Rosebery, and, though still sceptical, he fell back upon the argument that since the object was to set up a deterrent to Franco-Russian adventures, it could be better accomplished by 'adding a few ships to the Mediterranean Squadron than by putting a few men in Malta'.³ This point was well taken: Rosebery himself, while he wished to see Malta reinforced as a precaution, realized that primarily the problem was naval.⁴ Chapman and the Director of Naval Intelligence, Admiral Bridge, were in agreement by 29 July on the need for an augmentation of the Mediterranean fleet,⁵ and on the same day the Foreign Secretary started fervently beseeching Spencer to take action. 'I would rather you weakened your Pacific and Channel Squadrons',

¹ Chapman to Rosebery, Private, 1 Aug.; Chapman to Buller, Secret, 2 Aug.; Confidential, 5 Aug. 1893, W.O. 106/16.

² Chapman to Villiers, Private and Confidential, 12 Aug. 1893, W.O. 106/16.

³ Campbell-Bannerman to Spencer, Confidential, 17 Aug. 1893, Spencer Papers.

⁴ Rosebery to Campbell-Bannerman, 26 Aug. 1893, Add. MS. 41226.

⁵ Chapman to Villiers, Private, 29 July 1893, W.O. 106/16.

he wrote, 'than failed to add strength in the Mediterranean.'¹ The First Lord, however, did not take the alleged danger seriously enough to divert ships from other stations at short notice. By 1 August he had agreed to the dispatch of three more cruisers,² but, since these were to be newly commissioned vessels, a difficulty soon presented itself. The Naval Defence Act of 1889, though laying down a programme of warship construction, had omitted any adequate provision for the recruitment and training of personnel.³ The Admiralty now found that while it had the cruisers for the Mediterranean, it could not sufficiently man them - particularly with respect to officers and engine-room complements - without having recourse to mobilization.⁴ The reinforcement of the Mediterranean station was accordingly postponed until the beginning of 1894.⁵ Once again, as in the matter of war plans, Rosebery's wishes were only partially and belatedly fulfilled.

On With the Admiralty unwilling to weaken other squadrons, and unable otherwise to provide the resources for a timely display of British strength in the threatened area, the Foreign Secretary found himself dependent for his immediate deterrent on the maintenance of obviously cordial relations

¹ Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 29 July; cf. Secret, 30 July; Secret, 17 Oct. 1893, Spencer Papers.

² Chapman to Rosebery, Private, 1 Aug. 1893, W.O. 106/16.

³ Lord C. Beresford, The Memoirs of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, ii. 397; cf. ii. 388.

⁴ Spencer to Seymour, 9 Nov.; Spencer to Harcourt (Chancellor of the Exchequer), 10 Dec. 1893, Spencer Papers; cf. Commander C.N. Robinson, R.N., The British Fleet, p. 444; H. Williams, R.N., The Steam Navy of England: Past, Present and Future, pp. 208-219.

⁵ Spencer to Seymour, 14 Nov. 1893, Spencer Papers.

with Italy. The developments of July had already convinced him that some public hint of a possible Anglo-Italian naval combination would be desirable. In the early days of the month, before hearing of the planned Toulon meeting or facing the Siam crisis, Rosebery had been unenthusiastic about an Italian request for a British naval visit: on the 9th he ordered the request to be forwarded to the Admiralty 'without any recommendation'.¹ Nevertheless, apparently as a simple gesture of courtesy, the naval authorities had decided by the 17th to comply with Italy's desire.² The Admiral in command promptly objected, alleging cholera at Naples and pointing to the difficulty of avoiding festivities, which he felt to be inappropriate so soon after the tragic loss through collision of the battleship Victoria. These arguments sufficed for the Admiral's superiors in London: the visit was forthwith abandoned, the Foreign Office being informed but not consulted.³ On 28 July Rosebery intervened through his Permanent Under-Secretary to obtain a reversal of the new decision,⁴ and two days later he wrote personally to Spencer:

You are quite right in thinking that I have quite changed my mind as to the Italian visit. Circumstances have greatly changed for the worse, and the same reasons which make me hope that you can strengthen the Mediter-

¹ Edwardes (chargé d'affaires at Rome) to Rosebery, Tel. No. 54, 9 July (with minute by Rosebery), F.O. 45/701; Foreign Office to Admiralty, Confidential, 10 July 1893, F.O. 45/712.

² Admiralty to Foreign Office, Confidential, 17 July, F.O. 45/712; Rosebery to Edwardes, Tel. No. 27, 20 July 1893, F.O. 170/474.

³ Admiralty to Foreign Office, Confidential, 26 July 1893, F.O. 45/712.

⁴ Ibid. (with minutes by Rosebery and Sir P. Currie); Currie to Spencer, 28 July 1893, Spencer Papers.

ranean fleet make me wish for this visit. I am by no means at ease in my mind.¹

During August, accordingly, arrangements for the visit went forward.²

Taranto - found to be free of cholera - was to be the British 'counterblast' to the threat of Franco-Russian naval co-operation seemingly implied by Toulon.³ It was almost as much a bluff as the continued presence of the Levant Squadron near the Dardanelles, for London had no confidence in the combat effectiveness of the Italian fleet.⁴ As a deterrent, however, such a reminder of the possibility of an Anglo-Italian alliance was not altogether unpromising. Italy's sea power was an uncertain quantity rather than an obvious nullity: if the British could not count upon its aid being useful, neither could the French and Russians count upon its opposition being negligible. While a visit to an Italian port was by no means a satisfactory substitute for a prompt and substantial augmentation of Great Britain's own Mediterranean forces, it did at least hold out to Rosebery some prospect of a reduction in the level of danger.

In the event, the alarm at the Foreign Office about the immediate future had greatly diminished by the time when the Taranto visit took place. In July it had been believed that Toulon was scheduled for August;⁵ at the end of August no

¹ Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 30 July 1893, Spencer Papers.

² Admiralty to Foreign Office, 21 Aug., F.O. 45/712; Rosebery to Edwardes, Tel. No. 29, 22 Aug. 1893, F.O. 45/701.

³ Spencer to Seymour, Confidential, 12 Oct. 1893, Spencer Papers.

⁴ Marder, pp. 172-173; Taylor, p. 344.

⁵ Howard to Rosebery, Tel. No. 83, 18 July 1893, F.O. 65/1448.

date had apparently been set, and soon it was learned that the meeting had been postponed until October.¹ At Rosebery's insistence, Taranto was planned by the Admiralty to follow rather than precede its Franco-Russian counterpart.² Meanwhile, in the final week or ten days of September, the scare fizzled out. Through the first half of the month the Foreign Secretary had continued to cry 'Wolf!' at the Service Departments; on the 3rd, for instance, he had advised his subordinates to send all reports of Russian activity immediately to the Admiralty and War Office, 'as I wish both offices impressed with the menacing character of the situation'.³ By the 15th the Secretary for War must have been weary of being nagged; he humoured Rosebery with a formal notification that 'Mr. Campbell-Bannerman is fully aware of the serious character of the situation in South-East Europe'.⁴ His true opinion he revealed to Spencer some days later: with reference to discussion of war plans, he observed that 'no one, except our young friend at the F.O., thinks the matter urgent or demanding precipitation'.⁵ Though perhaps not to be taken quite literally, the remark seems to convey a substantially accurate

¹ Howard to Rosebery, No. 225 Confidential, 31 Aug., F.O. 65/1447; Tel. No. 99, 1 Sept.; Tel. No. 100, 7 Sept. 1893, F.O. 65/1448.

² Memorandum by Sir P. Currie, dated 6 Oct. (with minutes by Rosebery); Currie to Sir A. Hoskins, 6 Oct.; Admiralty to Foreign Office, Confidential, 11 Oct. 1893, F.O. 45/712.

³ Memoranda communicated by the German ambassador in London, dated 29 Aug. 1893 (with minute by Rosebery, dated 3 Sept.), F.O. 64/1308; Foreign Office to Admiralty, Secret, 5 Sept.; Foreign Office to War Office, Secret, 5 Sept. 1893, F.O. 65/1456.

⁴ War Office to Foreign Office, 15 Sept. 1893, F.O. 65/1456.

⁵ Campbell-Bannerman to Spencer, 20 Sept. 1893, Spencer Papers.

impression of the state of feeling in the Service Departments; and at this moment the divergence in view between the two Departments and the Foreign Secretary was being considerably narrowed. After receiving Campbell-Bannerman's assurance of the 15th, which was as welcome as it was disingenuous, Rosebery had at once turned his attention to frightening his colleagues in general: a 'selection of the papers pointing to war', he thought, should be circulated to the cabinet.¹ Significantly, however, he allowed the proposed package of alarmist propaganda to be prepared in so unhurried a fashion that it was not made available to the other ministers until 23 October, five weeks after the idea had first commended itself to him.² It is evident that in the latter part of September Rosebery lost much of his former sense of urgency. The diminution of anxiety at the Foreign Office was indeed so marked during this period that both the Austrian chargé d'affaires and the Italian ambassador observed it with a good deal of interest, and guessed that the explanation might lie in the arrival of some secret promise from St. Petersburg.³

To attempt to identify any single decisive reason for the change in Rosebery's thinking would probably be a mistake. It is likely that there were at least three contributory factors. In the first place, the Foreign Office as well as the Admiralty had knowledge of a reassuring technical point; that although there was no month of the year in which weather conditions were so consistently bad as to rule out an amphibious operation against the Bosphorus altogether, it was in July,

¹ War Office to Foreign Office, 15 Sept. 1893 (with minutes by Rosebery), F.O. 65/1456.

² Ibid. (with minute by F. Bertie, dated 23 Oct. 1893).

³ Wydenbruck to Kálnoky, No. 31D Confidential, 4 Oct. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

August and 'much' of September that the Russian commanders could count with greatest confidence on protracted periods of calm.¹ By late September, therefore, the season of the most acute danger - the season during which an attack could have been launched with the smallest risk of delays in disembarkation - was drawing to its close. In the second place, there was growing reason to believe that Russia's decision to send her warships to Toulon had no warlike implications. A new interpretation of Russian motives was being given credence by the middle of the month both in financial and to some extent in diplomatic circles in Paris. The Tsar's government, it was reported, was seeking conversion of an earlier six per cent French loan into a loan at four per cent; and the forthcoming Toulon visit, instead of appearing clearly as a token of intended naval collaboration, was now thought to be not unconnected with a Russian desire to facilitate this innocuous transaction.² As September drew on, the impression that Russia's intentions were peaceful was greatly strengthened by the personal attitude of Alexander III. During discussion of plans for the visit the Tsar made it plain to the French that he did not wish the occasion to be used for provocations against rival Powers. To this stipulation the French agreed,³ and before the month ended it was publicly known that as a result of Alexander's insistence the festivities at Toulon were to be prevented from assuming the character of a threat-

¹ Supplementary Paper by Sir G. Tryon with his 'Report on the Defences of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles', Confidential, dated 27 June 1892 (received by the Foreign Office from the Admiralty on 22 July 1892), F.O. 78/4435.

² Dufferin to Rosebery, No. 399, 15 Sept. 1893, F.O. 27/3121.

³ J. Hansen, L'Ambassade à Paris du Baron de Mohrenheim, 1884-1898, p. 160; cf. J. Hansen, L'Alliance Franco-Russe, p. 111.

ening demonstration.¹ Thirdly, to make the outlook brighter still, the Siamese question was failing to fulfil Rosebery's pessimistic expectations. True, it was a volcano that was long to continue smouldering: in July 1895, on returning to power after the Liberals' fall, Salisbury was authoritatively informed that Siam remained even then the 'most dangerous and active' of Great Britain's disputes with France.² The controversy was not to be finally settled until 1896.³ In mid-September of '93, however, there seemed no imminent prospect of another eruption comparable to that of the summer, and the British ambassador in Paris went so far as to state, albeit with qualifications, that he saw a 'fair' chance of reaching a satisfactory adjustment.⁴

Despite the rapturous reception which the French accorded their guest,⁵ the scare was not revived when the Russian visit took place. The evidence flowing into the Foreign Office indicated that St. Petersburg was responding to French enthusiasm with a certain coolness and indifference,⁶ attitudes which did not suggest any inclination on Russia's part to undertake a Near Eastern adventure dependent on support from

¹ Vivian to Rosebery, No. 248, 26 Sept.; No. 254 Confidential, 27 Sept. 1893, F.O. 45/699.

² Dufferin to Salisbury, Private, 9 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 114, Salisbury Papers.

³ R.C.K. Ensor, England, 1870-1914, p. 213.

⁴ Dufferin to Rosebery, No. 397, 14 Sept. 1893, F.O. 146/3359.

⁵ See Sir A. Lyall, The Life of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, ii. 270.

⁶ Dufferin to Rosebery, No. 431, 19 Oct., F.O. 27/3121; Howard to Rosebery, No. 263, 26 Oct.; No. 272 Secret, 9 Nov. 1893, F.O. 65/1447. Cf. Malet to Rosebery, No. 285 Secret, 27 Nov. 1893, F.O. 64/1295.

Paris. By the last day of October, furthermore - about the time by which Rosebery had feared in August that the situation might be 'more than serious' - an action of the Russian naval authorities had administered the coup de grâce to all immediate worry. Most of the vessels of the Black Sea fleet, it was learned, had been laid up for the winter, and the Admiralty and Foreign Office accordingly agreed that telegraphic reports from the British Consul at Odessa, hitherto sent at weekly intervals, could be discontinued until the spring.¹

So collapsed the Near Eastern and Mediterranean 'crisis' of 1893. Anxiety for the less imminent future remained: in late November the deplorable condition of the Bosphorus defences, and the Sultan's persistent refusal to heed British advice that they be improved, still evoked gloomy comment from both Rosebery and his Permanent Under-Secretary.² The former, indeed, while no longer thinking in terms of war within a few weeks, was still in a gloomy frame of mind about the international scene in general. French opinion at this period was in a conspicuously anti-British mood.³ On 13 November, in a conversation with the Austrian ambassador (Count Deym), Rosebery recognized that St. Petersburg had been anxious to avoid provocations during the Toulon visit, that the French government had likewise shown much restraint, and that the festivities had not fundamentally changed the

¹ Foreign Office to Admiralty, 31 Oct.; Admiralty to Foreign Office, Confidential, 4 Nov. 1893, F.O. 65/1456.

² Minute by Currie, dated 22 Nov. 1893; Minute by Rosebery, dated 26 Nov. 1893 (both with Foreign Office to Admiralty, Secret, 6 Dec. 1893, F.O. 78/4592).

³ Sir H. Rumbold, Final Recollections of a Diplomatist, pp. 234-235.

European political situation. He expressed some uneasiness, however, lest the presence of Russian warships in the Mediterranean might encourage France to experiment with more adventurous policies, and in particular to make new trouble for the British authorities in Egypt.¹ Later in the month, having received a warning from Berlin that the Tsar's Mediterranean squadron was to go to Alexandretta,² Rosebery informed Deym of his belief that Russia intended to establish a naval station at that Turkish port.³ Moreover, although this thought was one which he did not confide to his interlocutor, the Foreign Secretary foresaw that in the face of such French and Russian designs, Great Britain might find herself isolated. The Triple Alliance, he was beginning to fear, was possibly in danger of disintegration.⁴ The reasons for his fear will emerge later;⁵ to note the fact of its existence will suffice for the present. It was no doubt with his mind on the apparent instability of the Alliance - as well as on the problems which he chose to mention, such as Alexandretta - that Rosebery spoke to Deym of the troubled aspect of international affairs, and of the disquiet with which he looked forward to future developments.⁶

¹ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 35A-E Confidential, 15 Nov. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

² Malet to Rosebery, Tel. No. 20 Secret, 27 Nov., F.O. 64/1296; No. 285 Secret, 27 Nov. 1893, F.O. 64/1295.

³ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 36C Confidential, 29 Nov. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

⁴ Rosebery to Malet, Private, 6 Dec. 1893; Private, 3 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/3.

⁵ Below, pp. 227-240.

⁶ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 36C Confidential, 29 Nov. 1893,

In early December matters became worse. A military (though not a naval) convention was about to be concluded between the French and Russian governments. This fact remained unpublished, but was reflected in a conspicuous change in the political atmosphere. The British chargé d'affaires at St. Petersburg reported that Russian official circles, abandoning 'as if by magic' their cool indifference, had suddenly begun displaying extravagant enthusiasm for the 'entente cordiale' with France.¹ At the very moment when the friendly Continental coalition was in disarray, Great Britain's adversaries were drawing closer together.

In these circumstances it was natural that Rosebery's interest in the preparedness of British arms should remain intense. In December he was again urging Campbell-Bannerman to reinforce the garrison of Malta.² He also did what he could to instill some life and energy into the joint naval and military Committee - a body which he had just dubbed the 'committee which never meets'.³ He had, he wrote to the Secretary for War, a 'pretty clear idea' of what it ought to be: instead of being a group concerned exclusively with technical points, as the existing conception of its task dictated, it should be 'somewhat enlarged' in scope and should include a Foreign Office representative. Having obtained Campbell-Bannerman's consent to such an appointment, Rosebery argued that the Foreign Office member should be

W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

¹ Howard to Rosebery, No. 287 Secret, 7 Dec. 1893, F.O. 65/1447.

² Rosebery to Campbell-Bannerman, 13 Dec. 1893, Add. MS. 41226.

³ Minute by Rosebery, dated 1 Dec. 1893 (with Foreign Office to Admiralty, Secret, 6 Dec. 1893, F.O. 78/4592).

invited to all meetings; when the agenda consisted entirely of technical matters he might withdraw, but whatever the agenda he should have the right to ask questions and suggest subjects for discussion. 'In a word,' the Foreign Secretary concluded, 'I should wish the F.O. to be in touch with the Committee. Indeed experience of the past and apprehension of the future make me regard this as imperative.'¹

One problem which Rosebery thought might be referred to the Committee was that of the defence of Constantinople.² It is not clear that anything was done: if the views recorded by the Intelligence Directors in 1892 were now re-examined, they were certainly not revised, for in the spring of 1894 it was still believed at the Admiralty that to act near the Ottoman capital the British fleet would require an assurance of French neutrality and a land force of 10,000 men to protect its communications through the Dardanelles.³ In the light of British and Turkish capabilities, the opinion which Rosebery's Permanent Under-Secretary had expressed in November '93, that 'when the war breaks out Russia will be in possession of the Bosphorus',⁴ seemed to remain as sound as ever. By April '94, however, Rosebery himself (now Prime Minister) was sounding a new note. He did not dispute the

¹ Rosebery to Campbell-Bannerman, 19 Dec.; 20 Dec. 1893, Add. MS. 41226.

² Minute by Rosebery, dated 1 Dec. 1893 (with Foreign Office to Admiralty, Secret, 6 Dec. 1893, F.O. 78/4592).

³ Kimberley to Spencer, 11 May 1894 (encloses summary of Memorandum by Sir T. Sanderson on Naval and Military Policy in the Mediterranean); Spencer to Kimberley, 12 May 1894, Spencer Papers.

⁴ Minute by Currie, dated 22 Nov. 1893 (with Foreign Office to Admiralty, Secret, 6 Dec. 1893, F.O. 78/4592).

feasibility of a coup de main - quite the contrary - but he had come to the conclusion that the danger of one being attempted was past for something more than the moment.¹

Some basis for such optimism had been known to the Foreign Office as early as the end of the previous year. Although the stores and equipment necessary for a sudden blow were thought to be still in readiness, the British military attaché at St. Petersburg, in the course of travels in the Black Sea region, had discovered grounds for suspecting an appreciable reduction in the unusual divisional strengths which had formerly occasioned concern. The establishments for 1894, he considered, had 'not been fixed with a view to early action against Turkey'. But the evidence for this opinion was less than conclusive,² and Rosebery does not appear to have been deeply impressed. Subsequently he again betrayed some nervousness as to Russian intentions,³ and in April the reasons he cited for confidence were in no way related to the reported change in Russia's military arrangements. One of his reasons was the belief which the Austrian foreign minister had voiced in January, that any initiative by St. Petersburg on the Straits Question would be diplomatic rather than warlike.⁴ Since he regarded Count Kálnoky as the 'statesman best qualified to judge', the Prime Min-

¹ Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 22 Apr. 1894, Spencer Papers.

² Major Waters to Howard, No. 36 Confidential, 13 Dec. (copy enclosed in Howard to Rosebery, No. 302, 21 Dec. 1893 (received at the Foreign Office on 25 Dec. 1893), F.O. 65/1447).

³ Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 9 Confidential, 14 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

⁴ For Kálnoky's observations, see Monson to Rosebery, Tel. No. 4 Most Confidential, 17 Jan.; No. 17 Secret, 24 Jan. 1894, F.O. 78/4592.

ister passed on his prediction to Spencer as a source of good cheer, adding that it was a view confirmed by the character of the Tsar.¹ Having once given way to extreme alarm and seen his fears left unjustified by events, Rosebery was evidently more inclined than before to agree with those - such as his military attaché on the Bosphorus - who had always attached the greatest weight to Alexander III's personal preference for peace.²

The most important reasons for the new optimism, however, were three developments more recent than the remarks of Kálnoky. In the first place, it seemed that the tempting opportunity which had presented itself to Russia in 1893 had substantially evaporated. In March, after continuing through most of the winter to be extremely cordial, Franco-Russian relations had deteriorated. At the British embassy in St. Petersburg this fact was attributed primarily to a desire on Russia's part for a decade of peace in which to develop the country internally, and to a realization that to preserve peace it was necessary to restrain the French. A decision of the French themselves, the embassy reported, might also have played a part: without consulting Russia or even warning her in advance, the Paris government had raised the tariff on importations of grain - a move which had made the Tsarist authorities 'excessively angry'.³ Alluding to the latter cause of dissension, Rosebery told Spencer in April that the

¹ Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 22 Apr. 1894, Spencer Papers.

² See Colonel Chermiside to the Director of Military Intelligence, 21 May 1893 (extract enclosed in Director of Military Intelligence to Foreign Office, 6 June 1893, F.O. 65/1456).

³ Howard to Kimberley, No. 73 Most Confidential, 29 Mar. 1894, F.O. 65/1472.

France-Russian friendship, 'always essentially evanescent', had suffered 'serious if not mortal blows' and was 'partly on the decline'. Secondly, a further ground for anticipating no 'rush on Constantinople' was seen by the Prime Minister in the new Spencer Programme of naval expansion. He expected that in conjunction with the existence of the Levant Squadron, the Programme would produce a salutary effect on Russian thinking. The ships to be constructed would of course not be ready for a considerable time, but the mere adoption of the measure, Rosebery reasoned, demonstrated the 'temper of the nation': wanting peace, Russia refrained from seizing Constantinople because of her fear of subsequent war with one or more of the Great Powers, and the naval augmentation would keep that fear alive by showing that Great Britain was in no mood to stand idly aside if her Mediterranean interests were endangered.¹ Finally - though he refrained from mentioning this point to the First Lord - Rosebery believed that like the Programme, his own replacement of Gladstone in the Premiership, early in March, was an event which would help to deter Russia from risking a forward policy.²

It is clear that by the spring of 1894 Rosebery had completely reversed his alarmist attitude of the preceding year. So strong indeed had his faith in Russian caution now become that during the very months of July and August when a coup de main was most probable, he permitted the Levant Squadron to be withdrawn temporarily for manoeuvres in the West. Though it was conditional on the movement being carried out

¹ Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 22 Apr. 1894, Spencer Papers.

² Deym to Kalnoky, No. 11A-C Secret, 10 Mar. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

'quietly', this authorization to the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, issued at the end of April, was symptomatic of the fact that in 1894 Rosebery was no more uneasy about the Straits, perhaps even less so, than Salisbury had been when arguing against the scaremongers in 1891.¹

Of the factors contributing to the apparently increased security of the Ottoman capital and waterway, the British Liberal administration could claim credit for only two. With respect to the relations between France and Russia, there had been little that Rosebery could do, short of making unacceptable sacrifices, to promote the deterioration which he found so reassuring. On but one question, that of a coal-ing station for the Russian Mediterranean squadron, did he contemplate a yielding attitude as a means of forestalling a strengthening of Russo-French ties. From the time when St. Petersburg was reported, in July 1893, to be on the point of establishing such a squadron, rumours had circulated, often with the flimsiest of evidence to support them, that a station for its use might be acquired from Greece or Turkey.² We have noticed that Rosebery gave credence to a German warning that the place chosen might be the Turkish port of Alexandretta. He took the position that Greece could not grant the Tsar a station without violating the 'international engagements on which her national existence is

¹ Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 22 Apr.; Spencer to Kimberley, Secret, 17 Apr.; Spencer to Seymour, 1 May 1894, Spencer Papers; Admiralty to Foreign Office, Immediate and Confidential, 25 Apr.; Foreign Office to Admiralty, Immediate and Confidential, 27 Apr. 1894, F.O. 78/4560.

² Nicolson to Rosebery, Tel. No. 135 Secret, 20 July 1893, F.O. 78/4486; Tel. No. 5, 15 Jan.; Tel. No. 6, 16 Jan. 1894, F.O. 78/4546; Elliot to Rosebery, No. 143, 30 Aug. 1893, F.O. 32/648.

founded' - an allusion to the Anglo-Franco-Russian Protocol of 1830 and the Treaty of London of 1832.¹ In the case of the Ottoman Empire, however, he recalled no treaty on which a British protest could plausibly be based, and finally he made up his mind that even apart from this legal difficulty, inflexible opposition to Russia's desire for an Eastern coaling depot would be unwise. It would lead the Russians, he observed at the end of January 1894, to turn for facilities to France, and would thereby foster the maritime co-operation of the two Powers.²

In adopting this view Rosebery did not encounter resistance from the Admiralty. British naval experts were determined only that St. Petersburg should be prevented from getting Lemnos, near the entrance to the Dardanelles. Their reason was in part that they had covetous eyes on that island themselves. That Cyprus was of no value as a base had been understood by a few Generals and Admirals when it was first occupied,³ and its uselessness was now fully recognized by naval opinion.⁴ Lemnos, it appears, had been given some

¹ Rosebery to Egerton, No. 2, 9 Jan. 1894, F.O. 32/659; Minutes, including one by Sanderson and one by Rosebery, intended to be bound with Egerton to Rosebery, No. 194, 2 Dec.; bound by error with Egerton to Rosebery, No. 174, 17 Oct. 1893, F.O. 32/649.

² Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 4, 31 Jan. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174. There had already been rumours that France had agreed to give the Tsar a station: Wolff to Rosebery, No. 247 Most Secret and Confidential, 18 Sept. 1893, F.O. 72/1927.

³ D.E. Lee, Great Britain and the Cyprus Convention Policy of 1878, pp. 119-120.

⁴ A.J. Marder, British Naval Policy, 1880-1905, p. 224; Summary of Memorandum by Sanderson on Naval and Military Policy in the Mediterranean (enclosed in Kimberley to Spencer, 11 May 1894); Spencer to Kimberley, 12 May 1894, Spencer Papers.

consideration as a possible alternative to Cyprus in 1878,¹ and in 1893-'94, convinced that the location was highly advantageous, Admiralty officials would have liked to see rectified the blunder which Disraeli had committed in failing to acquire it.² Especially since the Levant Squadron was to be withdrawn westwards in a crisis, however, Spencer perceived no sufficient justification for advocating action, which he feared would have undesirable diplomatic repercussions.³ The Admiralty accordingly confined itself to the negative course of opposing Russian designs on the island - designs regarding which the Constantinople embassy had been instructed in November '93 to be 'vigilant'.⁴ In February '94 the Director of Naval Intelligence commented that he believed it to be quite appreciated at the Foreign Office that to keep the Russians out of Lemnos was more important than to deny them a station elsewhere in Eastern waters.⁵

In the event St. Petersburg seems to have received no offer of a station anywhere, and Rosebery's decision not to raise comprehensive objections, as it did not affect the outcome, is interesting rather than momentous. The Liberal policy

¹ H. Temperley, 'Disraeli and Cyprus', English Historical Review, xlvii. 276-277.

² Summary of Memorandum by Sanderson on Naval and Military Policy in the Mediterranean (enclosed in Kimberley to Spencer, 11 May 1894); Spencer to Kimberley, 12 May 1894, Spencer Papers; Marder, loc. cit.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rosebery to Ford, Tel. No. 90 Private and Secret, 20 Nov. 1893, F.O. 195/1780.

⁵ Foreign Office to Admiralty, Confidential, 14 Feb. 1894 (with minute by Admiral Bridge, dated 19 Feb. 1894), Adm. I/7168.

which did have crucial importance was that of an expanded Navy - chiefly because major increases in the fleet were likely in themselves to prove a deterrent to Russia, but also because it was the acceptance of such increases by the cabinet that precipitated the retirement of Gladstone.¹ Between them, the planned naval augmentation and the change of Prime Ministers represented Great Britain's whole contribution to the improvement in the Near Eastern situation as Rosebery saw it.

The Navy Scare of 1893, and the public and parliamentary clamour for naval increases which preceded announcement of the Spencer Programme, were phenomena closely connected with Near Eastern politics. Because the Sultan was an Anglophobe and British influence on the Bosphorus was weak, the Straits had been left vulnerable to Russia; and it was in no small degree because the Straits were vulnerable to Russia that British supremacy in the Mediterranean was thought to be in jeopardy. Admittedly a number of other factors played a significant part in arousing anxiety, and in making new ship-building seem necessary. The accidental sinking of the Victoria had not enhanced confidence in British naval architecture.² There was the obvious long-term danger of being overtaken numerically: on 1 January 1894, it was reported, France and Russia would have under construction twenty-three vessels with an aggregate tonnage of 210,300, whereas Great Britain would have under construction only four totalling 56,000 tons.³ Moreover, since rapid advances were being made

¹ S. Low and L.C. Sanders, The History of England during the Reign of Victoria, 1837-1901, p. 424.

² H.W. Wilson, Ironclads in Action, ii. 207.

³ Spectator, lxxi. 858 (16 Dec. 1893).

in the science of warship design, there was a risk that if the British rested content with what they had, command of the sea might pass within a few years to an enemy perhaps numerically inferior, but more powerfully armed and armoured.¹ Some observers went so far as to argue that if hostilities broke out even in existing circumstances, the British fleet might be expelled from the Mediterranean by the French unsupported by Russia.² Plausibility was lent to this thesis by the fact that France possessed impressive flotillas of torpedo-boats,³ which were alleged to be possibly capable of cancelling out the British superiority in battleships.⁴ The Admiralty was confident, however, that the combined Mediterranean and Channel fleets would be strong enough to face the Toulon fleet,⁵ and the more level-headed critics of the government were not prepared to contest the official view. 'If war were declared tomorrow,' Joseph Chamberlain told the House of Commons in December, 'the British Navy in the Mediterranean would have to cut and run - if it could run.'⁶ But Chamberlain, fierce opponent of Gladstone though he was, explained that he was speaking only of the eventuality of a hostile coalition: 'I did not say that we should have to cut

¹ R.C.K. Ensor, England, 1870-1914, pp. 287-289.

² Spectator, lxxi. 865 (16 Dec. 1893); cf. Harcourt to Spencer, 9 Dec. 1893, Spencer Papers.

³ Seymour to Spencer, 16 Nov. 1893, Spencer Papers.

⁴ Spectator, lxxi. 652 (11 Nov. 1893).

⁵ Marder, p. 219; Elizabeth Monroe, The Mediterranean in Politics, p. 5.

⁶ Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 4th ser., xix. 1865; cf. cols. 1864, 1866-1867.

⁷ Spencer to Seymour, 9 Nov.; Spencer to Harcourt, 10 Dec.

and run from France alone.'¹ The Russian Mediterranean squadron had turned out to be a far from formidable force;² what disturbed the Liberal Unionist leader was clearly the Black Sea fleet, the virtually undefended Ottoman capital, and the thought of Abdul Hamid writing orders at Russian dictation to the commander at the Dardanelles. In being influenced by such fears, Chamberlain was by no means exceptional.³

Especially since partisan as well as patriotic motives were involved, it was inevitable that the campaign for naval expansion should be characterized, in press as in Parliament, by extravagant exaggerations of British weakness and Franco-Russian might. To such misstatements the reactions of different members of the cabinet were sharply divergent. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir William Harcourt, was highly indignant: he accused the Admiralty of 'studiously' withholding the 'true facts', and of thus allowing the public to be 'deliberately deceived'.⁴ Spencer's feelings were mixed. He admitted that many falsehoods were being circulated, and he was resentful at the question of the fleet being exploited for party purposes. On the other hand, realizing that in some respects the Navy suffered from genuine deficiencies, he considered it good that the public should be impressed with the need for 'continued efforts' to maintain British maritime predominance.⁵ Unlike Harcourt, Spencer had

¹ Ibid., col. 1879.

² Vivian to Rosebery, No. 254 Confidential, 27 Sept. 1893, F.O.45/699; Marder, p. 182.

³ Ibid., pp. 182-184.

⁴ Harcourt to Spencer, 9 Dec.; Secret, 12 Dec. 1893, Spencer Papers.

⁵ Spencer to Seymour, 9 Nov.; Spencer to Harcourt, 10 Dec.

daily to face the Admirals - who, incidentally, received some private encouragement from the Intelligence Division of the War Office. In the summer, just after the beginning of the Straits scare, General Chapman had written to his naval opposite number:

I cannot help thinking that we have now an opportunity of urging the necessity of an increase to the strength of the Navy and the Army. Do you not think that you might ask for a number of ships equal to the number of Russian ships at present locked up in the Black Sea?¹

It may safely be assumed that the Admirals required no prompting. Late in September the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean advised the First Lord to 'build and keep our fleet superior both in numbers and quality to France and Russia combined - I mean really superior, and that it should not be open to argument as to whether we are superior or not'.² Spencer himself believed it could be proved beyond doubt that Great Britain was 'all powerful at the present moment' in battleships; yet he was reluctant to see such proof given to Parliament.³ His reason he explained to Harcourt in December. Like the Mediterranean Commander-in-Chief, he was much disquieted by the British inferiority to France in torpedo-craft.⁴ This weakness was not being stressed in the naval campaign, he told the Chancellor, because those

1893, Spencer Papers.

¹ Chapman to Admiral Bridge, Private, 3 Aug. 1893, W.O. 106/16.

² Seymour to Spencer, Confidential, 27 Sept. 1893, Spencer Papers.

³ Spencer to Harcourt, 10 Dec. 1893, Spencer Papers; cf. H.G. Hutchinson, Private Diaries of the Rt. Hon. Sir Algernon West, G.C.B., p. 227.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 221; Seymour to Spencer, 16 Nov.; Spencer to Harcourt, 10 Dec. 1893, Spencer Papers.

promoting the agitation in the country were supporters of the Tories, and the lack of torpedo-boats was the fault not of the Liberal ministry but of Salisbury's. He feared, nevertheless, that if British strength in capital ships were shown conclusively to be overwhelming, critics of the government would be driven to shift their main attack to the torpedo-boat question. The deficiency in this sphere being all too real, he was anxious that the attention of other Powers should not be drawn to it; and he added that the problem of personnel was also 'not altogether a matter of boasting' - a fact which had been brought home to him by his inability to man the additional cruisers for the Mediterranean.¹

Thus did Spencer justify his silence about the 'true facts' - a silence which must certainly have played a significant part in facilitating the growth of the panic, and therefore in strengthening the hand of the Admirals. The latter, although their initial demands were not met in full, were in essentials triumphant. Even Harcourt was prepared at an early stage of discussion to permit the building of vessels to deal with enemy torpedo-boats,² and the new Programme naturally included provision for obtaining adequate trained manpower.³ Above all, the British line-of-battle fleet began to undergo that expansion which was to give the country confidence in its security in the days of Fashoda and the Boer War.⁴ In 1895 there were launched five great battleships, patterned on the Magnificent of 1894: Majestic, Hannibal and Jupiter, Prince George and Victorious - followed

¹ Ibid.

² Hutchinson, p. 227.

³ Lord C. Beresford, The Memoirs of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, ii. 388.

⁴ Ensor, p. 289.

in 1896 by Caesar, Illustrious and Mars.¹ During the naval agitation Russia had four completed battleships in the Black Sea, with one more (launched in 1892) in the process of being armed, and a sixth under construction.² This force, once the new British ships were ready, would hold no terrors for Whitehall.

The victory belonged to Rosebery as well as to publicists and Admirals. In the autumn of 1893, although he considered that the initiative in the cabinet had to be left to the First Lord, the Foreign Secretary repeatedly emphasized in private the necessity of action, and promised his colleague support.³ Advocacy of naval increases was the most important aspect of his passion for preparedness. The exaggerations of campaigners he recognized for what they were, but he frankly told the Austrian ambassador that far from deploring them, he welcomed the raising of an alarm and the pressure being brought to bear on the government for immediate measures.⁴ In the controversies of the early winter with Gladstone and Harcourt, he proved a more ardent champion of the 'Spencer Programme' than Spencer himself. At one point Gladstone's son Herbert approached Lewis Harcourt with news that the Prime Minister was moving rapidly towards the Admiralty's position, and that some 'practically immaterial concession'

¹ Sir W.L. Clowes, The Royal Navy, vii. 33.

² Secret Memorandum on the Increase of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, by Captain Grierson, dated 28 Sept. 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

³ Rosebery to Queen Victoria, 16 Nov. 1893 (printed in G.E. Buckle, The Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd ser., ii. 321; Marquess of Crewe, Lord Rosebery, ii. 436-437).

⁴ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 37A-I Secret, 13 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

would suffice to avert his resignation.¹ Notwithstanding the fact that he had already whittled down the Admirals' proposals by a full £1,000,000 on the estimates for 1894-'95 alone, Spencer was quite willing to contemplate further reductions - perhaps of up to £200,000 - in order to find an accommodation tolerable to his chief.² Rosebery would have none of it. True, although he expressed regret that Gladstone had not retired years before,³ the Foreign Secretary did not want him to go on the issue of the Navy.⁴ Except for one brief period of despair, however, he clung to the belief that the Prime Minister was bluffing and would eventually surrender. He therefore felt safe in urging Spencer to stand by his existing figures with absolute and adamant firmness.⁵

The basis of compromise suggested by the Prime Minister's son remained obscure: 'I cannot for the life of me', wrote John Morley, 'make out - in figures - what the drift of H.G.'s message to Loulou was.'⁶ No accommodation was reached, but, as a means of saving the Liberal party from disruption, Gladstone explained his resignation on the not unconvincing grounds of failing eyesight and hearing.⁷ The way was cleared for the measure which would immediately, by indicating the 'temper of the nation', reduce the apparent threat *et to*

¹ Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 15 Jan. 1894, Spencer Papers.

² Lewis Harcourt to Sir A. West, Confidential, 17 Jan. 1894 (printed in Hutchinson, p. 246; cf. also p. 232).

³ Hutchinson, p. 227.

⁴ Ibid., p. 237.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 235, 237, 241, 246; Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 15 Jan. 1894, Spencer Papers.

⁶ Morley to Spencer, Secret, 19 Jan. 1894, Spencer Papers.

⁷ Viscount Morley, Recollections, ii. 7.

the Straits, and which would in the long run place at the disposal of the Foreign Office a deterrent at once independent and convincing. While the Spencer battleships were being built, London would have to be cautious, try to reduce tension with Paris and St. Petersburg, and run as little risk as possible of war. But the lesson of the summer of 1893 had been taken to heart: the absurd situation in which the British Empire could find itself forced to rely on such a hollow bluff as the Taranto visit was on its way to being put right.

In the thinking of the Foreign Secretary, however, adoption of the Spencer Programme was not only a method of deterring France and Russia, and of making it feasible for Great Britain, even if isolated, to uphold effectively her imperial position. The Programme was also considered to be a method of keeping the danger of isolation to a minimum. As ship-building was intended to impress the Russians and the French with the perils involved in threatening British interests, so it was intended to impress friendly Powers with the usefulness of British support. The circumstances which gave the latter function high importance in Rosebery's mind will be examined in some detail in the pages that follow.

assumption of a Russian menace, therefore, Austria should seek to prevent consolidation of the Franco-Russian entente, and to revive, on the basis of a common stand against socialism and republicanism, the tripartite coalition of Vienna, St. Petersburg and Berlin. Count Wolkenstein, Francis Joseph's ambassador to the Russian Court, held similar opinions,¹ and

¹ V.L. Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1892-1914, pp. 276-277.

ROSEBERY AND THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE, 1893

Although in the spring of 1893 Rosebery saw as yet no major threat of imminent war, his thoughts seem already to have been turning towards the desirability of taking precautions against another danger - the danger that Austria-Hungary might lose faith in the effective support of a Gladstonian England, and, fearing Russia, seek a rapprochement with the Tsar on terms prejudicial to British interests in the Near East. The Foreign Secretary had no strong evidence that such a development might be near at hand, but, as a result of circumstances which had recently arisen, the risk was one which he was not prepared to ignore.

During the autumn of 1892 Aehrenthal, the First Secretary of the Austrian embassy at St. Petersburg, had earnestly advocated the establishment of an Austro-Russian understanding, even at the cost of significant concessions in the Bulgarian question. So long as Vienna avoided a provocative course in Bulgaria, he argued, Russia would refrain from action on her Western frontiers. Instead of basing her policy on the assumption of a Russian menace, therefore, Austria should seek to prevent consolidation of the Franco-Russian entente, and to revive, on the basis of a common stand against socialism and republicanism, the tripartite coalition of Vienna, St. Petersburg and Berlin. Count Wolkenstein, Francis Joseph's ambassador to the Russian Court, held similar opinions,¹ and

¹ W.L. Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1890-1894, pp. 276-277.

it appears that Kálnoky himself hearkened with some show of sympathy to the case presented to him.¹

In Kálnoky's eyes, however, rapprochement with St. Petersburg was a possibility to be kept in reserve rather than a programme to be promptly and actively implemented. He preferred, so long as it was practicable, to maintain the alignment of Austria, Italy and Great Britain which had been forged in 1887. The grounds for the preference were compelling. True, the foreign minister realized that the Russians intended no war on the Bulgarian issue, and he even saw a 'remote' chance that Austria could negotiate an entente with the Tsar on terms entailing the latter's renunciation of aggression in the Balkans as a whole. But of this, he felt certain, there was 'very little likelihood': while Russia would not fight over Bulgaria, her attitude regarding the Bosphorus and Dardanelles appeared to him to be a 'different matter'.² That she planned to acquire a secure freedom of passage through the Ottoman waterway, for warships as well as for munitions, Kálnoky was convinced; and he was equally convinced that the fulfilment of that ambition had become the central objective of Russian external policy.³ Reasoning from these premises, the Austrian minister cannot have failed to conclude that as a condition of an Austro-Russian understanding, the government at St. Petersburg would probably insist on Austria's acceptance of a proposal for the opening of the

¹ Ibid., p. 277.

² Paget to Rosebery, No. 12 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 7/1197.

³ Paget to Rosebery, No. 2 Confidential, 3 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4592 (copy in F.O. 7/1197); cf. Memorandum by Kálnoky on a conversation between Kálnoky and Monson, Strictly Confidential, dated 18 Jan. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

Straits.

Free passage through the Straits for the Russian fleet would lead inevitably, Kálnoky knew, to Russian supremacy on shore. He did not anticipate that the Tsar would use his rights of transit in order to threaten Constantinople with bombardment or occupation; he did not believe that such threats would be necessary. The mere proximity of Russia's battleships, steaming to and fro unchallenged in front of the Turkish capital, would be quite enough. Russia would be mistress of the city as of the Straits, in fact if not in form, and a 'prodigious stride' would have been taken towards the 'extinction of the present Ottoman position'.¹ With the consequent enhancement of Russian power and prestige, Bulgaria and Roumania would experience a sense of growing insecurity, and would probably hasten to make their peace with St. Petersburg. In Kálnoky's judgment, therefore, a success by Russia on the issue of free passage would be decisive for the Near Eastern question.² For the Ballplatz to purchase an Austro-Russian entente would not simply involve, as Aehrenthal argued, an exchange of limited concessions, and satisfaction of the Tsar's amour propre in Bulgaria.³ It would involve as well a major Austriensacrifice leading to Russian domination of the eastern Balkans,

¹ Monson to Rosebery, No. 17 Secret, 24 Jan. 1894, F.O. 78/4592; Memorandum by Kálnoky on a conversation between Kálnoky and Monson, Strictly Confidential, dated 18 Jan. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Ibid.; Kálnoky to Deym, No. 1 Secret, 25 Jan. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174; cf. Paget to Rosebery, No. 2 Confidential, 3 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4592 (copy in F.O. 7/1197); G.P. ix, No. 2129 (Prince Heinrich VII Reuss (German ambassador in Vienna) to Caprivi, 6 Jan. 1893).

³ For Aehrenthal's view, see Langer, loc. cit.

and thus to a Bismarckian partition of the Balkans between St. Petersburg and Vienna.

The idea of such an arrangement was one for which Kálmoky had not the slightest enthusiasm.¹ As a pis aller, admittedly, he did not rule it out. A Balkan settlement on the basis of partition would at least bring with it the advantages of peace and safety. As long as they desired the maintenance of the Dual Monarchy as a Great Power, the Germans would have to support it against any treacherous attempt by Russia to encroach on an agreed sphere of Austrian influence commanding the approaches to the Austrian frontier. Secure in the Near East, but unable to make further advances there without facing the certainty of united resistance, the Russians might be expected to devote their expansionist energies to rivalry with the British in Central Asia or China - regions reassuringly remote from any point where Austrian interests could be jeopardized. Thus, as an alternative to an isolated stand against Russia on the Straits Question, a policy of acquiescing in free passage and thereby in a Balkan partition was by no means intolerable. In the last resort, apparently, Kálmoky would have been prepared to adopt such a course.² What he naturally preferred, however, was not merely safety but supremacy - a continuation of the supremacy which Vienna had enjoyed in the Balkans since the fall of Bismarck in 1890. The strength of Austria's diplomatic position had arisen in part from her confidence in Great Britain's willingness to

¹ L. Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914, i. 79.

² Kálmoky to Deym, No. 1 Secret, 25 Jan.; Deym to Kálmoky, No. 7A-E Secret, 7 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174. (A translation of the latter document is printed in H. Temperley and Lillian M. Penson, Foundations of British Foreign Policy, 1792-1902, pp. 480-487.)

co-operate effectively, and in part from Wilhelm II's unqualified assurances of German military assistance in the event of Austrian mobilization on a Balkan issue.¹ Not until these foundations of his existing policy had been destroyed would Kálnoky be likely to abandon opposition to Russian designs on the Straits.

In 1892 and early 1893, neither the German nor the British props had as yet collapsed. It was only in September '93 that the German Kaiser finally withdrew his promises of military backing in South-Eastern Europe, and informed the Austrians that he would not fight for Constantinople.² In the previous autumn he had still been voicing entire approval of Austrian policy in the East, and the British ambassador at Vienna had received the impression that Kálnoky felt no uneasiness whatever regarding the stability of Wilhelm's views on foreign affairs.³ As for Great Britain, her attitude had already been rendered uncertain during July 1892 by the victory of Gladstone, who looked upon the Triple Alliance as a 'complication' from which London ought to stand 'absolutely aloof'.⁴ The new Prime Minister's distaste for the Habsburg Monarchy, and for Continental entanglements in

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, The Habsburg Monarchy, 1809-1918, p. 166; see also W.L. Langer, European Alliances and Alignments, 1871-1890, pp. 496, 499; M.P. Hornik, Baron Holstein: Studies in German Diplomacy, p. 13.

² G.P. ix, No. 2138 (Eulenburg to Caprivi, 20 Dec. 1893, with a minute by Kaiser Wilhelm); A.J.P. Taylor, The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918, p. 349.

³ Paget to Rosebery, No. 184 Very Confidential, 14 Oct. 1892, F.O. 7/1186.

⁴ Gladstone to Labouchere, 11 July 1891 (printed in A.L. Thorold, The Life of Henry Labouchere, p. 372).

general, was as notorious as it was profound.¹ On the other hand, the opinions of the Foreign Secretary were encouraging: at the very outset Rosebery stressed his determination to maintain continuity with the course followed by his predecessor.² It was plainly too early for the Austrian government to despair altogether of British support. Thus Kálnoky saw no immediate need to revise fundamentally the policy to which he was accustomed. He did decide, however, to keep the escape-hatch of Austro-Russian rapprochement as free of obstructions as possible, by cultivating warmer relations with St. Petersburg.³ This endeavour seemed all the more expedient because of an internal consideration - the growing political importance of the Young Czech movement in Bohemia. Along with other non-Polish Slav elements in the Empire, the Young Czechs were advocating reconciliation and even alliance with the neighbouring Slav Great Power.⁴ By displaying a friendly disposition towards the Tsar, Kálnoky could not only protect his line of diplomatic retreat, but in addition throw an inexpensive sop to domestic sentiments of Slav solidarity.⁵

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, The Habsburg Monarchy, 1809-1918, loc. cit; O.J. Hale, Publicity and Diplomacy, 1890-1914, p. 93.

² G.P. viii, No. 1736 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 20 Aug. 1892); Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Twenty-Five Years, i. 4.

³ W.L. Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1890-1894, p. 277.

⁴ Milbanke (Consul-General at Budapest) to Paget, No. 13, 25 Mar. 1893, F.O. 7/1203; Paget to Rosebery, No. 110 Strictly Confidential, 24 June 1893, F.O. 7/1198; A.J. May, The Habsburg Monarchy, 1867-1914, pp. 197-200, 225, 329. On the rise of the Young Czechs, see also R.W. Seton-Watson, A History of the Czechs and Slovaks, pp. 229, 232.

⁵ Cf. D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 39 (Decrais to Ribot, 3 Nov. 1892).

Accordingly, in a speech delivered in October 1892, he adopted with reference to Russia an unwontedly cordial tone, and spoke of the 'excellent' relations prevailing with the Russian Court¹ - a pronouncement which was successful in evoking a most favourable reaction at St. Petersburg.² For some time the improvement in the Russo-Austrian atmosphere continued. Comment published by leading newspapers in the Russian capital became reasonably friendly towards Vienna, and included open expression of a wish that the two Courts might draw closer together.³

Of these developments Rosebery appears to have been content to remain a passive spectator. What Great Britain had cause to fear was not an Austro-Russian flirtation, but rather tension that might end in the Austrians' becoming sufficiently frightened to pay the Russian price for a durable entente. While the relations between Vienna and St. Petersburg were amicable, in the autumn and part of the winter of 1892-'93, the British Foreign Secretary made no move. It was only after relations deteriorated, as they had done by the spring, that he judged the situation to require action.

The new Austro-Russian friction of 1893 arose from events in Bulgaria. The policy of the Principality during the winter was even more offensive to the Tsar than was usually the case.⁴ According to some reports in diplomatic quarters Austria had used her influence without avail in the cause of

¹ Ibid., No. 26 (Montmarin (French chargé d'affaires at Vienna) to Ribot, 7 Oct. 1892).

² Morier to Rosebery, No. 236, 5 Oct. 1892, F.O. 65/1421.

³ Morier to Rosebery, No. 286, 21 Nov. 1892, F.O. 65/1421.

⁴ For descriptions of the policy pursued by the Bulgarian régime in 1892-'93, see below, pp. 213, 365-366.

restraint,¹ but more reliable accounts indicated otherwise. Although Kálnoky disapproved of the Bulgarians' conduct, he was reluctant to expose himself to the charge of interference in what were technically their internal affairs, and therefore did little or nothing to deflect them from their course.² The failure of the Ballplatz to intervene vigorously at Sofia created fertile soil in which Russian suspicions could flourish. In March, apparently convinced of the existence of Austrian 'intrigues' in the Principality,³ Alexander III permitted the Russian press to open a violent campaign against Vienna. His irritation was increased when Francis Joseph, early in April, received in private audience the Bulgarian Premier Stambouloff.⁴ As an evident result of the Tsar's belief that Vienna was responsible for Bulgaria's proceedings, the Grand Duke Vladimir, who had made known his intention of returning home from Italy via the Austrian capital, was sent peremptory instructions to change his route.⁵

The Austro-Russian misunderstanding over Bulgaria was

¹ Vivian to Rosebery, No. 274 Confidential (with postscript), 20 Dec. 1892, F.O. 45/684; cf. D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 65 (Decrais to Ribot, 12, 13 and 14 Dec. 1892).

² Ibid.; Rosebery to Barrington (chargé d'affaires at Vienna), No. 135 Confidential, 12 Dec., F.O. 7/1183; Barrington to Rosebery, No. 218, 13 Dec. 1892, F.O. 7/1186.

³ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 185 (Decrais to Develle, 16 Mar. 1893); cf. Malet to Rosebery, No. 125 Very Confidential, 27 May 1893, F.O. 64/1294.

⁴ Paget to Rosebery, No. 67 Confidential, 25 Apr. 1893, F.O. 7/1197; Die Belgischen Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Weltkrieges, I. 376-379 (Despatch from Borchgrave, Belgian Minister in Vienna, dated 12 June 1893); Langer, p. 280.

⁵ Malet to Rosebery, No. 125 Very Confidential, 27 May 1893, F.O. 64/1294.

not in itself of great importance. Kálnoky was not alarmed; an optimist by nature,¹ he did not take Russia's hostility to Bulgarian policy very seriously. In the early spring the Austrians prudently set out to dissuade Sofia from baiting the Tsar further; Francis Joseph used the reception of Stambouloff as an occasion for giving advice along these lines, and Kálnoky spoke to the visitor in a similar sense.² The foreign minister had already made it clear to the Russians, however, that he remained unwilling to interfere in any way with the two 'internal' matters that chiefly annoyed Alexander: an amendment to the Bulgarian Constitution abolishing a requirement that all children of the Prince be raised in the Orthodox faith, and an impending marriage between Prince Ferdinand and a Roman Catholic princess which the amendment had been designed to facilitate. With the marriage of the Prince arranged, Stambouloff had no compelling motive to take additional steps provocative to the Russian ruler; and so long as he did not do so, Kálnoky was confident that St. Petersburg would express indignation only in words.³ The Austrian minister was in fact becoming increasingly sure that the Tsar and his cabinet wished to preserve peaceful relations with Vienna - a certainty which he had not felt in

¹ Monson to Rosebery, No. 158 Confidential, 16 Sept. 1893, F.O. 7/1198.

² Paget to Rosebery, No. 59 Confidential, 11 Apr.; No. 61 Confidential, 12 Apr. 1893, F.O. 7/1197; cf. G.P. ix, No. 2133 (Prince Heinrich VII Reuss to Caprivi, 15 Apr. 1893).

³ Paget to Rosebery, No. 42, 11 Mar.; No. 43, 14 Mar. 1893, F.O. 7/1197; D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 190 (Decrais to Develle, 21 Mar. 1893). For the text of the relevant provision of the original Constitution, see C.E. Black, The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Bulgaria, p. 294.

1890 or 1891.¹ This change of opinion may have been due in part to the fact that Austrian Military Intelligence had by now grown more sceptical than its British counterpart regarding the true offensive power of the Tsar's army. During 1892-'93 about a dozen Austrian staff officers of Slav extraction had been at work as spies in Southern and South-Western Russia, and they had brought back uniformly encouraging reports: that the Russian forces in those regions were suffering seriously from defective training, poor discipline and a 'bad spirit', socialist and nihilist doctrines having become widely disseminated among the troops.² If the reports were accurate, and if Russia's generals realized her weakness, St. Petersburg would obviously be likely to refrain from warlike adventures. Whether for this reason or for others, Kalnoky was moving towards the view - if indeed he had not already adopted it fully - that any Russian initiative even at the Straits would be diplomatic rather than military.³ In Vienna such faith in a Russian preference for peace seems to have been strongly held, for the evidence is conclusive that the scare which arose at the British Foreign Office in the summer of 1893 was not accompanied by any similar alarm at the Ballplatz.⁴

¹ Paget to Rosebery, No. 100, 4 June; No. 101, 6 June; No. 102 Confidential, 7 June 1893, F.O. 7/1198.

² Chermiside to the Director of Military Intelligence, 21 May 1893 (extract enclosed in Director of Military Intelligence to Foreign Office, 6 June 1893, F.O. 65/1456).

³ Monson to Rosebery, No. 17 Secret, 24 Jan. 1894, F.O. 78/4592.

⁴ Monson to Rosebery, No. 245 Most Confidential, 13 Dec. 1893, F.O. 7/1199; cf. Monson to Rosebery, No. 158 Confidential, 16 Sept. 1893, F.O. 7/1198.

In early 1893, however, it still appeared natural at London to assume that a certain nervousness existed among Austrian officials as a result of the large Russian troop concentrations in the West.¹ The impression that such nervousness was present cannot have been weakened by the conspicuous eagerness of Francis Joseph, after his reception of Stambouloff, to make amends through courteous gestures for the offence which he had given to the Tsar.² To Rosebery the idea that friction over Bulgaria might transform Austrian uneasiness into alarm was by no means incredible, for he himself saw in the Principality a centre of considerable danger. The preparations made by Russia for a coup de main on Constantinople could also be used for another purpose: in March Stambouloff had alluded to the possibility of a Russian landing on the Bulgarian coast, and had asked unsuccessfully for a British promise of armed support in that eventuality.³ After the announcement of plans for a Russian Mediterranean squadron, Rosebery's attention was to be rivetted on the Straits, but at least as late as June he suspected that if the Russians struck a blow at anyone, it might well be against Stambouloff and Prince Ferdinand. It was with reference to the risk of an attack on Bulgaria that the Foreign Secretary wrote to the Queen on the 16th:

¹ Memorandum by Captain Grierson, 'Twenty Years of Russian Army Reform and the Present Distribution of the Russian Land Forces', dated January 1893 (received at the Foreign Office on 10 Apr. 1893), F.O. 65/1456.

² D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 218 (Decrais to Develle, 25 Apr. 1893); Paget to Rosebery, No. 67 Confidential, 25 Apr. 1893, F.O. 7/1197.

³ Dering to Rosebery, No. 50 Confidential, 27 Mar. 1893, F.O. 78/4506; Rosebery to Dering, No. 21, 6 Apr. 1893, F.O. 78/4505.

No one can tell how long the Emperor's pacific temperament can resist the forces that impel him to war. It may be tomorrow, it may be today, it may be not at all that war may come. With most Russian Emperors it would have been yesterday at latest. But it may come at any moment; when it does come it will light a European conflagration, involving possibly Great Britain.¹

Although Kálnoky had in the past made no secret of his conviction that Russia would not fight over Bulgaria,² Rosebery knew that in April, in trying to restrain Stambouloff from provocations, the Austrian statesman had adopted a tone suggestive of some disquiet as to the chances of a violent reaction from the Tsar.³ This tone might of course be explicable in terms of diplomatic tactics; yet, since Kálnoky had shown no interest in restraining the Bulgarians a few months before, there was ground for a suspicion that he might now be becoming genuinely anxious. How strongly such a suspicion was felt by Rosebery is unclear; what seems evident, however, is that by mid-May British diplomacy had among its objectives the strengthening of Austria's confidence in her own security. Notwithstanding his sense of a possible danger in Bulgaria, the Foreign Secretary assured an official of the Austrian embassy in London that the sole cloud on the international horizon was the problem of French activities in Siam - that everywhere else the outlook was satisfactorily peaceful.⁴ More important, an attempt was

¹ Rosebery to Queen Victoria, 16 June 1893 (printed in G.E. Buckle, The Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd ser., ii. 260-261).

² Paget to Rosebery, No. 2 Confidential, 3 Jan., F.O. 78/4592; No. 12 Confidential, 20 Jan. 1893, F.O. 7/1197.

³ Paget to Rosebery, No. 59 Confidential, 11 Apr. 1893, F.O. 7/1197.

⁴ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 17, 17 May 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

made to raise Austrian hopes of support from Great Britain, and perhaps also to warn Russia. On 13 May, taking advantage of a farewell speech to members of the British colony in Vienna, the retiring ambassador - Sir A. Paget - spoke of the existence of a 'natural alliance' between the British Empire and the Danubian Monarchy. There was no question, he said, on which their views or interests were divergent. The two were united in love of peace and in readiness to contribute towards its maintenance; they both desired the continuance of the European status quo - 'especially in the East, where they wish for the freedom of the Balkan States from foreign interference, and the national and peaceful development of these States'.¹

Kálnoky would have liked to turn British talk about a 'natural alliance' into a discussion of clearly defined commitments, but he played his cards badly. As the future was to prove, his one chance of obtaining a commitment from Rosebery was to show fright and appear to be contemplating an arrangement with Russia. This he did not do in 1893: instead he revealed both to the foreign affairs committees of the Austrian and Hungarian Delegations, and in private to Paget, his belief in Russia's pacific intentions.² To the German government, now engaged in an alarmist campaign for passage of its Army Bill, Kálnoky's unconcealed optimism was an embarrassment and a source of irritation.³ To

¹ Paget to Rosebery, No. 81, 13 May 1893, F.O. 7/1197; cf. D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 239 (Marchand (French chargé d'affaires at Vienna) to Develle, 15 May 1893).

² Paget to Rosebery, No. 100, 4 June; No. 101, 6 June; No. 102 Confidential, 7 June 1893, F.O. 7/1198.

³ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 261 (Decrais to Develle, 10 June 1893).

Rosebery, by contrast, it was thoroughly welcome.¹ Although he was less optimistic himself, the fact that the Ballplatz thought as it did meant that he was unlikely to have to face any serious pressure from that quarter for a concrete promise of assistance in war. Almost certainly the Foreign Secretary had never planned to go beyond generalities, and now he had a reduced incentive to do so. He confined himself to assuring the Austrian ambassador in London, Count Deym, that he agreed with everything Paget had said, that British and Austrian interests in the Balkans were considered to be identical by Liberals as well as by Conservatives, that Gladstone was not interfering to any important degree with the conduct of foreign policy, and finally that his, Rosebery's, line of policy was fully accepted by the cabinet.² In these statements lay most of the positive aspects of the Anglo-Austrian conversations of June 1893, the remainder of which consisted largely of Rosebery's saying 'No' to Austrian requests for precision.

Deym's efforts to obtain a definition of the 'natural alliance' fell into two distinct parts. Paget had spoken of the Balkan States, but the Austrians, recognizing the superficial unpleasantness over Bulgaria for what it was, understood that the threat to the independence of the Balkan peoples was only an indirect one - arising from Russian designs on the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. Deym therefore began by pointing out that if London and Vienna had identical

¹ Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 21, 7 June 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

² Deym to Kálnoky, Secret, 14 June 1893 (translation printed as Document 186 in H. Temperley and Lillian M. Penson, Foundations of British Foreign Policy, 1792-1902, pp. 473-474).

interests, Great Britain must share Austria's interest in the protection of Constantinople from the Tsar. He posed a point-blank question: if the Russians made a bid for control of the Ottoman capital, would the British intervene to frustrate their attack? Rosebery declined to undertake the desired obligation.¹ Apart altogether from the difficulty of honouring such a pledge in the existing state of British naval power, he had to take into account the attitude of his colleagues. There could be no hope that a Liberal cabinet would consent to deviate from the traditional principle to which even Salisbury had adhered, that a British government should not commit itself to war before the casus belli had arisen. Thus Rosebery could have given the Austrians satisfaction only in the form of a secret personal promise made behind the backs of his fellow ministers. This course entailed a grave risk: if some leakage of information, some indiscretion at Vienna or perhaps Berlin, brought the matter to his colleagues' knowledge, he would have no option but to resign in disgrace. He could do no more with safety than express an opinion regarding the probable reaction of the British public to a Russian move against the Straits:

There is no doubt [Deym quoted Rosebery as saying] that the first news of a Russian attack on Constantinople would raise a general cry of war in England, and that if the same mood prevailed in England as is prevalent now, the cry of war would be so loud that the voice of those who are against any intervention in Continental policy and are in favour of peace à tout prix would be drowned and overwhelmed.

'But, as I said,' the Foreign Secretary concluded, 'I could not undertake an obligation of immediate action on the part of England.'²

¹ Ibid. pp. 257-258.

² Ibid.

Thus did Rosebery attempt to create the impression that action other than 'immediate', ordered after public opinion had had opportunity to make itself felt, would be so probable as to be virtually certain. Even with the French menace left out of consideration, the impression was one quite divorced from naval reality as far as defence of Constantinople was concerned. At the Admiralty it was thought fundamental to such an enterprise that the intervening squadron should reach the Black Sea in time to prevent the enemy from disembarking.¹ After Russian troops were ashore, the situation could admittedly still be retrieved if British vessels were able to cut their lines of supply and reinforcement from the Black Sea ports;² but a delay while public opinion was bringing its pressure to bear, a delay sufficiently long to permit a hostile expeditionary force to land, would also be long enough for the fast Russian minelayers of which Rosebery had heard³ to close the passage through the Bosphorus. In this case, although the British might declare war and fight Russia elsewhere, they could do nothing to protect the Ottoman capital.

Instead of raising this argument, the Austrians allowed themselves to be fobbed off with the Foreign Secretary's prediction of intervention by popular demand. Being inclined to the belief that Russia wanted peace - that the question of an attempted coup de main, and therefore of immedi-

¹ Minute by the Director of Naval Intelligence, dated 5 Jan. 1892 (with War Office to Admiralty, 2 Jan. 1892); cf. Admiralty to War Office, Secret, 30 Jan. 1892, Adm. I/7135; see also above, p. 158.

² Cf. Salisbury to Simmons, 21 Sept.; Confidential, 30 Sept. 1891, F.O. 358/6.

³ Above, pp. 167-168.

ate action, was likely to prove academic - Kálnoky had a good ground for willingness to content himself with a guarantee of British co-operation on the diplomatic plane. Thus the second phase of Deym's campaign for an agreed definition of the 'natural alliance' consisted of an effort to revive the understanding on common interests and objectives which had been secretly concluded between Salisbury and the Austrian and Italian governments in December 1887.¹ This idea, too, Rosebery declined to entertain - even when Deym proposed, as a substitute for another formal exchange of notes, a mere discussion of the various clauses of the tripartite agreement with a view to determining the extent to which the Foreign Secretary accepted them.² Here the naval factor was less important; it was almost solely the isolationism of the cabinet which stood in the way of a favourable reply to the Austrian request. Liberal policy, as described by Sir William Harcourt in 1891, was based not only on the refusal of military or naval commitments but also on 'absolute disengagement from continental combinations of every kind', and on a desire to maintain the 'right of England to act as her interests demanded when the occasion arose, unfettered by any alliances or understandings of any description'.³ As an Opposition the Liberals had given Salisbury what Harcourt called 'toleration and support' in foreign affairs, but they had done so under the impression that his attitude,

¹ For the terms of the agreement, see A.F. Pribram, The Secret Treaties of Austria-Hungary, i. 124-133.

² Deym to Kálnoky, Secret, 28 June 1893 (translation printed as Document 187 in Temperley and Penson, pp. 475-477).

³ Harcourt to Gladstone, 11 July 1891 (printed in A.G. Gardiner, Life of Sir William Harcourt, ii. 127-128).

although obviously benevolent towards the Triple Alliance, was one of 'neutrality'.¹ In the election of 1892, despite the questions which Labouchere had raised from time to time in the House of Commons about rumours of an Anglo-Italian accord,² Gladstone as well as Rosebery explicitly excluded Salisbury's conduct of foreign relations from the sphere of party controversy.³ The Liberals came to power publicly pledged to continue the policy of their predecessors - but only, of course, as far as that policy was publicly known.⁴ Rumour had not been enough to destroy the myth of Salisbury's 'isolation',⁵ and it was because of the survival of this myth that he had been able to pursue his actual course relatively undisturbed by the Gladstonians. If Rosebery had attempted in 1893 to resurrect the agreement of December 1887, the argument of continuity would have carried no weight with most of his colleagues.

On some matters, by the summer of 1893, Rosebery had proved able to overcome the influence of the Prime Minister and of other opponents in the cabinet, and follow the policies preferred by himself. That he should have succeeded in so doing is not surprising. Gladstone was deeply preoccupied with Irish Home Rule,⁶ and headed a ministry resting pre-

¹ Ibid.

² Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd ser., cccxxii. 152-153, 377, 557-558; cccxxxviii. 850-851; cccliii. 1464-1466.

³ P. Knaplund, Gladstone's Foreign Policy, pp. 253-254.

⁴ Anonymous, The Foreign Policy of Lord Rosebery, p. 74.

⁵ Cf. Gardiner, ii. 127.

⁶ G.W.E. Russell, William Ewart Gladstone, p. 261; R.B. McCallum, 'From 1852-1895', in E. Halévy, A History of

cariously on a meagre parliamentary majority of which the Irish were a vital component. In view of Rosebery's stature and the weakness of the Liberal hold on office, Gladstone could not lightly have allowed him to resign.¹ In persuading him to accept the seals of the Foreign Office in the first place the Prime Minister had experienced great difficulties.² Rosebery was not in good health, and felt what seems to have been a sincere reluctance to undertake the burdens of official responsibility.³ His entry into the government having been a concession to pleading friends rather than the fulfilment of avowed ambition, he was in an unusually strong position to threaten resignation convincingly. He could be retained, it appeared, only by being pampered. To avoid losing him, to avoid prejudicing the Irish programme, Gladstone had to put up with much that he did not like: 'his total and gross misconception of the relative positions of the two offices were respectively held, and . . . his really outrageous assumption of power apart from both the First Minister and from the Cabinet'.⁴ In the

the English People in the Nineteenth Century, iv. 476; F. Gosses, The Management of British Foreign Policy before the First World War, p. 130.

¹ P. Magnus, Gladstone, p. 403.

² Gladstone to Ponsonby, 13 Aug. 1892 (printed in P. Guedalla, The Queen and Mr. Gladstone, ii. 437); Gladstone to Mrs. Gladstone, Secret, 15 Aug. 1892 (printed in A.T. Bassett, Gladstone to His Wife, p. 256); Sir C. Petrie, The Powers Behind the Prime Ministers, p. 46.

³ Rosebery to Spencer, Confidential, 3 Aug. 1892, Spencer Papers; A. Ponsonby, Henry Ponsonby: His Life from His Letters, p. 262; Jane T. Stoddart, The Earl of Rosebery, K.G., p. 114.

⁴ Magnus, loc. cit.; cf. Gosses, p. 131.

controversy of 1892 over the future of Uganda, Rosebery was successful in averting the abandonment advocated by Gladstone, Harcourt and the 'Little Englanders'.¹ In the case of Egypt he is said to have made continuance of the British occupation an explicit condition of his joining the ministry,² and in the crisis of January 1893 he was able to obtain cabinet sanction for the increase in the garrison despite initially violent resistance from the Gladstonian group. The Prime Minister himself told Harcourt on this occasion that he might as well be asked to 'put a torch to Westminster Abbey' as to authorize the dispatch of additional troops;³ but it was realized that Rosebery's resignation on such an issue would wreck the government and the Home Rule cause - so, in the end, Gladstone capitulated.⁴ While he seems to have had somewhat less freedom in the handling of the Egyptian question than in most Foreign Office matters,⁵ the Foreign Secretary got substantially his own way on the lower Nile as well as in Uganda.⁶

Rosebery's victories on the problems of Uganda and Egypt, however, did not by any means imply that his strength

¹ Gardiner, ii. 188-198; 312; J. Renwick, The Life and Work of Lord Rosebery, p. 89.

² E.T. Raymond, The Man of Promise, Lord Rosebery, p. 121.

³ H.G. Hutchinson, Private Diaries of the Rt. Hon. Sir Algernon West, G.C.B., p. 123.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 124, 126-127.

⁵ For evidence of cabinet supervision regarding Egypt, see Cabinet Minute by Gladstone, dated 7 Nov. 1892, Add. MS. 44648; Gladstone to Harcourt, 5 Feb.; Harcourt to Gladstone, Confidential, 5 Feb. 1893, Add. MS. 44203.

⁶ See also below, pp. 374-375.

in the cabinet was sufficient for him to impose his will regarding a projected diplomatic arrangement with a Continental Power. Resignation on Egypt would have destroyed the government, but resignation over the rejection of a formal entente with Austria would have had little chance of producing the same result. Whereas a very large segment of public and parliamentary opinion was certain to rally to the side of one who championed the cause of Great Britain's oceanic and imperial might, particularly when the route to India was at stake, few people were likely to display enthusiasm for restricting British freedom of action by commitments - even of a purely diplomatic nature - to a European military monarchy. In a contest between Gladstone and Rosebery on the latter issue, the Prime Minister would have held the winning hand - the ability to appeal to tradition, to pride in the splendour of isolated greatness. Understanding the limitations of his power, the Foreign Secretary never wavered from the view that despite the independence which Gladstone allowed him in the day-to-day conduct of affairs, his position was not so strong that he could afford to confront the cabinet with a demand for an Anglo-Austrian or Anglo-Italian agreement.¹ There is no evidence that he deliberately belittled his own authority in order to have a pretext for being non-committal; on the contrary, even when he did decide in 1894 to give Vienna more definite assurances, he remained as firm as ever in asserting the undesirability of bringing the matter before his colleagues.² He realized

¹ Temperley and Penson, loc. cit.; Deym to Kálnoky, Secret, 29 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174; cf. W.L. Langer, The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902, i. 46.

² Temperley and Penson, p. 483; Deym to Kálnoky, Tek. No. 5 Secret, 31 Jan. 1894, W.S.A. P.A.viii/174.

that in seeking to make his recognition of common Anglo-Austrian interests more meaningful by alluding to the 'complete agreement' of the cabinet with his general policy,¹ he had been painting a misleading picture. Justifying to Deym his refusal to revive the accord of 1887, he found it necessary to admit the truth - that the cabinet was by no means united in its outlook on external problems. His ability to preserve the substance of an alignment with the Triple Alliance depended, he hinted, on his doing nothing which could bring latent dissensions into the open. While an identity of interests between Great Britain and Austria existed in actual fact, and was not, he maintained, seriously disputed by anybody, an attempt to define this 'natural alliance' in a cabinet discussion might lead to the 'recording of a divergence in view'.²

As in the matter of a commitment to armed intervention at Constantinople, therefore, Rosebery knew that he could comply with Austria's wishes regarding the agreement of 1887 only by personal action without his colleagues' consent or knowledge. There was no more reason for him to take the risk of exposure and enforced resignation³ in the latter case than in the former. The advantage of the agreement to Salisbury had lain largely in the fact that it gave him security from the danger that the Austrians might be intimidated into rapprochement with Russia, leaving Great Britain isolated.⁴ In the mood prevailing at Vienna in the summer of 1893, that eventuality was remote. Rosebery confined himself

¹ Temperley and Penson, p. 474.

² Ibid., p. 476.

³ See *ibid.*, pp. 476-477.

⁴ C.L. Smith, The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople, 1886-1891, p. 100.

to repeating an assurance previously given to Italy, that he was as much interested as his predecessor in the preservation of the status quo in the Mediterranean. Of the notes exchanged in 1887, he said, he had 'never taken cognizance', though he was aware of their existence. As a question might be asked in Parliament, he wished to remain in a position to deny officially that he had any knowledge of them.¹

Confronted with Rosebery's firm refusal to discuss the terms of the Mediterranean agreement, Count Deym wisely refrained from pressing further the Austrian request. The Foreign Secretary had argued that the basis of Anglo-Austrian relations had to be not formal accords but reciprocal trust. After expressing understanding of his interlocutor's difficulties, Deym duly assured him of Kálnoky's continuing confidence.² Discussions between Rosebery and the ambassador do not regain importance to the present narrative until the late autumn, by which time the situation was markedly different from that of the early summer.

It was in the autumn, after the German prop of their Balkan policy collapsed, that the Austrians first became genuinely alarmed. Germany had promised Vienna her backing against Russia at a time when Great Britain too seemed to be intimately and reliably aligned with the Danubian Monarchy. After the defeat of Salisbury in 1892, some concern had immediately arisen at the Wilhelmstrasse lest Great

¹ Temperley and Penson, pp. 475-477. If it is assumed that Gladstone was telling the truth in a conversation which he had at Hawarden with the French ambassador in December 1892, Rosebery had already denied to the Prime Minister that any written agreement existed between Great Britain and Italy: D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 64 (Waddington to Ribot, 9 Dec. 1892).

² Temperley and Penson, p. 477.

Britain under Gladstone's leadership would be disinclined to act with vigour on the international stage. Although no abrupt change in British policy was anticipated, and it was realized that from the standpoint of continuity Rosebery was the best of possible Liberal Foreign Secretaries,¹ Berlin was uncomfortably conscious not only of the Gladstonians' hopes for improved relations with France, but also of the belief sometimes expressed in Liberal circles that London might avoid trouble on the approaches to India by leaving to the Central Powers the task of containing Russia in the Near East.² As a counterpoise to such tendencies, Rosebery's presence in the cabinet was valued;³ but, within a year of his taking office, his prestige was gravely impaired in German eyes by his handling of the Siam crisis.⁴ Berlin did not judge his Siamese policy fairly. The vital British need was that a buffer state should be kept in being between British and French possessions in Southeast Asia, and to this the Foreign Secretary secured French agreement in principle on 31 July 1893.⁵ A few days later Lord Randolph Churchill observed to Prince Bismarck at Kissingen that Rosebery had learned to 'ask for no more

¹ G.P. viii, No. 1733 (Memorandum by Raschdau of the German Foreign Office, dated 20 July 1892); No. 1732 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 19 July 1892).

² Ibid., No. 1733.

³ Cf. ibid., No. 1818 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 14 Jan. 1893).

⁴ E.M. Carroll, Germany and the Great Powers, 1866-1914: A Study in Public Opinion and Foreign Policy, pp. 322-324; Count J. Andrassy, Bismarck, Andrassy and Their Successors, p. 215.

⁵ Accounts and Papers, Siam No. 1 (1893), cix [C-7231], 798.

than he required, but to insist on getting what he required, and to treat with neglect what was not essential'. Bismarck, praising Rosebery highly, concurred with this judgment,¹ but the men now in power in Germany were less perspicacious. The unspectacular course of compromise - of delimiting a neutral zone through 'mutual sacrifices and concessions'² - was in their view a policy of feebleness and timidity, and their opinion of the practical value of Great Britain's friendship, affected already by the return of Gladstone, was lowered still further.³ Rosebery, it was concluded, lacked the will or the ability to overcome the Gladstonians' distaste for an energetic conduct of foreign affairs.⁴ This impression was not lessened by his unwillingness to place co-operation with Austria on a clearly defined basis, nor by the failure to uphold with spirit the British diplomatic position on the Bosphorus. In the Near East as in Siam London's policy appeared to be flabby, and the suspicion gained ground that British thinking was moving in the direction of supine acquiescence in a Russian conquest of Constantinople.⁵ To all this, moreover, was added growing uneasiness about the possible inadequacy of the British

¹ W.S. Churchill, Lord Randolph Churchill, ii. 478.

² Accounts and Papers, Treaty Series No. 18 (1893), cix. [C-7232], 102.

³ Carroll, *loc. cit.*; Andrassy, *loc. cit.*; L. Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914, i. 79.

⁴ G.P. viii, No. 1762 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 24 Oct. 1893); cf. *Ibid.*, No. 1761 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 27 Sept. 1893).

⁵ G.P. ix, No. 2135 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 6 Nov. 1893); No. 2136 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 28 Nov. 1893); No. 2137 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 6 Dec. 1893).

fleet.¹

The less support Germans expected from Great Britain, the more important did it become for them to reduce the risk of a clash with Russia. Nor could they ignore the increasing warmth of the relations between Russia and France. Whereas France held against them the durable grievance of Alsace-Lorraine, it was more than possible that through friendliness they might succeed in inducing Russia to draw back from the alignment with Paris which was potentially so dangerous to German security. Constantinople was not directly relevant to any vital German interest; except perhaps as the price for a reliable British commitment to Austria, an anti-Russian policy on the Bosphorus had no advantages sufficient to compensate Berlin for the burden of Russian enmity. The Kaiser's abandonment of his post-Bismarckian course, implied by his warning to Kálnoky that he would not face war over the fate of the Ottoman capital, was an entirely logical step in the circumstances of the autumn of 1893. If Russia took possession of the Bosphorus, Wilhelm advised his ally, Vienna should be content with compensation at Salonika.²

Not long after this pronouncement, the German ambassador in Turkey began openly avowing an unwillingness to co-operate with his Austrian colleague. In 1895, when Prince Radolin was transferred from Constantinople to St. Petersburg, the British ambassador remarked that from the time of Rado-

¹ Gosselin (chargé d'affaires at Berlin) to Rosebery, No. 261 Confidential, 4 Nov. 1893 (encloses Memorandum by Colonel Swaine, military attaché at Berlin, dated 4 Nov. 1893), F.O. 64/1295.

² G.P. ix, No. 2138 (Eulenburg to Caprivi, 20 Dec. 1893, with a minute by Kaiser Wilhelm).

lin's appointment to his Turkish post in 1892, the German embassy had stopped working in the same intimate collaboration as before with the British, Austrians and Italians. It had devoted its attention almost exclusively to promoting the commercial interests of German nationals, detaching itself more and more from all concern for political questions, with the result that the Triple Alliance had ceased to exist 'as an active force in Eastern politics'.¹ This statement of the case contains much truth, but in its failure to bring out the significance of the events of 1893 it is oversimplified and misleading. The railway incident at the beginning of the year afforded proof of an intense German interest in economic rivalry, and Radolin's misunderstanding of Ford's proceedings would not have been possible had the two ambassadors enjoyed the close relations which had prevailed between their predecessors, Radowitz and White. Yet, although the Germans were plainly ready to believe the worst of the British on very flimsy evidence, there was still no clearly perceptible trend towards an abandonment on their part of the Anglo-Austrian cause on the Bosphorus. Radolin recognized without demur, for example, the importance of the controversy over free passage of the Straits for Russian war materials,² and in February, the Kaula uproar at an end, Sir Arthur Nicolson was able to write of the British, Austrian, Italian and German ambassadors as constituting a 'happy family'.³

¹ Currie to Kimberley, No. 207 Confidential, 2 Apr. 1895, F.O. 78/4610.

² Ford to Rosebery, No. 32 Confidential, 30 Jan. 1893, F.O. 78/4592.

³ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Feb. 1893, Villiers Papers.

It was not on Radolin's appointment, but in the summer and autumn of 1893, that the decisive change occurred which destroyed the Triple Alliance at Constantinople. By November the 'happy family' was a memory. Radolin was now arguing that there was 'scarcely a point in Europe' where it was less necessary for the Alliance to stand united, and that in many instances the Eastern interests of its members were actually divergent. The Austrian ambassador Baron Calice, by persistently haranguing his German colleague in an opposite sense, succeeded only in annoying him. Calice, as Nicolson observed, had 'daily, for many years, burnt candles before the altar' of the Dreibund, and the new situation caused him deep distress and discomfiture. Despairingly he lamented that he was being left 'alone in the breach' to defend the 'interests of Central Europe'.¹

Kálnoky's thinking, too, was now influenced by a sense of isolation and danger. Not only had he lost the support of Germany on the Bosphorus, but he had come to share German suspicions that Great Britain might well remain inactive in the face of a Russian initiative in that quarter.² Although he did not think that such an initiative was to be expected immediately, he warned the British ambassador at Vienna that there would be 'not more than enough' time for Great Britain to make 'all necessary preparation'. The ambassador was much impressed by the change in Kálnoky's tone since the summer. Up to the time of the Toulon visit, he reported, the Austrian minister had expressed confidence that there was nothing in European politics to inspire grave apprehension as to the

¹ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 25 Nov. 1893, Villiers Papers; cf. Monson to Rosebery, No. 245 Most Confidential, 13 Dec. 1893, F.O. 7/1199.

² G.P., ix, No. 2136; No. 2141.

future. Now, however, the Austrian's mind seemed to be full of the Russian menace at Constantinople.¹ Part of the explanation lay in the welcome which the Russians had received in France. Whereas Rosebery, having had his scare beforehand, looked on the Toulon festivities as an anti-climax that signified no fundamental darkening of the international outlook, the hitherto optimistic Kálnoky believed that because of them Russia would be able to count in future with much greater certainty on French assistance in any enterprise which she might care to undertake.²

German indifference, apparent British infirmity of purpose, an enhanced probability of a forward policy on the part of Russia - such were the elements of the Near Eastern situation as Kálnoky had to face it. In addition he was looking uneasily over his shoulder at Italy, for the risk of an Italian defection to the Franco-Russian group seemed to be increasing.³ If Rome were to jettison its policy of Italo-French rivalry in Africa, its obvious alternative course would be one of irredentism, implying hostility to the Habsburg Monarchy.⁴ Whatever the Italians did, it would remain foolhardy for Austria to try and oppose Russian designs on the Straits by herself; but if she were being

¹ Monson to Rosebery, No. 245 Most Confidential, 13 Dec.; No. 255 Most Confidential, 19 Dec. 1893, F.O. 7/1199.

² Monson to Rosebery, No. 190 Confidential, 1 Nov. 1893, F.O. 7/1199; Rosebery to Monson, No. 141 Confidential, 13 Nov. 1893, F.O. 7/1196.

³ Kálnoky to Deym, No. 2 Strictly Confidential, 7 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

⁴ Malet to Rosebery, No. 306 Confidential, 20 Dec. 1893, F.O. 64/1295. Cf. Baron von Mitis, The Life of the Crown Prince Rudolph of Habsburg, pp. 125-126.

threatened with a stab in the back, her position in negotiations for a Balkan partition - a partition which free passage for Russian warships would render inevitable - would plainly be prejudiced.

'If our group cannot be reconstructed in such a way that we stand close together with England and Italy,' wrote Kálnoky to the gloomy Calice, 'and can safely count on Germany's support, then I also share the view that we shall not be able to make a stand against the Russo-French combination in Constantinople.'¹ It required no unusual diplomatic acumen to see that the key to such a reconstruction had to be sought in London. The problem of keeping the Italians in the Triple Alliance was essentially one of securing a British commitment to their cause. Especially if the British stood aloof, Germany could not be expected to stake her national destiny in a great European war for the sake of Italy's African aspirations;² and in any case it was only the British fleet, not the German army, which could protect the Italian coasts. As for the question of regaining Germany's aid in the Near East, the prospect of unequivocal and energetic British support for Italy in the Mediterranean, and for Italy and Austria at Constantinople, would give Vienna a potent argument with which to persuade the Germans to resume their backing of Austrian policy. At the worst, even if Berlin still held back, an association with Great Britain and Italy alone would be less intolerable than the total isolation now threatening. In December, accordingly, the Austrians opened at the British capital a

¹ Kálnoky to Calice, 15 Dec. 1893 (quoted in M.P. Hornik, 'The Anglo-Belgian Agreement of 12 May 1894', English Historical Review, lvii. 239).

² Andrassy, pp. 198-199.

campaign with a dual purpose: to obtain firm assurances for their Italian ally,¹ and to draw the Liberal ministry into a vigorous effort, through collaboration with the Triple Alliance, to restore Great Britain's vanished influence on the Bosphorus and frustrate Franco-Russian ambitions. Kálnoky explained to Deym:

Ich kenne die englischen Verhältnisse zu genau um den englischen Staatsmännern einen Vorwurf daraus machen zu wollen, dass sie sich ausser Stande erklärten, unsere jahrelangen Bemühungen den russischen von Frankreich unterstützten Intrigen im europäischen Orient bei Zeiten eine kräftige Gruppe entgegenzustellen, eine sichere Stütze zu bieten; so dass heute . . . die Position in Constantinopel eine sehr bedrohte geworden ist und der noch unter Sir W. White sehr bedeutende englische Einfluss heute kaum mehr zählt. Aber ich kann nicht umhin auch meinerseits die Überzeugung auszusprechen, dass für England der psychologische Moment gekommen ist, nicht nur seine Marine zu verstärken, sondern sich überhaupt darüber klar zu werden, ob es seine traditionelle politische Machtstellung behaupten will oder ob es sich damit abfinden kann, sich aus dem Mittelmeer . . . verdrängen zu lassen. . . Da es undenkbar ist, dass man sich in England für letzteres entscheiden könnte, so wird das britische Cabinet sich darüber klar werden müssen, dass es gleichzeitig mit der Stärkung seiner maritimen Macht auch an die Stärkung seiner politischen Position wird gehen müssen.²

Rosebery readily admitted to Deym the great deterioration in the British position in the Near East since the days of White,³ but he failed to draw the conclusion for which Kálnoky had hoped - that the Foreign Office should at last

¹ Kálnoky to Deym, No. 2 Strictly Confidential, 7 Dec. 1893; Deym to Kálnoky, No. 37A-I Secret, 13 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Kálnoky to Deym, No. 3 Strictly Confidential, 7 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 38A-E Secret, 22 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

abandon its free hand. In one sense, indeed, there was less reason than there had been in June for him to risk the displeasure of his colleagues by committing himself to diplomatic solidarity at Constantinople. Germany's announcement of her withdrawal from the Eastern political scene had made it more urgent for Austria to obtain a guarantee of British support,¹ but at the same time it had reduced the advantage which Rosebery could expect to derive from pledging that support. Neither the Austrians nor the Italians carried any important weight in Turkey;² except as a means of forestalling an Austro-Russian rapprochement, an arrangement with Vienna and Rome that did not include Berlin had little to commend it. Rumours were beginning to circulate widely that an Austro-Russian rapprochement, on the basis of a Balkan partition, might in fact be in the offing, and the British ambassador in Vienna warned that the possibility of a reversal of Austria's foreign policy ought not to be ignored. But, while remarking that there were 'personages in a high position in this Empire to whom a good understanding with Russia would be infinitely more agreeable than the present arrangements with Germany', the ambassador added that as Kálnoky was not one of them, he would probably be led to contemplate such a change in course only by 'overwhelming' anxiety.³ Deym was not using the threat of an Austrian volte-face in his conversations with Rosebery in London, and the Foreign Secretary did not regard the situa-

¹ Monson to Rosebery, No. 267 Secret and Confidential, 29 Dec. 1893, F.O. 7/1199.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 25 Nov. 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ Monson to Rosebery, No. 267 Secret and Confidential, 29 Dec. 1893, F.O. 7/1199.

tion as one sufficiently dangerous to demand the drastic cure of British commitment to Vienna in any form.¹

That Berlin could be brought back into the Near Eastern fold, unless Great Britain undertook obligations extending to warlike action, Rosebery did not believe. The Foreign Secretary's attitude towards Germany at this period was an amalgam of irritation and deep distrust. In the summer, citing their behaviour in the railway controversy, he had reproached the Germans for 'lack of friendliness';² and the durable bad impression which the Kaula incident had produced was not counteracted by German conduct in the autumn. Notwithstanding his own belief in the necessity of more warships, Rosebery did not appreciate lengthy lectures from Berlin about the supposedly hopeless impotence of the existing British Mediterranean squadrons, the 'sorry figure' which Great Britain might therefore cut in a naval war, and the absence of any excuse for a British government which placed national honour in jeopardy.³ 'The German Government is evidently uncomfortable,' wrote the Foreign Secretary to Sir Edward Malet, 'and one of their methods of easing their discomfort is to complain of our fleet and our government and everything about us.'⁴ More important than Rosebery's

¹ Rosebery to Malet, Private, 3 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/3.

² Villiers to Malet, Private, 7 June 1893 (bound by error with the correspondence of January 1893), F.O. 343/3; cf. G.P. viii, No. 2017 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 2 June 1893).

³ Gosselin (chargé d'affaires at Berlin) to Rosebery, No. 261 Confidential, 4 Nov. 1893 (encloses Memorandum by Colonel Swaine, military attaché at Berlin, dated 4 Nov. 1893); cf. Malet to Rosebery, No. 285 Secret, 27 Nov. 1893, F.O. 64/1295; Private, 2 Dec. 1893, F.O. 343/13.

⁴ Rosebery to Malet, Private, 6 Dec. 1893, F.O. 343/3.

of signs'.¹
 irritation, however, was his recognition of the reasons for Germany's discomfort - her 'distrust' of Italy and her suspicions even of Austria. At any moment, he feared, Berlin might begin seeking 'fresh entrées'.¹

Malet tried to calm his chief, arguing that there would be no 'politique d'aventure' on Germany's part as long as Caprivi remained Chancellor, and that even if the Germans desired a change, as they did not, there was no other political combination open to them 'at present' than the Triple Alliance.² Yet Rosebery did not altogether cease to be uneasy about German policy.³ The European scene appeared to be in a state of flux, a state in which familiar friendships might collapse at any instant, familiar antagonisms be submerged, and familiar arrangements superseded. Even Gladstone, not predisposed to emphasize foreign dangers, was giving way to wild imaginings: France and Germany, he suggested, might sink their differences over Alsace-Lorraine and combine in an assault on Belgium and the Netherlands.⁴ There is no evidence that Rosebery shared this particular apprehension, but he knew that the future usefulness and cohesiveness of the Triple Alliance had become subjects of doubt and debate in Continental capitals,⁵ and the mutual suspicions with which the coalition was afflicted seemed to him the 'worst

¹ Ibid.

² Malet to Rosebery, Private, 9 Dec. 1893, F.O. 343/13.

³ Rosebery to Malet, Private, 3 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/3.

⁴ H.G.Hutchinson, Private Diaries of the Rt. Hon. Sir Algernon West, G.C.B., p. 221.

⁵ Wolff to Rosebery, No. 311A Secret and Confidential, 17 Nov. 1893, F.O. 72/1927; cf. Monson to Rosebery, No. 267 Secret and Confidential, 29 Dec. 1893, F.O. 7/1199.

of signs'.¹

Writing to Malet about the 'somewhat parlous condition' of the Dreibund, the Foreign Secretary mentioned two theoretically possible remedies: outright British adhesion to the Alliance, or alternatively a secret treaty between Great Britain and Italy.² Germany as much as Austria would have welcomed British assurances to the Italians³ - not only because the loyalty of Rome to its present allies could thereby be rendered certain, but because London, having assumed the Italian burden and become involved by it in intensified friction with France, might then be expected to draw closer to Berlin.⁴ Not sharing the traditional prejudice of his party against commitments,⁵ Rosebery put forward no personal objection in principle either to an agreement with Italy or to membership in a new quadruple coalition, but inevitably he had to rule both of them out as being beyond 'the range of practical politics for a British Minister at this time'.⁶ His colleagues would not approve a binding pledge of any sort, and it was only a binding pledge from Great Britain that could convince the Germans that it would be worth their while to stand by their friends in regions so remote from immediate German interests as the Near East and the Mediterranean. Without giving some commitment to warlike action,

¹ Rosebery to Malet, Private, 3 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/3.

² Ibid. 'to his duty'.⁶ The depth of the Foreign Secretary's

³ Szögyény to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 94 Confidential, 16 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

⁴ Andrassy, pp. 198-200.

⁵ Cf. Lord Newton, Lord Lansdowne, p. 227.

⁶ Rosebery to Malet, Private, 3 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/3.

1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

Rosebery did not see what he could do to restore stability to the Dreibund;¹ and as long as the Dreibund remained in its existing disarray, the idea of a personal commitment to diplomatic co-operation ^{with} ~~in~~ Austria on the Bosphorus had, as has been shown, no advantage commensurate with the risk of difficulties in the cabinet. His policy at Constantinople, the Foreign Secretary informed Malet, was to 'act cordially' with the Austrians - 'but there, too, though our interests are clear, our hands must be free: we must co-operate, but not be handcuffed to anyone.'²

Within that limitation, Rosebery did the best he could to give the Austrians confidence not only in Great Britain's willingness to support their Near Eastern diplomacy, but also in the ability of the British embassy to make its support effective. He did not admit to Deym that the weakening of the British position at Constantinople since White's death had been due to any deep-seated causes: instead he attributed it largely to the egregious Sir Clare Ford³ - whose defects of temperament, in conjunction with the distraction of amorous peccadilloes, had certainly not been without their importance.⁴ Ford's transfer to Rome had already been decided upon in October,⁵ and Rosebery made it clear to the Austrians that he was determined not to have another like him in Turkey, but to send out a man who would be 'equal to his duty'.⁶ The depth of the Foreign Secretary's

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 38A-E Secret, 22 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

⁴ Above, pp. 60-67.

⁵ Above, p. 68.

⁶ Deym to Kálnoky, Secret, 13 Dec.; No. 38A-E Secret, 22 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

determination may be judged from the selection which he made. For a time the Austrian embassy in London was expecting the appointment of Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, who had negotiated the famous though futile Egyptian Convention of 1887;¹ but Rosebery had a more spectacular choice in mind. He hesitated in making it final, for he was extremely loath to lose the services in London of a valued and experienced expert.² Ultimately, however, he took the plunge, and made known the appointment to Constantinople of Sir Philip Currie, the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office.³

The selection of Currie, reported Sir Arthur Nicolson, was 'very well received' at the Ottoman capital; and Nicolson himself, considering that Currie possessed in full measure the energy, firmness and dignity which Ford had lacked, hailed it with delight.⁴ The Austrians too were highly pleased: they had been very conscious of Ford's deficiencies,⁵ and Kálnoky, like Nicolson, attached much importance to having a strong and forceful personality as the representative of Great Britain on the Bosphorus.⁶ Deym hin-

¹ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 35A-E Confidential, 15 Nov. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

² Deym to Kálnoky, No. 38A-E Secret, 22 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174; No. 38D Confidential, 22 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

³ Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 39, 20 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

⁴ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 1 Jan.; Private and Personal, 12 Feb.; Private and Personal, 26 Feb. 1894, Villiers Papers.

⁵ G.P. ix, No. 2141 (Prince Heinrich VII Reuss to Caprivi, 22 Dec. 1893).

⁶ Kálnoky to Deym, No. 3 Strictly Confidential, 7 Dec. 1893,

formed his chief that Sir Philip was a man of parts and of vigour, who could be relied upon whenever occasion arose to act with all necessary resolution. He was a product, the Count went on to point out, of the 'school of Lord Beaconsfield', had been appointed Permanent Under-Secretary by Lord Salisbury, and was a convinced adherent of Salisbury's policy.¹ With this appraisal Kálnoky agreed.² Without doing anything to which his most suspicious colleague could take exception, Rosebery had thus given the Austrians a new ground for strong hopes that at least so far as diplomatic action was concerned, Great Britain's traditional stand on the Near Eastern Question would be firmly maintained. It seemed that Baron Calice, after his months of loneliness, was at last to have an able and determined comrade.

Currie's appointment was, however, to prove insufficient to satisfy the Austrians even in the Near East, and obviously it could not give them any sense of security regarding the future policy of Italy. A danger of an Italian volte-face under pressure from France had had to be faced after the Liberal victory of the preceding year, which had caused disquiet at Rome lest London might cease trying to uphold the status quo in the Mediterranean region. In August 1892 the Italian foreign minister had bluntly warned the British ambassador that if the French, encouraged by the political change at Westminster, embarked on a more forward policy in North Africa, and if the British disinterested themselves in

W.S.A., P.A. viii/174; cf. G.P. ix, No. 2141.

¹ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 38D Confidential, 22 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

² G.P. ix, No. 2146 (Prince von Ratibor (German chargé d'affaires at Vienna) to Caprivi, 13 Feb. 1894).

the matter, the result might be the adoption by Italy of a new course.¹ Gladstone saw no 'immediate cause for uneasiness' about Mediterranean affairs: though suspecting that the Italians might be under the impression that Salisbury had promised them material assistance, he assumed that the previous administration had 'entered into no covenant', and believed that in seeking assurances of support from the Liberal ministry the Quirinal was displaying 'not a little brass'.² But Rosebery, unlike the Prime Minister, was eager to allay Italy's anxieties. In September he took the initiative in discussing with the Germans the subject of Anglo-Italian relations. It would be unsafe, he pointed out, for him to give Rome any assurance in writing, lest an Italian indiscretion reveal it to his colleagues.³ The German ambassador, Count Hatzfeldt, replied that Italy was not in fact asking for a written communication, and he suggested as alternatives either an oral statement to the Italian ambassador, Count Tornielli, or the transmission of Rosebery's views to Rome by way of Berlin. Opting for the latter procedure, the Foreign Secretary agreed for the sake of precision to formulate his attitude in a memorandum which, however, was to be treated by the Germans as orally delivered.⁴

The assurance which Rosebery gave in this technically oral form was explicitly stated not to be an attempt to com-

¹ Vivian to Salisbury, No. 172 Confidential, 16 Aug. 1892 (initialled by Rosebery on 24 August), F.O. 45/683.

² Gladstone to Rosebery, 26 Aug.; 30 Aug.; 11 Sept. 1892, Add. MS. 44549.

³ G.P. viii, No. 1737 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 6 Sept.); No. 1739 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 7 Sept. 1892).

⁴ Ibid., No. 1737.

mit the British cabinet. It was rather the expression of a 'personal' opinion that in the event of a 'groundless' French attack on Italy, Great Britain would be led by her interests and sympathies to intervene.¹ Hatzfeldt argued for the exclusion of the qualification 'groundless', and Currie, as Permanent Under-Secretary, supported him: they saw danger that it would arouse suspicions at Rome, especially since the Italians, if they were indeed attacked, could not afford to wait for naval assistance while the British debated the 'groundlessness' or otherwise of the French action. Rosebery, however, was adamant for retention of the word, doubtless in part because he did not want to encourage Italy to be provocative towards France, but largely because he feared that his statement might not remain a secret. It was obviously with the risk of exposure in mind that he insisted to Currie that the phraseology used should respect the British popular preference for peace.²

In the event, the Italians accepted Rosebery's declaration without making any allusion to the qualification,³ and agreed philosophically with Germany's advice that nothing more definite should be sought for the present.⁴ The Germans had realized that the Foreign Secretary's worry about difficulties with his colleagues was well-founded.⁵ Italy had a

¹ Ibid., No. 1740 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 11 Sept. 1892, with enclosure).

² Ibid., No. 1738 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 7 Sept. 1892, with postscript); No. 1740.

³ Ibid., No. 1741 (Solms-Sonnenwalde to the German Foreign Office, 14 Sept. 1892); No. 1742 (Solms-Sonnenwalde to Caprivi, 26 Sept. 1892).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., No. 1739; No. 1740.

stronger attraction for Liberal sentiment than did Austria, but this advantage was balanced by the Francophile tendencies in the Liberal party, and by the fact that Italy was compromised through her membership in the Triple Alliance, which Gladstone considered a major error in Italian policy.¹ In dealing with Rome as well as with Vienna, Rosebery had to tread gingerly in order to remain secure; and it was not to Germany's interest that he should be pushed or cajoled into adopting a course which might precipitate his resignation. The Germans hoped, however - and Currie did what he could to foster the hope - that he might eventually come to occupy within the cabinet a position of sufficient strength for him safely to give Italy more complete satisfaction.²

Here matters rested for some time. The Italians were still somewhat uneasy, suspecting that the French might be intending to convert Bizerta, on the North African coast, into a fortified naval station, and also giving credence to rumours of French incursions into Tripoli.³ But neither of these problems was serious. Although the Italian government insisted, despite the contrary judgment of British experts, that a fortified French base at Bizerta would aggravate the threat to Italy's seaboard, it was conceded at Rome that so far as could be discovered, no construction of fortifications was actually in progress.⁴ As for Tripoli,

¹ P. Knaplund, Gladstone's Foreign Policy, p. 253.

² G.P. viii, No. 1740; No. 1742.

³ Rosebery to Vivian, No. 156, 26 Oct. 1892, F.O. 45/681.

⁴ Vivian to Rosebery, Tel. No. 70, 2 Dec. 1892, F.O. 45/685. For the differing British and Italian views regarding Bizerta, see Vivian to Rosebery, No. 237 Very Confidential, 10 Nov. 1892, F.O. 45/684.

all that the Quirinal asked of the British was the co-operation of Sir Clare Ford in persuading the Turks to dispatch a few more troops.¹

In 1893 the risk of Italy's changing sides became more grave, and began to attract more attention in diplomatic circles. In the spring the German foreign minister, conversing with the Italian foreign minister Brin, found the latter in what appeared a deeply anxious frame of mind regarding the prospects of British aid in a crisis.² There was now circulating a report, the origin of which was attributed to Prince Bismarck, that even in the latter days of Salisbury's administration the Italians had taken steps to protect themselves by means of an understanding with Russia on Near Eastern affairs.³ Rosebery, evidently disturbed, reacted to the rumour by taking up a markedly friendlier attitude towards Count Tornielli, for whom he had in earlier months shown dislike.⁴ With Tornielli personally the Foreign Secretary achieved a considerable success. At the time of the change of government in London the ambassador had thought Great Britain to be so frightened of French strength as to be entirely unreliable,⁵ and he later

¹ Rosebery to Vivian, No. 156, 26 Oct. 1892, F.O. 45/681.

² Trench (chargé d'affaires at Berlin) to Rosebery, No. 104 Confidential, 6 May 1893, F.O. 64/1294.

³ G.P. viii, No. 1745 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 26 May 1893); No. 1748 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 3 June 1893); Edwardes (chargé d'affaires at Rome) to Rosebery, No. 206 Very Confidential, 17 Aug. 1893, F.O. 45/699.

⁴ G.P. viii, No. 1745; No. 1748; see also No. 1737.

⁵ Ibid., No. 1735 (Solms-Sonnenwalde to Caprivi, 18 Aug. 1892).

told Hatzfeldt that he had considered Salisbury's utterances to be usually dishonest and evasive, aimed only at avoiding compliance with Italy's desires. Rosebery, on the other hand, was said by Tornielli in May 1893 to be thoroughly trustworthy - a statesman of sincerity, determination and clarity of mind.¹

But success with Tornielli did not necessarily mean success with Italy. At Vienna, whereas Kálnoky was unperturbed during the summer by Rosebery's refusal to take cognizance of the notes exchanged in 1887, the Italian ambassador expressed a pessimistic view of the matter.² At the end of July the Hamburger Nachrichten published an article, believed to have been either written or inspired by Bismarck, in which the allegation was repeated that the Italians, as a result of the small trust which they reposed in Great Britain, had already concluded a secret convention with St. Petersburg.³ Some colour was given to this assertion by the fact that according to a report received in June from the British Agent in Bulgaria, recent events at Sofia had indicated that Italy's attitude towards the Principality was perceptibly cooler now than it had been in the 'eighties.⁴ For a time in the late summer there seems to have been a degree of concern at the British embassy in Rome lest the

¹ Ibid., No. 1745.

² Ibid., No. 1758 (Prince Heinrich VII Reuss to Caprivi, 18 Aug. 1893).

³ Malet to Rosebery, No. 167, 1 Aug. 1893 (encloses translation of an article in the Hamburger Nachrichten of 29 July), F.O. 64/1294; cf. Edwardes to Rosebery, No. 206 Very Confidential, 17 Aug. 1893, F.O. 45/699.

⁴ Dering to Rosebery, No. 69 Confidential, 2 June 1893, F.O. 78/4507.

statement in the newspaper article might be true. When the ambassador, Lord Vivian, raised the question with Brin, the latter responded with a denial couched in the most categorical and vehement terms, and he succeeded in convincing Vivian of his veracity.¹ Yet even the temporary existence of such a suspicion, and the press allegation itself, were significant symptoms of the uncertainties of the Italian situation.

Uncertainty was soon to increase. In August and September the approach of the Toulon visit was a source of misgivings at the Quirinal, where it was feared that faith in Russian support would produce an intoxicating effect on the French.² In late September Italian anxiety on this score was considerably diminished by the Tsar's insistence on the avoidance of a provocative political demonstration;³ but some weeks after the Toulon festivities, on visiting Monza for conversations with Brin and King Umberto, Kálnoky gained the impression that a sense of isolation in the face of a Franco-Russian coalition had become an important factor in Italian thinking.⁴ The Austrian minister's decision to go to Monza had arisen in the first place from alarm felt at Vienna about the exceptionally severe tension prevailing between Paris and Rome in the autumn of 1893, and about the campaign being waged by French financiers against Italian

¹ Vivian to Rosebery, No. 227 Confidential, 13 Sept. 1893, F.O. 45/699.

² Vivian to Rosebery, No. 226 Confidential, 13 Sept. 1893, F.O. 45/699.

³ Vivian to Rosebery, No. 248, 26 Sept.; No. 254 Confidential, 27 Sept. 1893, F.O. 45/699; see also above, pp. 185-186.

⁴ Kálnoky to Deym, No. 2 Strictly Confidential, 7 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

securities and credit¹ - which were already in a dangerously weak position.² Threatened as she was by financial difficulties, Italy could yet have no hope, so long as the French menace endured, of being able to escape from the heavy burden of her existing expenditure on armaments. In consequence there was agitation in the Italian press against further participation in the Triple Alliance.³ The policy of rivalry with France was proving too hazardous and too expensive: a reaction, it seemed, might set in against it, and the Italians might throw themselves in despair into the arms of their hitherto hated adversary. The collapse of the scandal-torn Giolitti administration in late November added still another element of instability to the diplomatic scene. Austro-Italian relations had benefited during 1893 from the personal friendships among Count Nigra, the Italian ambassador in Vienna, Baron Bruck, the Austrian ambassador in Rome, and Signor Brin himself.⁴ Brin's retirement from office was to Kálnoky a matter of regret.⁵

Such were the circumstances in which Kálnoky instructed Deym to draw Rosebery's attention to the necessity of bolstering Italian self-confidence. The Austrian minister believed that the King of Italy would remain loyal to the

¹ Monson to Rosebery, Tel. No. 13 Secret, 12 Nov. 1893, F.O. 7/1200.

² Vivian to Rosebery, No. 276, 13 Oct. 1893, F.O. 45/700.

³ W.L. Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1890-1894, p. 367.

⁴ Edwardes (chargé d'affaires at Rome) to Rosebery, No. 313 Confidential, 6 Dec. 1893, F.O. 45/700.

⁵ Kálnoky to Deym, No. 2 Strictly Confidential, 7 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

Triple Alliance, but he considered Umberto to be weak and indecisive, and felt no faith in the effectiveness of royal influence. He believed that if the Austrian rear were to be kept secure, and if the British naval deterrent in the Mediterranean were not to have its credibility diminished by a defection of the Italian fleet to the Dual Entente, then the Foreign Office might well have to act with vigour to dispel Italy's despondency. The arguments with which he supplied his ambassador in London naturally stressed the naval factor.¹

When Deym raised the question on 13 December, Rosebery unhesitatingly recognized the identity of British and Italian interests in the Mediterranean, the advantages of retaining Italy's support at sea, and the fact that Great Britain could not be indifferent to a veering of Italian policy from its established course. That the Quirinal might possibly be seduced by French 'intrigues', and that it was important to disabuse Italian statesmen of any idea that they were standing alone against a superior foe, the Foreign Secretary also admitted. With respect to the means of reassuring Italy, however, he initially spoke as though he saw no need for any action beyond a decision to expand the British fleet. The knowledge that such a decision had been taken, he reasoned, would in itself cause the Italian sense of being exposed to give way to a feeling of greater safety, and he confidentially informed Deym - somewhat prematurely - that the cabinet was on the point of approving a very considerable naval increase.²

¹ Kálnoky to Deym, No. 2 Strictly Confidential, 7 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174; see also G.P. ix, No. 2138 (Eulenburg to Caprivi, 20 Dec. 1893).

² Deym to Kálnoky, No. 37A-I Secret, 13 Dec. 1893, W.S.A.,

This assurance regarding the fleet did not appear to Deym to alter the situation. From the state of public opinion, and from less definite language used by Rosebery in November, the ambassador had already derived the impression that naval increases were probable.¹ That they would produce a desirable effect on Italian minds he was prepared to concede, but he reminded the Foreign Secretary that although the French might be restrained from aggression, Italy would still be in doubt as to the action of the augmented fleet in case of war. He added: '. . . dass, wenn auch die englischen Verhältnisse den Abschluss eines Bündnisses nicht zuließen, bei der Stellung die Lord Rosebery im Cabinet einnehme und bei dem Ansehen, welches er bei beiden Parteien des Landes genieße, er es wohl mit Beruhigung auf sich nehmen könne, für bestimmte Fälle Zusicherungen zu ertheilen'.²

At this Rosebery firmly demurred, for the usual reason that cabinet approval was unobtainable.³ A secret personal promise to Italy would, he knew, be even more risky than one to Austria. The Italian government had just given a rather embarrassing demonstration of its carelessness with secret information: the intended appointment of Sir Clare Ford to the Rome embassy had been revealed to the Italian press be-

P.A. viii/174. It was not until 14 December, the day following the conversation between Rosebery and Deym, that Lord Spencer first raised in the cabinet the question of naval increases: see Gladstone to J. Morley, 14 Dec. 1893, Add. MS. 44549.

¹ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 36B, 29 Nov.; No. 36C Confidential, 29 Nov. 1893; No. 37B, 13 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

² Deym to Kálnoky, No. 374-I Secret, 13 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Ibid.

fore being formally approved by the Queen.¹ The incident was not an isolated one: when he told Victoria of what had happened, Rosebery mentioned having frequently pointed out to the Italians that the 'constant' leakage from their foreign ministry tended to 'prevent all confidential communication'.² In the interview of 13 December, he left Deym convinced that while he might well speak some comforting words to Count Tornielli, he would not deviate from the principle of 'no obligations'.³

Kálnoky was far from satisfied. To him it seemed that since Italy had already received assurances in general terms of British sympathy and probable aid in the event of French aggression, and was nevertheless not enjoying ease of mind, the mere repetition of such 'ganz allgemeine Zusicherungen' would be of little avail. That Rosebery was determined to resist France by arms if need be, the Austrian minister did not doubt; but he considered that this determination had small relevance to the diplomatic circumstances. The French, in Kálnoky's view, contemplated no attack: their plan was not to fight Italy but to make her ever more conscious of weakness and isolation, and finally to persuade her that alignment with France would be more in her interests than maintenance of her existing dependence on an unreliable England. The task of persuasion would be facilitated, Kálnoky feared, by offers of financial assistance and of commercial

¹ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 35A-E Confidential, 15 Nov. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/114.

² Rosebery to Queen Victoria, 14 Nov. 1893 (printed in G.E. Buckle, The Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd ser., ii. 319-320).

³ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 37A-I Secret, 13 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

and territorial bribes. Believing in this interpretation of French policy, the Austrian was unimpressed by an argument put forward by Rosebery - that if Franco-Italian hostilities broke out, and if he (Rosebery) had then to confess to his colleagues that he was committed to the Italian cause, his ability to influence the cabinet in favour of intervention would be destroyed. Kálnoky expected that the occasion for British armed intervention would never arise: the commitments which he envisaged were to be not a prelude to battle, but simply a diplomatic counter-measure against the effects of French psychological warfare. Count Deym was instructed to continue his efforts at London.¹

The ambassador took a more realistic view than his chief of what could be accomplished. In his opinion - which was shared by Count Hatzfeldt - Rosebery already understood that the danger of a Franco-Italian rapprochement was genuine, and was sincere in citing the attitude of his colleagues as the decisive objection to the Austrian plan for forestalling it.² Unless the danger appeared at some time to grow more imminent than the Foreign Secretary now thought it to be, Deym was afraid that the objection could not be overcome. Without the authority of the cabinet, he reported, or at least of the Prime Minister, Rosebery would not give binding assurances; and if he laid a proposal for such assurances before his fellow ministers, he would have to back up his advocacy with a threat of resignation. This the ambassador was confident that he would do if he were sure that an Anglo-

¹ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 37A-I Secret, 13 Dec.; Kálnoky to Deym, Strictly Confidential, 20 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Deym to Kálnoky, No. 39A-C, 27 Dec.; No. 39B Confidential, 27 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

Italian pact was indispensable - but not otherwise. To make matters worse, Deym felt no certainty that the Foreign Secretary's position in the cabinet had become, or would ever become, strong enough for him to carry his point.¹

It was therefore in a pessimistic mood that the Austrian diplomat reopened the conversations at the Foreign Office towards the end of December. At once his fears seemed confirmed. Though admitting again that an Italo-French arrangement was by no means impossible, Rosebery argued strongly against its probability. As long as Great Britain displayed sympathy for her, he maintained, Italy was unlikely to be enticed into alignment with the French unless the latter were to accord substantial concessions. Protectionists being dominant in the French Chamber, he thought it questionable that any important concession could be offered in the commercial sphere, and he voiced doubt that a settlement of territorial issues in the Mediterranean region would be permitted by French chauvinists except on terms which could have no attraction for the Italians. Moreover, professing no little contempt for French statesmen, he questioned whether they were sufficiently competent in diplomacy to make the most of the opportunity presented by Italy's difficulties. In brief, the Foreign Secretary still spoke as though he saw no need to do anything more than show friendship for Italy and expand the British navy.²

Inwardly, it appears, Rosebery was less complacent than he allowed Deym to believe: early in January, accepting the

¹ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 39A-C, 27 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Deym to Kálnoky, Secret, 29 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174; G.P. viii, No. 1763 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 29 Dec. 1893).

risk of an indiscretion at Rome, he gave the Italian ambassador to understand that he was prepared to 'take over the arrangements made by Lord Salisbury'¹ - the step which he had refused, in December as in June, to contemplate in the case of Austria. He added that Great Britain could not 'regard with indifference' the defeat of Italy by France.² Even now he did not give assurances of automatic armed action in defined eventualities, but the Austrians contented themselves with what they had achieved. In this policy they were encouraged by advice from the Wilhelmstrasse, which held that in view of the attitude of the Liberal cabinet, it could not be hoped that Rosebery would proffer firm pledges of material intervention.³ Moreover, although Francesco Crispi's accession to the Italian Premiership a few weeks previously had not been welcomed at Berlin,⁴ the German foreign minister let the Austrians know that he was more sanguine than Kálnoky regarding the chances of Italy's remaining loyal to her friends in spite of British reserve. Baron Marschall agreed with Rosebery in thinking French politicians too short-sighted and maladroit to take best advantage of their opportunity, and he contended as well that the opportunity was not in fact a very good one. In Italian official circles, he said, there had recently been a growth of confidence that even in the absence of commitments, public opinion would compel any British government to come

¹ W.L. Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1890-1894, p. 371.

² Ibid.

³ Szögyény to Kálnoky, No. 2A-G Strictly Confidential, 6 Jan.; No. 2B Strictly Confidential, 6 Jan. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

⁴ Malet to Rosebery, Private, 9 Dec. 1893, F.O. 343/13.

to Italy's aid in an emergency.¹

Believing neither in the necessity of definite British promises nor in the possibility of obtaining them, the Germans were interested primarily in seeing Great Britain strengthen her fleet - in particular with respect to personnel, a problem which Chancellor Caprivi considered with some reason to be more urgent than that of new construction.² To Rosebery also naval augmentation seemed 'our only sure policy'.³ All his main objectives he sought to attain either exclusively or largely by that means. To restrain France and Russia, to make it safer for Great Britain to exist in isolation, and at the same time, by reassuring Italy and Austria, to make isolation less likely - for each of these purposes adoption of a naval programme appeared vital. Upon such a programme depended even the value which the lonely Austrians might be expected to attach to Sir Philip Currie's co-operation at Constantinople. Whatever his talents, an ambassador could accomplish little or nothing if the Sultan and his entourage become completely contemptuous of British power. Now the Turks, by December 1893, were known to have concluded that the British Mediterranean fleet was hopelessly inferior to the forces which France and Russia together could bring against it.⁴ As we have already ~~noted~~^{noticed}, Baron

¹ Szögyény to Kálnoky, No. 2A-G Strictly Confidential, 6 Jan. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Szögyény to Kálnoky, No. 57A-G Strictly Confidential, 23 Dec. 1893; No. 2B Strictly Confidential, 6 Jan. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174. Cf. Spencer to Seymour, 9 Nov.; Spencer to Harcourt, 10 Dec. 1893, Spencer Papers.

³ Rosebery to Malet, Private, 3 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/3.

⁴ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 7 Dec. 1893, Villiers Papers.

Calice had been worried as early as the summer lest the apparent weakening of the British position at sea might lead to a further rise in Franco-Russian influence on the Bosphorus;¹ and in December Sir Arthur Nicolson - no alarmist - was willing to admit that the naval situation might indeed cause the Ottoman authorities to treat the British embassy 'cavalierly'. Nicolson confidently predicted, however, that the Turks' attitude would 'veer round again' if the Mediterranean fleet were reinforced.²

With respect to its effectiveness both as a deterrent to the Dual Entente, and as a substitute for commitments - as a method, that is, of increasing Austrian and Italian faith in British support without the use of binding assurances - Rosebery's policy of naval expansion was jeopardized from its inception by the conduct of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Foreign Secretary seems to have felt no doubt that victory for the advocates of an enlarged Navy was ultimately certain;³ but since a new programme would take years to complete, and no immediate gains in physical power would result, he knew that its value for the present would lie chiefly in its psychological impact - in the impression which it would convey that Great Britain was determined to remain a first-class Power, playing a prominent part in all international disputes affecting her interests. To obtain the maximum psychological advantage,

¹ Above, p. 144.

² Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 7 Dec. 1893, Villiers Papers.

³ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 360 Confidential, 29 Nov. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. . viii/114; No. 37A-I Secret, 13 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174; Rosebery to Malet, Private, 3 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/3.

the government would have not merely to adopt a major programme, but to do so quickly and with an appearance of unity and decision. 'As the effect of this immediate expenditure is even more moral than physical,' wrote Rosebery to Gladstone, 'I lay the greatest stress on an early intimation If we are to spend the money let us get our money's worth; and half the worth will lie in the promptitude of the announcement that we are ready to spend it.'¹ To such advice neither Gladstone nor Harcourt was prepared to listen.

In early December, urged on by Chamberlain and Balfour, Lord George Hamilton gave notice of a motion in the House of Commons calling upon the government to make known its intentions regarding the fleet before the Christmas recess, in order that action might be taken at once.² To the intense disappointment of the Queen, a staunch ally of the Admirals,³ the cabinet accepted the view of Harcourt and the Prime Minister that the motion should be treated as one of no confidence.⁴ Though besought by Rosebery on the eve of the debate to let it be clear that the fleet would in fact be increased,⁵ Gladstone couched his reply to Hamilton in terms

¹ Rosebery to Gladstone, Confidential, 18 Dec. 1893, Add. MS. 44290.

² Lord G. Hamilton, Parliamentary Reminiscences and Reflections, ii, 219, 223; Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 4th ser., xix. 1170.

³ Queen Victoria to Gladstone, 7 Dec. 1893 (printed in Buckle, 3rd ser., ii. 328); Sir H. Ponsonby to Gladstone, 17 Dec. 1893 (printed in Buckle, 3rd ser., ii. 332).

⁴ Harcourt to Gladstone, Private, 12 Dec. 1893, Add. MS. 44203; H.G. Hutchinson, Private Diaries of the Rt. Hon. Sir Algernon West, G.C.B., p. 227.

⁵ Rosebery to Gladstone, Confidential, 18 Dec. 1893, Add. MS. 44290.

which afforded no comfort to the champions of naval augmentation.¹ The Foreign Secretary was deeply dismayed, believing that at a time when Europe was in a 'parlous state', an opportunity of making a valuable contribution to peace had been thrown away.² On the following day, 20 December, he commented to Spencer:

What I deplore is that at the moment when a clear and decisive note should have been sounded in Europe, which could have anticipated many evils and guaranteed peace, we had something, admirable perhaps from the point of view of House of Commons tactics, but ambiguous, obscure and therefore disastrous.

You do not seem to take in that what was wanted quite as much as ^{new} naval strength was the moral effect of a timely if general declaration.

The peace of Europe is less secure today than it was yesterday.³

Gladstone had created for the Foreign Secretary an embarrassing diplomatic problem. If promises of naval expansion were still to carry weight at Vienna, Rosebery had plainly to convince the Austrians that the Prime Minister did not speak with the true voice of the cabinet. Accordingly, also on the 20th, he gave Count Deym to understand that the response to Hamilton's motion was attributable solely to the personal 'pedantry' of a stubborn old man. Gladstone's attitude was deplorable, he said, but it did not mean that nothing would be done to strengthen the fleet. Deym does not appear to have argued the point; privately, however, he now felt some disquiet about the prospects for

¹ Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 4th ser., xix. 1789-1804.

² Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 20 Dec., Spencer Papers; Rosebery to Gladstone, Confidential, 28 Dec. 1893, Add. MS. 44290.

³ Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 20 Dec. 1893 (a letter apparently written subsequently to that cited in Note 2 above), Spencer Papers.

an adequate increase in the naval estimates. There could be no doubt, he warned Kálmoky, that Rosebery had suffered a defeat in the cabinet on the naval question.¹

The Austrian ambassador was being excessively pessimistic, for on the substance of the issue, as distinct from the matter of dealing with the Opposition motion, Gladstone was already nearly isolated. On 14 December Spencer had disclosed to the cabinet the views prevailing at the Admiralty, and the reception given his statement had indicated that most of the ministers were willing to acquiesce in an important addition to the naval budget. John Morley had been absent; only the Prime Minister and Harcourt had protested, the former at least in the language of threatened resignation. Gladstone's initial objections were based on financial considerations,² and until the end of the first week of January discussions dragged on regarding a possible compromise on amounts.³ Then the situation changed: refusing to argue further about figures, the Prime Minister prepared an hour-long oration to the cabinet stressing what he conceived to be the evil international implications of naval expansion.⁴ If some plan for the evacuation of Egypt had been agreed upon, he informed Rosebery privately, 'my sense of the enormous mischief of the pending proposal . . . would have been partially, perhaps sensibly abated, though I cannot

¹ Deym to Kálmoky, Private and Confidential, 23 Dec. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Gladstone to Morley, 14 Dec. 1893, Add. MS. 44549.

³ Morley to Spencer, Secret, 4 Jan.; Secret, 6 Jan. 1894, Spencer Papers.

⁴ Morley to Spencer, Secret, 9 Jan. 1894, Spencer Papers; Notes by Gladstone, dated 9 Jan. 1894, Add. MS. 44648.

say essentially altered.¹ As matters stood, he maintained to his colleagues on 9 January that adoption of the naval programme would aggravate tension with France and Russia, cause an acceleration of French and Russian construction, and force Great Britain to draw closer to the Triple Alliance. Continental jealousy of Great Britain would, he feared, be intensified, and might even lead to the formation of a 'defensive league' against her. But what moved the Prime Minister 'far above all' was the conviction that naval increases would constitute a 'stimulus and provocation to the accursed militarism'.²

With Gladstone's plea Harcourt associated himself, not merely disputing the necessity of the new proposals but denouncing as 'foolish' even the Naval Defence Act of 1889.³ Unlike Rosebery, the Chancellor had no tendency to torture himself with thoughts of possibly impending crises. 'My dear Winston,' he remarked to a certain young cavalry officer in 1895, 'the experiences of a long life have convinced me that nothing ever happens.'⁴ Moreover, he was at one with Gladstone in taking treaties seriously, and in doubting that Russia would dare to break the 'ban of Europe' by sending her Black Sea fleet into Mediterranean waters.⁵ Out of touch with diplomatic realities, he believed - or at any rate pro-

¹ Gladstone to Rosebery, 11 Jan. 1894, Add. MS. 44549.

² Notes by Gladstone, dated 9 Jan. 1894, Add. MS. 44648.

³ Cabinet Minute by Gladstone, dated 9 Jan. 1894, Add. MS 44648.

⁴ W.S. Churchill, The World Crisis, i. 25-26.

⁵ Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 4th ser., xix. 1880; Gladstone to Spencer, 2 Jan. 1894, Add. MS. 44549; cf. A.J. Marder, British Naval Policy, 1880-1905, p. 182.

fessed to believe - in the ludicrously naive notion that a Russian plunge through the Straits would automatically bring the Triple Alliance into the war.¹ For all this, however, Harcourt's position in the naval controversy differed from Gladstone's, in that the Chancellor was not resolved to carry his opposition to the Admiralty beyond sharp words. In correspondence with Spencer he employed tactics of bluff and bluster: as late as 19 January he insisted that the 'fixed point' in his eyes was the avoidance of estimates which would require the imposition of additional taxation. 'I at least am not prepared', he warned, 'to be the instrument of such a demand.'² Yet early in the month, before Gladstone's speech to the cabinet, he had been urging the Prime Minister in private to accept the naval programme. Spencer, he argued, was committed irrevocably to the Board of Admiralty; both would resign if thwarted, and to replace the Board and the First Lord would be impossible.³ The 'fixed point' was defended with violent phrases but without determination: the Spencer Programme did entail higher taxes, and it was Harcourt who imposed them.⁴

Gladstone had thus no steadfast supporters, and his arguments of 9 January did not win him converts. Naval augmentation was the one kind of vigorous action relevant to foreign affairs which was likely to find favour with a Lib-

¹ Harcourt to Spencer, 20 Nov. 1893 (printed in A.G. Gardiner, The Life of Sir William Harcourt, ii. 247-248).

² Harcourt to Spencer, Secret, 12 Dec. 1893; 19 Jan. 1894, Spencer Papers.

³ Gardiner, ii. 253.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252, 281-301, 629-631; Harcourt to Spencer, 26 Feb. 1894, Spencer Papers.

eral cabinet. In attempting to exploit isolationist and anti-militarist sentiment against the Admiralty, the Prime Minister overlooked or ignored the fact that the absolute supremacy of the fleet was as vital to the maintenance of isolationist and anti-militarist principles as it was to the prosecution of an imperialist policy. Ripon, for instance, opposed his leader precisely on the ground that a big Navy made it safe to possess only a small military establishment.¹ In these circumstances all that Gladstone could accomplish was to delay what he could not prevent - and this he made up his mind to do. At the cabinet meeting on 9 January Rosebery, with backing from Asquith, asked for an immediate decision, but to no avail.² The Prime Minister withdrew shortly afterwards to Biarritz: he avoided having another meeting before his departure, lest a decision be forced upon him, and he refused to delegate the power of convening the cabinet in his absence.³ There still seemed some chance that he might reconsider his stand: it was just before the middle of the month that Herbert Gladstone made his mysterious statement to Lewis Harcourt.⁴ Not until early March did the aged statesman submit his resignation to the Queen.

Rosebery's hopes of deriving psychological advantages from prompt and decisive action therefore came to nought. It may be doubted whether the impression which such action might have produced would have sufficed in any event to satisfy Vienna; but the delays and publicly known⁵ disunity of the Liberal ministry on the naval issue certainly cannot

¹ Ripon to Sir A. West, Confidential, 26 Jan. 1894 (printed in Hutchinson, pp. 258-260).

² Hutchinson, pp. 236-237.

³ Ibid., p. 238.

⁴ Above, pp. 202-203.

⁵ Hutchinson, p. 248.

have lessened Austria's fears that Great Britain, if confronted with an Eastern crisis, would hesitate, waver and perhaps ultimately do nothing. Presumably with the rising Franco-Russian influence on the Bosphorus in mind, Kálnoky thought that St. Petersburg would most probably precipitate the crisis by making the Sultan propose international discussion and settlement of the question of free passage through the Straits for warships. As an alternative, he believed, Russia might proceed by means of direct communication to the Powers.¹ Germany being aloof, Italy certainly weak and possibly disloyal, and Austria not strong enough to resist such moves by herself, everything depended in Kálnoky's eyes on the willingness of London to play a more energetic part in Eastern affairs. If the British aligned themselves firmly with Austria, the crisis might well be averted, or Russia made to retreat without bloodshed. The Russian goal, Kálnoky felt sure, was to obtain free passage without war, which would so exhaust the Tsarist Empire as to preclude it from exploiting the opportunities opened up by naval access to the Mediterranean.²

Count Deym's efforts at persuasion in December had fallen short of their objective. At about the turn of the year Count Hatzfeldt also had attempted to convince the Foreign Office of the need for a stronger policy. Although the ambassador imagined that he had done some good,³ he appears from British sources to have succeeded only in aggravating

¹ Monson to Rosebery, No. 17 Secret, 24 Jan. 1894, F.O. 78/4592.

² Ibid. ary to Hallet, Secret, 15 Jan. 1894, F.O. 78/3.

³ G.P. ix, No. 2143 (Hatzfeldt to Holstein (a private letter), 30 Dec. 1893).

Rosebery's suspicions of Germany. Knowing that Sir Phillip Currie - who was still in London - was not without influence with the Foreign Secretary,¹ Hatzfeldt approached the newly-appointed ambassador rather than Rosebery personally. He explained his doing so by saying that Rosebery was 'boutonné' with him, and then proceeded - in the words of the Foreign Secretary to Sir Edward Malet - 'to pour forth the disinterested fears of the Triple Alliance for us and not for themselves'. Rosebery considered this behaviour to be 'sinister and inexplicable'.² Hatzfeldt continued on his blundering way in early January, having long interviews with Currie - who was apparently somewhat embarrassed by what was going on - and sending a subordinate to see the Foreign Secretary. The latter, who suspected Kaiser Wilhelm of being at the bottom of the affair, concluded that in view of the 'Hatzfeldt mystery', it would be necessary to transact diplomatic business at Berlin instead of in London.³ Matters seem to have been put right in the course of the month, though not before Malet reminded Marschall that he, the minister, would not like a British ambassador to avoid contact with him in favour of conversing with Baron Holstein.⁴

Mere persuasion and general appeals to British interests had produced no sufficiently satisfactory results. But the Austrian foreign minister was resolved to obtain security through British support, and he had another card to play.

¹ Ibid., No. 2142 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 30 Dec. 1893).

² Rosebery to Malet, Private, 3 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/3.

³ Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 16 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/3.

⁴ Malet to Rosebery, Private and Secret, 20 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/13.

ROSEBERY AND THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE, 1894

Count Kálnoky made the first move of his new campaign in a conversation with Sir Edmund Monson, the British ambassador at Vienna, on 17 January 1894. Launching into a long exposition of Austria's views on the Near Eastern question, the foreign minister argued that Russia could now count upon support from Paris in any matter affecting the Mediterranean, and that she was unlikely to be so foolish as to delay action until French enthusiasm for the Russian connection had abated. On this ground he predicted that within the 'near' though not the 'immediate' future St. Petersburg would try to bring about, by diplomatic means, a settlement of the Straits issue.¹ In such an eventuality, he intimated, the policy of both Italy and Austria would be determined by that of Great Britain, and he made it clear that he was much desirous of being enlightened as soon as possible regarding British intentions.²

When Deym saw Rosebery once again on 31 January, therefore, the Foreign Secretary was prepared for further Austrian advocacy of precise assurances with respect to the attitude of the British government in a future Straits crisis. He was

¹ Monson to Rosebery, Tel. No. 4 Most Confidential, 17 Jan.; Rosebery to Monson, Tel. No. 4 Secret, 19 Jan.; Monson to Rosebery, Tel. No. 6 Secret, 19 Jan.; No. 17 Secret, 24 Jan. 1894 (received at the Foreign Office on 29 January), F.O. 78/4592.

² Ibid.; Memorandum by Kálnoky on a conversation between Kálnoky and Monson, Strictly Confidential, dated 18 Jan. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

also prepared to give a reply, in the form of a reassertion in general terms of his adherence to the traditional British position.¹ What Kálnoky had not made explicit to Monson, however, was that generalities, which had sufficed in June, would now be regarded by Austria as altogether inadequate. For the purpose of determining its own future course, the Ballplatz had made up its mind to find out, with the least delay, whether or not Great Britain could be relied upon 'under all circumstances' to uphold 'her interests and her prestige' in the Mediterranean against a Franco-Russian challenge.² Deym warned Rosebery that if Austria were unable to count with certainty on British aid, the government at Vienna would be compelled, in order to avoid the risk of a single-handed encounter with Russia, to abandon the Straits to the Tsar. Later in the conversation the ambassador spelled out the implications of such a step, explaining that Austria could reconcile herself, albeit with reluctance, to the rise of Russian influence in the eastern Balkans, and would limit her activities to the task of excluding her rival from the territories adjacent to the Austrian border and stretching to the Aegean. Deym indicated, that is, that Kálnoky would accept a Bismarckian partition of the Balkan peninsula - as Wilhelm II had advised - with Salonika as compensation for Russian supremacy at Constantinople.³

¹ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 7A-E Secret, 7 Feb. 1894 (printed in translation in H. Temperley and Lillian M. Penson, Foundations of British Foreign Policy, 1792-1902, pp. 480-487).

² Kálnoky to Deym, No. 1 Secret, 25 Jan. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Temperley and Penson, loc. cit.; for the German view, see above, p. 230.

⁴ Temperley and Penson, loc. cit.

What mattered to Rosebery, however, was less the fate of the peninsula for its own sake than the problem of the Ottoman waterway. It was evident to Deym that the Foreign Secretary was deeply impressed by the suggestion of a contemplated change in Austria's Straits policy.¹ The ambassador had indeed stated his warning so strongly that for a moment Rosebery exaggerated its scope: the Austrians were threatening that in the absence of a firm British commitment they would acquiesce in any Russian initiative for free passage, but what the Foreign Secretary apparently believed them to be threatening was that they would approach St. Petersburg themselves with the offer of an agreement giving Russia a free hand in the Straits Question. Deym detected and dispelled this misapprehension almost at once,² but the fact that it arose affords evidence of Rosebery's readiness to view the Austrian démarche in the gravest possible light. In his alarm he decided to go as far as was practicable towards meeting Kálnoky's requirements. Accepting the risk of exposure from which he had held back before, he gave a conditional promise, without his colleagues' knowledge, of British resistance to Russia at the Bosphorus.³

A promise given without the authorization of the cabinet was not, of course, as much as Kálnoky desired, and Deym pressed with embarrassing insistence for the submission of the question to the other ministers. On this point, however, the Foreign Secretary made no concession. Deym's expression of doubt that Austrian policy could be based on a mere personal assurance, which the cabinet might not honour

¹ Temperley and Penson, loc. cit.

² Deym to Kálnoky, Secret (unnumbered), 7 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Temperley and Penson, loc. cit.

in an emergency, evoked the rejoinder that it was Rosebery who directed foreign policy, and that he was confident of being supported by public opinion. For his colleagues to discuss the matter, the British statesman argued, would not be in Austria's own interests: whereas now Vienna had a commitment from the responsible minister, a debate in the cabinet would lead inevitably to his having to communicate the formal refusal of the British government to engage itself for the future. Once the danger became imminent, he told Deym, the cabinet would be 'unanime à maintenir le prestige de l'Angleterre'.¹

In making this last remark, Rosebery was being either exceedingly optimistic or less than honest: only about three weeks previously, apropos of the naval controversy, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had announced in a cabinet meeting that he could think of nothing which could 'induce him as a Minister to enter into a war for any purpose whatever'.² The Foreign Secretary's assertion was so categorical, however, that Deym reported it to Vienna without any evident scepticism, and went on to attach considerable importance to the personal assurances which he had received. The ambassador was, indeed, reasonably well pleased with what he had accomplished. His pressure for a cabinet decision had been a conscientious performance of duty; he had never entertained high hopes of its proving effective. What he had thought to be worth attempting was to prevail upon Rosebery to clarify his ideas in his own mind, and to declare his stand - and in these respects the Austrian démarche had been

¹ Ibid.

² Cabinet Minute by Gladstone, dated 9 Jan. 1894, Add. MS. 44648.

successful. At least as long as Rosebery remained in charge of British policy, Deym informed Kálnoky, Austria would know how far she could rely on London. 'This confidential discussion', the ambassador added, 'would always offer a starting-point from which to come to an agreement on a concrete question.'¹

To the promise elicited by Deym Rosebery had attached a major qualification. While stating that he was resolved to uphold the status quo at the Straits, and that he would not shrink from the prospect of involving Great Britain in a war with Russia, the Foreign Secretary confessed that it would be impossible for the British fleet to defend Constantinople against a Franco-Russian combination, or even for it to run the risk of being exposed to a French attack in its rear. 'Dans ce cas,' Deym quoted him as saying, 'il nous faudrait l'assistance de la triple alliance pour tenir la France en échec.'² Rosebery failed to give an explicit definition of what he meant by the term 'assistance of the Triple Alliance', but he made his words clear indirectly by specifying what he did not intend to convey. The Austrian fleet was designed exclusively for coastal defence, and he intimated that he considered it irrelevant to the present problem. As for the Italian fleet, the uncertainty regarding its fighting qualities led him to dismiss its aid as insufficient.³ These two fleets representing the sea power of the Triple Alliance in the Mediterranean, the Foreign Secretary was in effect ruling out naval action as the means

¹ Temperley and Penson, loc. cit.

² Ibid.; Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 5 Secret, 31 Jan. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Ibid.; Temperley and Penson, loc. cit.

whereby France was to be held in check. What he was implying, it followed, was that the French should be restrained by a threat of attack on land; and the only member of the Alliance capable of making such a threat was Germany. The essence of Rosebery's proposal, therefore, was that as a condition of his personal commitment to Austria to defend the Straits against Russia, the Germans would agree to browbeat into neutrality Russia's only potential supporter among the Great Powers - thus giving the British fleet a free hand to act in the East with a secure line of communications through the Western Mediterranean basin.

Such was the substance of the conversation of 31 January 1894. The conclusion seems all but inescapable that Rosebery's decision to offer a precise assurance was made only in the course of the discussion, when it became apparent that the danger of a change in Austria's Near Eastern policy could not be eliminated in any other way. Obviously, Deym observed to Kálnoky, the Foreign Secretary had not at first intended to make as definite a statement as he ultimately did: not until he 'perceived that his asseverations in quite general terms of adherence to the English policy did not satisfy me, did he take another tone' and make his conditional promise.¹ The judgment of the Austrian ambassador is confirmed by the evidence of a curious incident involving Sir Philip Currie. Deym heard from Rosebery on 1 February that Currie was 'genau informirt' as to the proposal which the Foreign Secretary had just put forward.² If this had been the case, it would be possible to argue with

¹ Ibid.

² Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 6 Confidential, 1 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

some plausibility that before he knew of the severity of the pressure to which the Austrians were about to subject him, Rosebery had perhaps already been planning to give them a promise as a means of purchasing a German commitment to neutralize France. The truth about Currie's information was, however, different. At Constantinople somewhat over two weeks later, Baron Calice spoke to his new British colleague about the exact meaning of the words 'assistance of the Triple Alliance'. 'Befragt, wie er diess verstehe,' Calice reported, 'sagte er, er meine dass die Flotten Österreich-Ungarns und Italiens in einem solchen Falle England Hülfe leisten sollten.'¹ Whereas Rosebery had expressed, in effect, a desire for Germany to threaten France with invasion, Currie was under the impression that his chief was willing to rely on the very factor - the naval resources of Austria and Italy - which he had explicitly rejected as inadequate in the conversation with Deym. This impression was clearly based on a mere guess. A few days after giving Calice his interpretation of Rosebery's suggestion, Currie asked the Austrian - too late - not to communicate his remarks to Vienna. They represented, he explained, a strictly personal view not plainly justified by the language of the Foreign Secretary.²

It is scarcely credible that if Rosebery had revealed to him orally a plan to enlist the aid of the 'Triple Alliance', a man of Currie's experience would have neglected to ascertain whether the reference was to the Austrian and

¹ Calice to Kálnoky, Private, 19 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174; cf. Kálnoky to Deym, Secret, 21 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Calice to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 14, 24 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

Italian fleets or to the German army. If, on the other hand, one postulates that Currie was informed by a hasty private letter or telegram in which the term 'Triple Alliance' was used without elaboration, then the misunderstanding becomes readily comprehensible. Now the new ambassador had left London for the Bosphorus on the morning of 31 January, just before the Rosebery-Deym meeting.¹ Since Rosebery trusted Currie and was fully prepared to take him into his confidence regarding the deep secret of the British commitment,² it seems probable that had he intended before seeing Deym to present the Austrian diplomat with a definite proposal, the Foreign Secretary would have made the scheme known to his ambassador - in all likelihood by word of mouth - prior to the latter's departure. In this case Currie would have had an opportunity of eliciting the details in face-to-face discussion. The fact that he did not elicit them, but was apparently notified by letter or telegram only after setting out for Turkey, suggests a strong probability that Deym was correct in believing Rosebery's decision to have been taken after the conversation began, in response to the unexpected degree of Austrian pressure. If this logic holds good, the assertion of the Foreign Secretary on 1 February that Currie was 'genau informirt' need not be considered mendacious; it was merely inaccurate. Having taken his plunge and made his offer on the preceding day, Rosebery had doubtless dispatched the news to the ambassador at once; but he had failed to do so with sufficient precision.

¹ Deym to Kalnoky, Tel. No. 5 Secret, 31 Jan. 1894, W.S.A. P.A. viii/174.

² Deym to Kalnoky, Tel. No. 6 Confidential, 1 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

What the Foreign Secretary had done was not to carry out a long-contemplated initiative, but to fall back on a desperate expedient to meet Austrian importunity. In the absence of Austrian insistence, two considerations would almost certainly have restrained him from undertaking any binding obligation to defend Constantinople. Firstly, even if the French allowed themselves to be cowed by German threats into a proclamation of neutrality, British intervention in the vicinity of the Turkish capital was likely to remain a hazardous enterprise. The problem of the Sultan's Anglophobia was unsolved: British communications through the Mediterranean might be rendered secure by Rosebery's scheme, but those through the Dardanelles - which the intervening squadron would have to pass in the first place under the menace if not the fire of Ottoman guns - would continue to be as vulnerable as had been feared in the past. It would be unfair to suggest that the Foreign Secretary regarded action in defiance of Abdul Hamid as impossible, and that he made his promise to Austria with dishonest intent. Military experts whose views were known to the Foreign Office tended to belittle the probable effectiveness of the Dardanelles defences. Notwithstanding the energy and money which had been expended on strengthening them, the military attaché at Constantinople had expressed the conviction, in the autumn of 1892, that the batteries were not sufficiently powerful to prevent the passage of a squadron of modern warships.¹ A similar verdict was reached in the same year by the Belgian specialist Brialmont, who went so far as to argue that the defences could be 'destroy-

¹ Chermiside to Ford, 26 Oct. 1892 (copy enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 326 Very Confidential, 26 Oct. 1892, F.O. 78/4416).

ed from a distance by the vessels of a modern squadron without much damage to the latter'.¹ Thus Rosebery had some grounds for hope that the Mediterranean fleet would be able to honour the pledge which he had given. Had Brialmont's conclusion been one endorsed by qualified observers in general, the Foreign Secretary might perhaps have been tempted to offer spontaneously a commitment at the Straits as the British price for a guarantee of German support. Naval opinion, however - and it was the navy that would have had to run the gauntlet - took the Sultan's guns and fortifications more seriously. In 1890 it had been predicted that an attempt to force the Dardanelles might well end in a 'disaster'.² 'Immensely strong' and 'formidable' were the terms applied to the defences in 1892 by the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean fleet, Vice-Admiral Sir G. Tryon. The Turkish guns were so placed, Tryon maintained, that they could not be silenced by fire from ships.³ In other words, even if a British squadron rushed past them without crippling losses and reached the Sea of Marmora, the batteries would remain more or less intact in its rear.⁴ The answer was of course a land force to seize and occupy the Turkish

¹ Chermiside to Ford, No. 26 Confidential, 12 Nov. 1892 (copy enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, No. 352, 16 Nov. 1892, F.O. 78/4417).

² A.J. Marder, British Naval Policy, 1880-1905, pp. 155-156.

³ 'Report on the Defences of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles', by Vice-Admiral Sir G. Tryon, Confidential, dated 27 June 1892 (received by the Foreign Office from the Admiralty on 22 July 1892), F.O. 78/4435.

⁴ Cf. Seymour to Currie, Private, 21 June; Private, 29 June 1895 (enclosed respectively in Currie to Salisbury, Private, 30 June; Private, 4 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers).

positions, at latest shortly after the passage of the British vessels. But, despite the reference made to this need by the Directors of Naval and Military Intelligence in 1892,¹ no arrangements for rapid provision of the necessary men had been ordered by the War Office. The omission was understandable, in the light of the Intelligence Directors' warning that in a crisis troops could not be moved through Mediterranean waters without an assurance of French neutrality.² The Secretary for War was never informed that a plan to obtain French neutrality existed; so, even in the winter of 1894, he had no incentive to act. When the question of forcing the Dardanelles was raised in the following year in connection with the Armenian problem, Tryon's successor - though he believed that his ships could perform the feat with 'more or less damage' - had still to urge somewhat plaintively that a land force be found to protect his communications.³

In the available professional opinions, therefore, Rosebery had grounds for nothing more than hope - certainly none for confidence - that a promise to defend Constantinople could be fulfilled. The cabinet, if it listened to the pessimistic advice of the naval experts, might well refuse to send a squadron into the Straits at all; moreover, if sent, the squadron might suffer such damage in transit that it would be unfit to face the Russian fleet in the Black Sea.

¹ Marder, p. 159; cf. above, pp. 16, 190.

² Marder, loc. cit.

³ Seymour to Currie, Private, 21 June; Private, 29 June 1895 (enclosed respectively in Currie to Salisbury, Private, 30 June; Private, 4 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers).

A firm pledge of British intervention was something which a Foreign Secretary was unlikely to give in these circumstances unless the alternative appeared intolerable - unless, for instance, there seemed to be an inescapable choice between a British commitment and an Austro-Russian entente.

The second factor tending to hold Rosebery back was one to which allusion has previously been made - the danger that a commitment might come to the knowledge of the cabinet. The depth of the Foreign Secretary's uneasiness about this possibility is evident from the veritable obsession with secrecy which afflicted him from the moment of his making his proposal to Deym. 'C'est qu'il y va de ma tête', he remarked to the ambassador, 'si on apprenait ici que je vous ai donné ces assurances.'¹ His precautions, particularly a request that Kálnoky maintain 'reserve' in conversation with Sir Edmund Monson, exceeded what Deym considered to be either necessary or desirable.² Monson was informed by the Austrians that they were pressing Germany to assume, in co-operation with her allies and with Great Britain, a more active diplomatic rôle in Near Eastern affairs, and to bring her policy regarding the Straits into harmony with that of Vienna.³ There is no indication, however, that he ever learned of his chief's promise to fight Russia if German support against France were forthcoming in a crisis.

¹ Temperley and Penson, p. 485.

² Deym to Kálnoky, Confidential (unnumbered), 7 Feb.; Tel. No. 6 Confidential, 1 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Monson to Rosebery, No. 37 Very Confidential, 20 Feb.; No. 59 Secret, 12 Mar.; Monson to Kimberley, No. 71 Secret, 22 Mar.; No. 81 Secret, 31 Mar. 1894, F.O. 7/1213; Monson to Kimberley, Tel. No. 21 Secret, 30 Mar.; Tel. No. 25 Secret, 14 Apr. 1894, F.O. 7/1216.

Sir Edward Malet at Berlin, to whom Rosebery had sometimes in the past confided private reflections,¹ was also kept in the dark. Only through accident - the casual remark of an incautious official at the Wilhelmstrasse - did he discover that discussions had taken place between Deym and the Foreign Secretary. Wondering what was in the wind, the ambassador sought enlightenment from his Austrian colleague Szögyény - to little avail, for the latter gave away nothing more than that there had been some confidential talks on the general political situation.² In mid-March, in the midst of conversations which might have led to a virtual Anglo-Austro-German alliance, Malet was able to write in all sincerity that there was 'very little going on in European politics'.³

One problem relevant to secrecy, but of wider significance, was that of Italy. Here Rosebery and the Austrians were in entire agreement: the Italians, both believed, should not be admitted to their friends' confidence prior to successful completion of the negotiations with Germany on the British proposal.⁴ Through most of Salisbury's second administration Italy had formed the chief diplomatic link between Great Britain and the Triple Alliance. In contacts with London it had been Rome which played the leading part, whereas Austria's task had been primarily to act as the

¹ Rosebery to Malet, Private, 6 Dec. 1893; Private, 3 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/3.

² Szögyény to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 29, 5 Mar. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Malet to Kimberley, Private, 17 Mar. 1894, F.O. 343/13.

⁴ Kálnoky to Deym, Secret, 6 Mar. 1894; Deym to Kálnoky, No. 11A-C Secret, 10 Mar. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

voice of the Mediterranean entente at Berlin.¹ During the period of the Liberal ministries the position was no longer quite the same. True, the common interest shared by British and Italians in limiting the growth of French power in North Africa and the Mediterranean still remained a vital bond attaching London to the Dreibund. In January 1895, using language similar to that of Salisbury a few years earlier, Rosebery wrote of the link which Italy thus provided between the Austro-German group and Great Britain as the 'central keystone' of the international situation.² Were the Quirinal to defect to France, it was obvious, Austria would be given a strong shove towards Russia: the British might be left friendless.³ Yet the Italians now performed their function of connecting agent in a less active sense than had formerly been the case. Rome did not serve in Rosebery's time as a telephone exchange between the Ballplatz and the Wilhelmstrasse on the one hand and the Foreign Office on the other. In the discussions at London relating to Mediterranean problems in 1893-'94, it was the Austrians - whose diplomatic activity at the British capital had previously been slight⁴ - who took the leading rôle. This doubtless suited Rosebery well: possible Italian indiscretions held greater danger for the Liberal Foreign Secretary than they had for his predecessor. With respect to the Straits, moreover, British and Austrians continued to recognize a clear common interest in opposing free passage. Since free-

¹ Temperley and Penson, p. 471.

² Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 6 Jan. 1895, F.O. 343/3. For Salisbury's view, see Temperley and Penson, p. 470.

³ Cf. Salisbury to Malet, Private, 16 Aug. 1892, F.O. 343/3.

⁴ G.P. viii, No. 1747 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 31 May 1893).

dom of passage would have facilitated Russian naval support of France, Italy might have been expected to agree completely with the Anglo-Austrian attitude; but in fact Italian policy seemed in the winter of 1894 to be veering towards an altogether different course.

On Crispi's accession to the Italian Premiership in December 1893, Signor Brin had been succeeded as foreign minister by Baron Blanc, a former ambassador at Constantinople. The latter soon began behaving in a somewhat disquieting fashion. Though he professed to the British that he would stand loyally by London and Vienna in resisting any Russian attack on the autonomy of Bulgaria, he aroused considerable irritation at Sofia by displaying towards the Principality a coolness still more ostentatious than that of Brin. Blanc's motive was to avoid offending Russia;¹ and while Italian rudeness towards the Bulgarians was not important in itself, it was inevitably suggestive of a desire to draw closer to St. Petersburg.² Simultaneously with this change in Italy's Balkan diplomacy, Blanc set about preaching heretical views regarding the Straits. He supplied the British embassy at Rome with memoranda arguing the case for a reversal of the traditional policy of the Mediterranean entente.³ 'The interest of all nations demands', the foreign minister believed, 'that the Straits Treaties should be abrogated, and that the highway from the Mediterranean

¹ Ford to Rosebery, No. 34 Confidential, 5 Feb. 1894, F.O. 45/716; cf. Dering to Rosebery, Tel. No. 3 Very Confidential, 20 Jan. 1894, F.O. 78/4570; No. 8 Very Confidential, 1 Feb.; No. 11 Confidential, 1 Feb. 1894, F.O. 78/4568.

² Cf. above, pp. 247-248.

³ Ford to Rosebery, No. 27, 31 Jan. 1894 (encloses two memoranda received from Baron Blanc), F.O. 78/4592.

to the Black Sea should be made free to the navies of the world.¹ Kálnoky sadly observed that the impressions which he had gained at Monza were being confirmed, but derived some comfort from the fact that Blanc's stand did not appear to be endorsed by Crispi.² From the Anglo-Austrian standpoint, the advice of the foreign minister was arrant nonsense. In law the Straits might be opened to the warships of Great Britain as well as of Russia - a change which, if the British could take advantage of it, would deprive Russia of her unchallenged supremacy in the Euxine. But in practice, with the French fleet undefeated in the Mediterranean, the Russians alone would be in a position to send large naval forces back and forth through the waterway. A decisive increase in Russian influence at Constantinople would probably prove as inseparable from an opening of the Straits to all navies as from their opening to the Tsar's vessels exclusively. Not surprisingly, Blanc accomplished nothing with his memoranda except to inspire Rosebery and Kálnoky with suspicion of his intentions. Rosebery, describing the attitude of the Italian minister as 'strange' and 'incomprehensible', cited it to Deym in early March as a reason for gratification at the latter's assurance that Austria had given Rome no information about the policy to be expected from Great Britain in a Straits crisis.³

Even apart from Rosebery's dread of an indiscretion,

¹ Kálnoky to Deym, Secret, 21 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Kálnoky to Deym, No. 3 Secret, 19 Feb. 1894 (with postscript); Secret, 21 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 11A-C Secret, 10 Mar. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

Blanc's dislike of the existing rule of the Straits afforded the British and Austrians sufficient cause to exclude him from negotiations directed towards the maintenance of that rule. In view of Italy's weakness exclusion was a course that could be adopted without qualms. Rosebery did not merely regard Italian naval assistance as inadequate to restrain France; he was also opposed to the participation of the Italian fleet in the actual defence of Constantinople against Russia. If the French were kept neutral by Germany, Great Britain, he told Deym on 26 February, would act alone in the East.¹ This position the Foreign Secretary justified in part by arguing that the difficulties from which Italy already suffered - he mentioned in particular her financial troubles - were such as to preclude her from taking part in a war without incurring serious harm. He intimated in addition that he preferred the prospect of an Anglo-Russian duel to that of the European holocaust which Italian (or Austrian) intervention might precipitate. The preference was one which Deym, reasoning that general hostilities would prejudice British commerce, considered to be sincerely held;² yet it is scarcely likely that Rosebery's eagerness to forgo Italian aid was not closely related to the warnings which British experts had been voicing for some time regarding the untrustworthiness of the Italian navy. In 1892 one officer had commented that if he had a 'heavy job' on hand in the Mediterranean, 'I would rather, even if I had a very inferior force of my own, attempt it without than with Italian

¹ Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 14 Secret, 26 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Deym to Kálnoky, No. 9 Secret, 27 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

help.¹

It was not only on the sea that Italy's weakness was conspicuous. To the Germans, the British knew, the Italian army seemed as worthless as London suspected the Italian fleet of being. A letter from an officer of British Military Intelligence at Berlin, an extract from which was sent to the Foreign Office at the end of January 1894, summarized the opinion of German observers:

If the French stood on the defensive, a very small force, comparatively speaking, would suffice to hold the Italians in check for a long time: and the German estimate of this force, supposing no French landing elsewhere to be undertaken, and the Italians to be taking the offensive, is two Reserve Army Corps - so that nothing would be withdrawn from the field army opposing the Germans. The Germans don't think much either of the Italians' fighting power, and believe French reserve troops to be equal in value to Italians of the active army. The mobilization also would be slow and this would give the French ample time to pull their reserve troops together.²

Inevitably, therefore, almost the full burden of neutralizing France would fall directly on Germany; active Italian co-operation would be merely incidental. As an independent factor in any context Italy carried negligible weight: a few months previously her credit had been rescued only by a timely loan from a syndicate of German bankers.³ Plagued by domestic disunity as well as by other problems, an Italian government had, it appeared, to be a satellite of

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918, p. 344; A.J. Marder, British Naval Policy, 1880-1905, p. 172.

² Enclosure in Director of Military Intelligence to Foreign Office, 29 Jan. 1894, F.O. 27/3198.

³ Vivian to Rosebery, No. 276, 13 Oct. 1893, F.O. 45/700.

somebody;¹ there was thus no necessity for Rome to be consulted as an equal partner. It was important that the Italians should not change sides and attach themselves to the Franco-Russian group, but of that there could be no danger if British, Germans and Austrians came to a firm agreement. Such a coalition would be so powerful that any Italian minister - even the wayward, perplexing Blanc - would be obliged to support it. Once matters were arranged among London, Berlin and Vienna, remarked Kálnoky, 'so wird es nicht schwer sein, mit dem in seinem Werthe sinkenden Italiens ins Reine zu kommen.'²

On first receiving the British proposal on 31 January, Kálnoky did not immediately refer it to Berlin: since Rosebery had indicated the need for German backing only by implication, and had asked for the strictest secrecy without specifying any exception, the Austrian foreign minister hesitated to take the initiative in informing the Wilhelmstrasse.³ It was left to Rosebery himself, in mid-February, to repeat the substance of the offer to Count Hatzfeldt.⁴ As the Foreign Secretary believed that the task of opening negotiations with Germany belonged properly to the latter's formal ally Austria,⁵ he did little more in his conversation

¹ Cf. W.J. Stillman, Francesco Crispi, p. 206.

² Kálnoky to Deym, Secret, 6 Mar. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Kálnoky to Deym, No. 1 Secret, 19 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

⁴ G.P. ix, No. 2147 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 14 Feb. 1894); Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 10 Secret, 17 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

⁵ Deym to Kálnoky, Private, 27 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

with the German ambassador than state his position.¹ Now, for a moment, the way seemed clear for Austrian action, but almost immediately the situation was confused by Currie's misinterpretation of his chief's policy. Although Kálnoky had begun by construing the British offer in the sense which Rosebery had intended, as a proposal for German pressure on France, Currie's words to Calice made the Austrian minister wonder whether he, Kálnoky, might not have been guilty of a fundamental misunderstanding. The idea of Austro-Italian naval support of Great Britain, as an alternative to German support on land, was one which he regarded without enthusiasm. If Rosebery really believed in it, he remarked drily to Deym, then the British statesman should inform himself about the Austrian fleet.² It was not long, however, before Rosebery clarified his stand,³ and at the end of the month Szögyény told the German Chancellor that he wished to have a full discussion with him on important news from Vienna relating to the questions of the Mediterranean and Near East.⁴

The circumstances in which the Austrian initiative at Berlin was undertaken were not propitious. Since 1891 Germany and Russia had been engaged in commercial feuding, which had developed in 1893 into full-scale tariff warfare.⁵ But German

¹ G.P. ix, No. 2147.

² Kálnoky to Deym, Secret, 21 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 14 Secret, 26 Feb.; No. 9 Secret, 27 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

⁴ Szögyény to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 24 Confidential, 28 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

⁵ W. Lotz, Die Handelspolitik des Deutschen Reiches unter Graf Caprivi and Fürst Hohenlohe, 1890-1900 (Schriften des Vereins für Socialpolitik, vol. xcii), pp. 118-119.

industrialists were eager to export their products to Russia's millions, and the agrarian interests threatened by Russian competition were declining in political influence.¹ The trend of domestic politics was thus in harmony with such diplomatic considerations as apparent British unreliability and the need to weaken the bonds attaching St. Petersburg to Paris. Just after Austria's approach to Berlin for co-operation in the Straits Question, a new Russo-German commercial treaty was approved by the Reichstag.² Kálnoky, though he had hopes of eventual success,³ did not belittle the setback inflicted by this rapprochement on his efforts to draw Germany into the Anglo-Austrian camp on the Bosphorus. Chancellor Caprivi, he thought, was personally disposed to accept Austrian advice, but he knew that Caprivi's position was so insecure as to be altogether dependent on the favour of Kaiser Wilhelm.⁴ The Austrian minister was somewhat depressed by the reflection that in view of his 'enthusiastic' temperament, the Kaiser was likely to jump from the fact of the commercial settlement to the conclusion that his relations with Russia were now established on a permanently satisfactory basis.⁵ In Kálnoky's opinion, any German attempt to woo the Tsar's government away from the French alliance was foredoomed to failure: Russia, he reasoned, would not renounce her designs on the Straits and the

¹ Taylor, p. 349.

² Ibid.

³ Monson to Kimberley, Tel. No. 25 Secret, 14 Apr. 1894, F.O. 7/1216.

⁴ Monson to Kimberley, No. 82 Secret, 31 Mar. 1894, F.O. 7/1213.

⁵ Monson to Kimberley, No. 81 Secret, 31 Mar. 1894, F.O. 7/1213.

Levant, and without the connivance of France she could not expect to make progress in those directions. This argument Kálnoky judged it essential to impress on Wilhelm, whose language at a meeting with Francis Joseph in the early spring confirmed Austrian fears regarding the effect of the commercial accord.¹

Meanwhile, a few days after Szögyény told Caprivi of his desire for discussions on the Near East, Gladstone had at last resigned. The Chancellor, who had heard from Hatzfeldt what Rosebery and the Austrians were intending, had asked Szögyény in their first conversation for a postponement of discussion in detail - giving as his ground pre-occupation with his duties in the Reichstag.² Now he found a further reason for delay in the desirability of awaiting clarification of the ministerial situation in Great Britain.³ Thus it was while the reception of his proposal at Berlin remained uncertain that Rosebery was elevated to the Premiership, the Earl of Kimberley - hitherto Secretary for India - replacing him at the Foreign Office. Within a matter of weeks a divergence of view became visible between the new Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary.

That Rosebery intended the Foreign Secretary to be a mere echo of his master's voice is obvious:⁴ to the Queen he justified the appointment largely on the ground that Kim-

¹ Monson to Kimberley, No. 91 Secret, 6 Apr. 1894, F.O. 7/1213.

² Szögyény to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 24 Confidential, 28 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Szögyény to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 27 Secret, 4 Mar. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

⁴ Cf. F. Gosses, The Management of British Foreign Policy before the First World War, p. 131.

berley spoke French.¹ Count Deym was invited to discuss policy with the Prime Minister personally as often as he wished.² Not only did Rosebery plan to retain effective authority, but he apparently thought that he would have no difficulty in so doing. He believed - if his assurances to Deym on this point were given honestly - that he had in Kimberley a man who fully agreed with his own attitude on external affairs.³ Such was not altogether the case. In the naval controversy the Secretary for India had certainly been a determined supporter of the Rosebery school against Gladstone: he had written to Spencer, just after Gladstone's appeal to the cabinet on 9 January, urging the First Lord to stand firm with regard to amounts, and promising to resign with him if need arose.⁴ On the use to which British warships should be put, however, Kimberley and Rosebery were less thoroughly in harmony. In 1892 it had already been evident to Hatzfeldt that the two men differed considerably in outlook, Kimberley being less favourable than Rosebery to the foreign policy of Salisbury.⁵ In the same year Kimberley himself hinted to the Russian ambassador that his views on the Straits Question were by no means rigid:

Tout change en ce monde [he had observed], en politique

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, 'Prelude to Fashoda: The Question of the Upper Nile, 1894-5', English Historical Review, lxx. 60n.

² Deym to Kálnoky, No. 11A-C Secret, 10 Mar. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Ibid.; Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 19, 6 Mar. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

⁴ Kimberley to Spencer, Secret, 10 Jan. 1894, Spencer Papers.

⁵ G.P. viii, No. 1732 (Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, 19 July 1892).

comme en autre chose. On rattachait souvent les affaires de l'Asie centrale à celles de Constantinople. Mais qui sait? Le jour où surgiraient de graves questions sur le Bosphore, peut-être s'apercevra-t-on que le terrain est changé, que ce qui était un axiome autrefois ne l'est plus en ce moment, et que ce qui passait pour une menace jadis n'est pas un danger aujourd'hui.

In the course of the same conversation Kimberley described himself as a convinced partisan of friendly relations with Russia, and remarked that an Anglo-Russian conflict would be a ruinous calamity.¹

Not long before Salisbury's fall in 1892, the view had been expressed in the Foreign Office that if the Straits, and the influence which could be exercised in the Levant by the possessor of Constantinople, were to pass to Russia, the threat to the Suez route would become so grave that Great Britain would have no interests in the Mediterranean left to defend.² Kimberley, apparently, was sceptical of such ideas, and unconcerned about the prospect sometimes apprehended of dangerous psychological repercussions in India. In 1894 his thoughts were probably still similar to those which he had voiced to Baron de Staal. Although he began in March by associating himself with the declaration made to the Austrians by his predecessor, a declaration of which he had just been informed,³ the new Foreign Secretary was soon to show himself much less willing than Rosebery to be committed to the maintenance by arms of the Near Eastern status quo.

¹ A. Meyendorff, Correspondance Diplomatique du Baron de Staal, 1884-1900, II. 186-188 (Staal to Chichkine, undated but probably written in October 1892).

² Rose L. Greaves, Persia and the Defence of India, 1884-1892, p. 218.

³ Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 22 Secret, 14 Mar. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

In April the British - or more precisely Rosebery and Kimberley, for the cabinet as a whole remained in ignorance of what was being done - had still received no reply from Germany. In conversation with Deym the Prime Minister was beginning to display some impatience,¹ but Kimberley's reaction to the delay was one of evident sympathy with the reluctance of the Germans to tie their hands. Whereas Rosebery had stressed his unqualified confidence in the support of public opinion in a crisis, his successor at the Foreign Office intimated to Deym that he thought it not unreasonable for Berlin to hesitate about giving the requested assurance, there being no certainty that the obligation on the British side, binding only on individual ministers personally, would be honoured by the nation. He had no doubt, Kimberley said, that the great majority of the people of Great Britain would recognize a vital interest in maintaining supremacy in the Mediterranean, but he added that the Russians might act at a time when circumstances would render impracticable a British intervention against them over the issue of the Straits. The specific circumstance to which he alluded was that of prior British involvement in war with France, but this possibility was cited only as one example of what might happen to make the commitment of ministers ineffective.² Rosebery had already made it clear that his engagement was conditional on French neutrality;³ so the risk of an Anglo-French conflict cannot have been the true motive behind the suggestion which

¹ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 17A-E Secret, 20 Apr.; cf. No. 16 Secret, 14 Apr. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Deym to Kálnoky, No. 17A-E Secret, 20 Apr. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

³ Deym to Kálnoky, No. 9 Secret, 27 Feb. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174; Temperley and Penson, pp. 482, 487.

Kimberley now put forward, that London and Berlin each concede the other a broad escape-clause. What he had in mind was that the promises of both might be limited by a proviso that fulfilment would be obligatory only when 'circumstances' permitted.¹ In the absence of any precise definition of the circumstances which would constitute a valid excuse for each party, this arrangement would have meant that nobody was really committed to anything - the result at which Kimberley was presumably aiming. Not wanting to become irrevocably entangled himself, he was willing to give up the hope of a firm pledge from the Germans. Were he in Caprivi's position, he told Deym, he would respond to Rosebery's offer with a recognition that all the Triple Alliance Powers had 'more or less' the same interests at the Straits as Great Britain, and he would say that Germany would be ready, in co-operation with her partners, to restrain France from intervening in an Anglo-Russian duel - if the conditions of the moment allowed. The Foreign Secretary admitted that an agreement with such reservations on both sides would perhaps not provide a very solid basis for future policy, but he argued that it would at least establish that Great Britain and the members of the Triple Alliance had essentially identical views and interests in regard to the Straits problem. With this he was prepared to be content.²

Kimberley's suggestion, being made without authority from Rosebery, was not a formal amendment to the original British offer, but rather a hint which the Foreign Secretary probably hoped would be used by the Central Powers as the

¹ Deym to Kalnoky, No. 17A-E Secret, 20 Apr. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Ibid.

basis for a counter-proposal of their own to Downing Street. Count Deym, describing the divergence which he had detected between Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister, observed that the latter wished 'bestimmte Zusicherungen zu erhalten, wenngleich er nur persönliche Verpflichtungen einzugehen bereit sich zeigt, während Lord Kimberley beinahe zu wünschen scheint, dass die von der Triple-Alliance seitens Lord Roseberys verlangte Zusicherung nicht ohne Vorbehalt erteilt werde, um auch ihm die Möglichkeit zu geben, die einzugehenden Verpflichtungen möglichst zu verklausulieren'.¹ The difference in the attitudes of the two British statesmen seemed all the greater because Rosebery too had just thrown out an apparent hint, leading Deym to believe that in his eagerness to obtain a definite German commitment he might possibly be prepared to pay a higher price than that represented by the promise to defend Constantinople. On Deym's mentioning to him Germany's fear of doing anything which might give offence at St. Petersburg, and thus aggravate the risk of Russo-German hostilities, the Prime Minister had replied that an understanding in advance regarding particular eventualities was precisely what would afford the Germans their best security against a Russian onslaught on their frontier.² If this remark made any sense at all, Deym reasoned, it must mean that Rosebery was thinking in terms of a British promise to fight not only if Russia attacked the Straits, but also if Germany's alignment with an anti-Russian bloc caused Russia, with French support, to declare war on Berlin. The ambassador considered that the formal adhesion of Great Britain to the

¹ Ibid.

² Deym to Kálnoky, No. 16 Secret, 14 April 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

Triple Alliance was out of the question: as in the case of the Straits the assurance would be personal, and therefore open to the objection that public opinion might prevent its being implemented. But if a German engagement respecting the Straits were made conditional merely on such a supplementary personal pledge, not entailing a treaty or even an exchange of notes, then Deym suspected that Rosebery might prove not unfavourably disposed towards the bargain.¹

Such was the secrecy with which Rosebery surrounded these conversations that the British archives contain no record of them, and Deym's impression can be neither refuted nor confirmed by means of the evidence available. It can be said, however, that in the idea of a possible readiness on the Prime Minister's part to contemplate paying a higher price, there is nothing which seems inherently incredible. To keep Austria on an anti-Russian course on the Bosphorus, to avert a movement towards reconstitution on the Dreikaiserbund, were objectives worth in Rosebery's eyes a substantial degree of risk; and whatever doubts there might be about the attitude of public opinion, it is not certain that he would have been deterred by them. Believing as he did that the Franco-Russian friendship had recently suffered 'serious if not mortal blows',² he might conceivably have given Germany a commitment regarding a two-front war in the belief that the value of his words would never be put to a practical test. Beyond speculation one cannot go: in the event the Germans made no offer conditional on an enlargement of Rose-

¹ Ibid.; Deym to Kálnoky, Secret, 20 Apr. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Rosebery to Spencer, Secret, 22 Apr. 1894, Spencer Papers; see also above, pp. 192-193.

bery's personal obligations, and the Prime Minister did not himself take a new initiative.

From the beginning of the Austro-German discussions in early March, Berlin was unsympathetic towards the British proposal for neutralization of France.¹ Rosebery had stated unequivocally that he was determined to maintain the status quo at the Straits, and that if necessary he would appeal to arms - provided that the French were prevented from intervening.² To the Germans this commitment did not seem definite enough. Count Hatzfeldt, at the end of February, had not only drawn attention to the question of the value to be attached to a personal oral pronouncement, but had warned that by offering to fight alone against the Russians, the British were keeping in their own hands the choice of the moment for action, and indeed the decision as to whether they should act at all in any particular case. They would not be bound to make the Straits issue a casus belli in precisely defined eventualities, whereas Germany would be bound to protect Great Britain's rear whenever London chose to invoke the agreement.³ Marschall and Caprivi considered this objection sound, and raised other arguments as well. They saw that once the power of decision had passed to the British, Germany could find herself compelled, without being further consulted, to bring pressure to bear on France - a duty which she could perform only by showing herself ready to mobilize. That such pressure would succeed in its object

¹ G.P. ix, No. 2151 (Memorandum by Caprivi, dated 8 Mar. 1894); No. 2152 (further Memorandum by Caprivi, also dated 8 Mar. 1894).

² Above, p.270.

³ G.P. ix, No. 2150 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 28 Feb. 1894).

of enforcing neutrality was thought in Berlin to be highly doubtful.¹ Less than a year earlier a British observer had recorded the view that France as a military Power had 'never been so strong, nor, one may add, so confident'.² During the summer of 1893 this French self-confidence had begun to occasion visible apprehension in German official circles.³ The same uneasiness apparently persisted in 1894, for there was no disposition on the Germans' part to assume that France would quail before the threat of invasion. Caprivi thought it possible, in fact, that pressure from Berlin might precipitate a French intervention in the Anglo-Russian conflict.⁴ To make good her threats to Paris and promises to London, Germany would then have to attack France. The Wilhelmstrasse did not know whether any engagements existed between France and Russia, but it was supposed that if they did, they would provide at the very least for joint measures in the event of aggression against either of the contracting parties. Rosebery's scheme would thus require Germany, at the word of command from Great Britain, to risk the dreaded war on two fronts.⁵ The German Empire would have to stake on the outcome its existence as a Power, throwing into the gamble its last mark and last man, while the British - wrote Caprivi - would place in jeopardy 'only one or

¹ Ibid., No. 2152.

² Confidential Memorandum, dated 19 May 1893, enclosed in Director of Military Intelligence to Foreign Office, 19 May 1893, F.O. 27/3149.

³ Malet to Rosebery, Private, 29 July 1893, F.O. 343/13.

⁴ G.P. ix, No. 2152.

⁵ Ibid., No. 2153 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 28 Mar. 1894; and enclosed Memorandum by Caprivi, dated 28 Mar. 1894).

two dozen warships'.¹ There was some doubt at Berlin, moreover, that Great Britain would prove a loyal comrade-in-arms even in a naval sense. A suspicion which Marschall had expressed in the previous autumn, that London wanted not allies but 'lightning conductors',² still exercised a strong influence on German thinking. Germany was being offered no guarantee, the foreign minister observed to Hatzfeldt, that when she had involved herself in a two-front war, the British would not immediately come to an independent understanding with Russia, leaving the Triple Alliance to face without support the struggle on which it had embarked as a result of British policy.³ Caprivi too feared that London might conclude a separate peace. If the British desired German assistance, he commented, they should decide on firm commitment to the Triple Alliance Powers, and enter into reciprocal obligations extending beyond the life of the government of the day.⁴

Some of Germany's reasons for rejecting the British proposal would have remained valid even had Rosebery been in a position to transform the Triple into a formal Quadruple Alliance. Admittedly, whereas Bismarck had predicted in the 'eighties that Russian acquisition of Constantinople would weaken the Tsar's Empire and increase German security,⁵ Caprivi was willing to concede that Berlin did have an interest

¹ Ibid., No. 2152.

² G.P. viii, No. 1762 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 24 Oct. 1893).

³ G.P. ix, No. 2153 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 28 Mar. 1894).

⁴ Ibid., No. 2152.

⁵ Malet to Rosebery, Private, 20 Jan., F.O. 343/13; cf. Malet to Rosebery, No. 8 Confidential, 10 Jan. 1894, F.O. 64/1325.

in preventing Russia from gaining possession of the Turkish capital. He believed, nevertheless, that the strengthening of Russia which would result from her control of the Bosphorus, and from the rise of her influence in the Balkan States, would not become significant for Germany for a considerable period of time. The Straits Question did not seem of sufficient immediate importance to justify provoking a two-front conflict in which victory would be uncertain.¹ The Chancellor realized, it is clear, that victory could not be ensured by British co-operation, however loyal and whole-hearted. The Director of Military Intelligence in London had remarked in 1892 that 'some months' would elapse before Great Britain could render herself capable of taking part in any Continental war.² Caprivi had no comforting illusions on this score: he calculated that in case of hostilities the British could muster at the outset scarcely enough men to defend India and Egypt, and that even their navy, because of the deficiencies with respect to personnel, could not quickly be restored to unchallengeable supremacy.³ Furthermore, apart from the military risks of a clash with France and Russia, the Chancellor feared that the German public - remembering Bismarck's famous allusion to the 'bones of a Pomeranian musketeer' - would not readily support a war arising from a Near Eastern quarrel.⁴

Though quite unprepared to accept Rosebery's proposal, Caprivi was also unwilling to discourage Austria more than was unavoidable, lest she be driven in despair into the arms

¹ G.P. ix, No. 2152.

² Chapman to Roberts (Commander-in-Chief in India), Private and Confidential, 19 Oct. 1892, W.O. 106/16.

³ G.P. ix, No. 2152.

⁴ Ibid.

of the Russians. He was convinced that it was necessary to keep Austria a Great Power, and to keep her allied to Germany. As a means to these ends he wanted to see the British pursue a strong Eastern policy which would be reassuring to Vienna.¹ The objective of Hatzfeldt's curious proceedings in December and January² was still - though it was not to be for much longer - among the goals of German diplomacy. Now Caprivi knew that refusal of the requested German commitment against France would prejudice the progress of the conversations in which the Austrians were seeking greater British support.³ He did not dare, however, to give Rosebery a statement so framed as to counteract the unfavourable impression which the refusal was certain to create in Downing Street. If any language were used indicative of German opposition to Russia's designs on the Straits, the Chancellor suspected that the British might sow discord between Berlin and St. Petersburg by divulging the contents of the declaration to the latter. This, he realized, would nullify Germany's efforts - efforts which he hoped might be crowned with success before the year was out - to draw the Russians away from France.⁴ As a solution to the dilemma he suggested that Rosebery had best be left without any definite answer to his proposal at all, and that Kálnoky should reply instead with words friendly, inoffensive but promising nothing.⁵

¹ Ibid.

² See above, pp. 264-265.

³ G.P. ix, No. 2153 (Memorandum by Caprivi, dated 28 Mar. 1894).

⁴ Ibid., No. 2155 (Memorandum by Caprivi, dated 23 Apr. 1894).

⁵ Ibid.; cf. No. 2153.

While unwilling to give Great Britain any reason to hope for their aid, the Germans encouraged Austria by letting it appear that they were not after all disinteresting themselves entirely in the Straits and Mediterranean. In early May the Austrian ambassador Szögyény felt able to report that as a result of Kálnoky's representations the Berlin government seemed to have moved appreciably closer to the viewpoint of the Ballplatz, in the sense that now 'eine gewisse Solidarität der Interessen Deutschlands und Österreich-Ungarns in dieser Frage, sowie die Notwendigkeit, dieselben eventuell gemeinsam zu verteidigen, hier nicht mehr abgeleugnet werden'.¹ From London too the spring brought encouragement for Austria, in the form of the Spencer Programme. Kálnoky would have liked the British to make a clear statement regarding naval increases in the early winter;² but better late than never. He related the Programme to the question of the manner in which Great Britain might be expected to meet Russian pretensions, and was gratified both by the substance of British plans and by the tone in which Spencer explained them to the House of Lords on 7 May.³ It is not improbable that in pressing the British for commitments the Austrian minister had somewhat exaggerated his own anxieties, and even to London he had never pretended that the Russian menace was an 'immediate' one. With the moderately good tidings from Great Britain and Germany, the

¹ Szögyény to Kálnoky, No. 20 Secret, 5 May 1894, W.S.A. P.A. viii/174.

² Monson to Rosebery, No. 271 Secret and Confidential, 29 Dec. 1893, F.O. 7/1199.

³ Monson to Kimberley, No. 71 Secret, 22 Mar., F.O. 7/1213; No. 125, 8 May 1894, F.O. 7/1214. For Spencer's speech, see Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 4th ser., xxiv. 434-444.

optimism which he had habitually displayed before the Toulon visit began to reassert itself. The decline of the Franco-Russian friendship doubtless contributed to this development. Austria, having no points of direct friction with the French, seemed to Kálnoky the Power best qualified to assume the task of keeping them out of a dangerous tête-à-tête with St. Petersburg; and the task was one which the minister was eager to attempt.¹ While explicitly rejecting the idea that Russia could be enticed away from France, he evidently thought it possible that something useful might be accomplished at the Quai d'Orsay. With respect to Italy he continued to be apprehensive, though apparently less now of a diplomatic volte-face than of an internal collapse: he confessed himself 'shocked' at news that the disintegration of the Kingdom was being openly discussed as a possibility in political circles at Rome.² As far as the Near East was concerned, however, he looked forward to a quiet summer.³ In the atmosphere of general détente which prevailed on the Continent in the spring and summer of 1894, a coup d'état in Serbia and the fall of the anti-Russian Premier of Bulgaria created scarcely a ripple on the surface of European diplomacy.⁴

Yet all was not happy in the diplomatic world. Germany

¹ Monson to Kimberley, No. 80 Confidential, 31 Mar., F.O. 7/1213; No. 173, 28 June 1894, F.O. 7/1214.

² Monson to Kimberley, No. 160 Very Confidential, 15 June 1894, F.O. 7/1214.

³ Monson to Kimberley, No. 176 Confidential, 29 June 1894, F.O. 7/1214.

⁴ Ibid.; Gosselin (chargé d'affaires at Berlin) to Kimberley, No. 94, 25 May 1894, F.O. 64/1325; Malet to Kimberley, Private, 2 June 1894, F.O. 343/13.

embarked in the late spring on proceedings which aroused anger and resentment in London and irritation in Vienna. In Egypt the German Consul-General, Baron Heyking, outraged his Austrian colleague by taking up a position opposed to that of Lord Cromer; and although Cromer believed that the German was a blunderer who had not been instructed to be as unfriendly as he was, but merely to apply strictly the principle 'do ut des',¹ Heyking's attitude was seen at the Foreign Office as part of a pattern. It was rumoured, Kimberley warned Malet, that Berlin was attempting to make 'mischief' in Morocco, where the British and French governments were agreed on a policy of acting in concert to uphold the status quo. Above all, Germany supported French opposition to the Anglo-Belgian Congo Agreement of 12 May.² The British might have chosen - as the Germans would have liked - to try and purchase a cessation of diplomatic hostilities by concessions overseas (for example on the issue of Samoa),³ or even by committing themselves to stand by Austria in the Near East without requiring a commitment from Berlin in return.⁴ But the second course would have been totally unrealistic in a naval sense, and in any event the Prime Minister was in no mood to bargain. He was infur-

¹ Cromer to Kimberley, Private, 28 May 1894 (extract enclosed in Kimberley to Malet, Private, 13 June 1894, F.O. 343/3).

² Kimberley to Malet, Private, 13 June 1894, F.O. 343/3; cf. also W.L. Langer, The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902, i. 134-141.

³ G.P. viii, No. 2039 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 1 June 1894),

⁴ Cf. A.J.P. Taylor, The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918, pp. 349-351; A.J.P. Taylor, 'Prelude to Fashoda: The Question of the Upper Nile, 1894-5', English Historical Review, lxxv. 62.

lated by what he considered to be the Germans' arrogance: their tone, he complained, was one which they might more properly have used in addressing Monaco.¹ Believing that Berlin would not be prepared to see him withdraw the limited British encouragement already given to members of the Triple Alliance, Rosebery resolved in his wrath to call the bully's bluff. He summoned the ambassador of guiltless Austria, and announced - the date was 13 June - that if Germany did not mend her ways, he would be obliged to retract his assurance to Vienna regarding maintenance of the status quo at Constantinople.² Presumably because armed action to implement the assurance had been made conditional on German support against France, no promise of which had been forthcoming, the Prime Minister soon decided that his Near Eastern threat by itself would not carry enough weight. On the following day he informed Deym that British assurances to Italy would be repudiated as well.³ It was intended, of course, that this language should 'ricochet through Vienna' to the Wilhelmstrasse.⁴

There ensued a comedy of undignified reversals. Rosebery, it would appear, had acted in a passing tantrum. When he gave the matter calmer thought, he probably abandoned almost at once whatever genuine idea he may have had

¹ Rosebery to Queen Victoria, 14 June 1894 (printed in G.E. Buckle, The Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd ser., ii. 404-405; Marquess of Crewe, Lord Rosebery, ii. 448-449).

² H. Temperley and Lillian M. Penson, Foundations of British Foreign Policy, 1792-1902, pp. 491-492; M.P. Hornik, 'The Anglo-Belgian Agreement of 12 May 1894', English Historical Review, lvii. 239.

³ *Ibid.*; Temperley and Penson, *loc. cit.*

⁴ Buckle, *loc. cit.*; Crewe, *loc. cit.*

of putting his threats into execution, and began wondering what he would do if Germany held her ground. On 16 June he withdrew his communications of the 13th and 14th: on re-consideration, he told Deym, he had come to the conclusion that Germany's tone had not been offensive after all, and that a bit of territory in Africa was not sufficiently important to justify a revolution in British foreign policy.¹ Meanwhile, however, Kalnoky had taken fright. Despite the fact that the British fleet could not fight in the East without German backing, Rosebery's declared determination to maintain the status quo in the Straits Question held out hope that British diplomatic action on the Bosphorus would be consistently vigorous. The Austrian minister set a good deal of store by the co-operation which Baron Calice had been receiving from Sir Philip Currie,² and he did not intend, if he could help it, to see the Anglo-Austrian alignment in Turkey destroyed by the crude bludgeoning of an inept Berlin.³ On 15 June he notified Germany of Rosebery's blunt words, and advocated settlement of the dispute.⁴ By the 17th the Germans had decided to beat a retreat: their face was saved by a subsequent concession from London, but the French had to continue their eventually successful campaign against the Congo Agreement without the German aid

¹ Temperley and Penson, pp. 490-491; Hornik, loc. cit.

² Monson to Kimberley, No. 82 Secret, 31 Mar. 1894, F.O. 7/1213.

³ For the Austrian view of German diplomatic methods, see Monson to Kimberley, No. 171 Very Confidential, 28 June; No. 181 Secret, 12 July 1894, F.O. 7/1214.

⁴ G.P. viii, No. 2054 (Eulenburg to the German Foreign Office, 15 June 1894).

which they had been led to expect.¹

These events affected not only the relations between Germany and Great Britain, but Anglo-Austrian and Austro-German relations as well. An African colonial squabble inevitably seemed petty in Austrian eyes, and Rosebery's willingness to threaten abandonment of his Near Eastern policy over such an issue inspired a degree of doubt in Kálnoky's mind with respect to the sincerity of British assurances to Vienna.² Count Deym reported that his confidence in the Prime Minister was shaken, 'not only regarding the security of his promises, but also respecting his eminence as a statesman'.³ The Austrians were perhaps even more dissatisfied with Germany's behaviour. Calice felt repelled by the 'roughness and egotism' of German diplomacy, and Kálnoky held an equally unfavourable view. The sphere of Anglo-German intercourse was not the only china-shop in which the Kaiser and his government were crashing destructively about. For some months the Ballplatz had been extremely anxious that everything possible should be done to keep to a minimum the danger that Spain might join with France in a combination prejudicial to Great Britain's position in the Mediterranean. The disagreeable tone which Germany had adopted in recent dealings with Spain did not seem well calculated to make such a development less likely.⁴

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918, pp. 351-352, 351n.

² G.P. ix, No. 2159 (Eulenburg to the German Foreign Office, 16 June 1894).

³ Quoted in Hornik, p. 241.

⁴ Monson to Kimberley, No. 171 Very Confidential, 28 June; No. 181 Secret, 12 July 1894, F.O. 7/1214.

To a spectator in Austria, German policy appeared to make no sense: there was no visibly co-ordinated whole directed towards rational objectives, but rather a series of what Sir Edmund Monson described as diplomatic 'freaks'.¹

Yet for all this Kálmoky did not revert, in assessment of the general situation, to his outspoken uneasiness of late 1893 and early '94. The international atmosphere in South-Eastern Europe remained calm: during the late summer the Austrian minister was able to absent himself frequently from Vienna.² Under existing circumstances, he was convinced, Russia would opt for a continued quiet life. Certain troop movements occurring in that country he judged to be in no way menacing: they related, he said, merely to details of military arrangements. The sole ground for anxiety which he admitted was the precarious health of the pacific Tsar, Alexander III;³ and in October, when it was evident that Alexander was dying, Kálmoky told Monson that the gathering dangers affected Great Britain 'almost exclusively' - a clear hint that he did not think the Near East to be the most probable centre of any approaching storm.⁴ In November Count Deym informed Kimberley that he saw no particular reason to expect Russia to raise the question of free passage of the Straits within the near future. The ambassador advocated the maintenance of cordial relations between Great Britain and the Triple Alliance

¹ Ibid.

² Monson to Kimberley, No. 196, 23 Aug. 1894, F.O. 7/1214.

³ Monson to Kimberley, No. 201 Confidential, 7 Sept. 1894, F.O. 7/1214.

⁴ Monson to Kimberley, No. 245 Confidential, 19 Oct. 1894, F.O. 7/1215.

Powers, but he no longer pointed to perils rendering desirable a more closely-knit anti-Russian coalition.¹ The Straits scare at Vienna, like the earlier one at London, had fizzled out. This fact - already sufficiently apparent in the summer - made it possible for Rosebery, without running any real risk of driving Austria to desperation, to pursue a new policy of rapprochement with St. Petersburg.

The British effort of 1894 to improve relations with Russia appears to have been begun at the beginning of the summer - during the period when Germany was not only maintaining an eloquent silence at London regarding Rosebery's Near Eastern proposal, but was commencing into the bargain to be actively unpleasant. On 6 June the Prime Minister suggested to Baron de Staal that a conference of the Powers be convened for the purpose of securing a general reduction in armaments. There was one person, he wrote, who was pre-eminently fitted, by his 'high pure character and his single-minded desire for peace', to summon such a congress: that person being the Tsar, who was 'above the suspicion of an interested motive'. His power, the 'splendour of his position' and his 'spirit of conciliation', Rosebery went on, would attract Powers which would not care to be represented at a disarmament conference elsewhere than at St. Petersburg.² It is probable that the British statesman's true purpose in this communication was less to pave the way for reducing arms than to ingratiate himself with a flattered Alexander. When making his suggestion Rosebery

¹ Kimberley to Monson, No. 147 Secret, 21 Nov. 1894, F.O. 7/1212.

² Rosebery to Baron de Staal, 6 June 1894 (copy enclosed in Kimberley to Lascelles, No. 208 Most Confidential, 4 Aug. 1894, F.O. 65/1471).

expressed a belief that the time was opportune, and that the representatives of the Powers, once assembled, would not separate without some practical result.¹ In July, however, when the Tsar replied by combining praise for the Prime Minister's intentions with an intimation that the moment was not in fact a propitious one, Rosebery reversed himself and instantly agreed.² Having done what he could to make a good impression on Alexander, he did not wish to spoil the effect through argument.

The policy of Anglo-Russian rapprochement enjoyed in 1894 and early 1895 a certain superficial success. The growth of better relations was facilitated by the fact that in the summer and autumn of '94 the attitudes of London and St. Petersburg were in harmony regarding the Sino-Japanese War.³ Then came the death of Alexander III at the beginning of November, and with it a further opportunity of cultivating Russian friendship. The Prince of Wales spent some weeks in Russia displaying his sympathy for the Imperial family in their bereavement, and in general making good use of his skill in personal contact.⁴ The new Tsar Nicholas II was promptly honoured by being appointed Colonel-in-Chief of the Scots Greys.⁵ Meanwhile more substantial content was

¹ Ibid.

² Memorandum by Rosebery on conversation with the Russian Ambassador, dated 27 July 1894 (enclosed in Kimberley to Lascelles, No. 208 Most Confidential, 4 Aug. 1894, F.O. 65/1471).

³ Langer, i. 173-175; Monson to Kimberley, No. 201 Confidential, 7 Sept. 1894, F.O. 7/1214.

⁴ Sir S. Lee, King Edward VII: A Biography, i. 689-692; A.G. Gardiner, The Life of Sir William Harcourt, ii. 325-326.

⁵ E.F. Benson, The Kaiser and English Relations, p. 117.

being given to the rapprochement through progress in negotiations relating to Central Asia.¹ A dispute over the Pamirs had been dragging on for years, with varying prospects of settlement.² By November 1894, the British having made by far the greatest concessions, London and St. Petersburg were at last in essential accord.³ An agreement on spheres of influence in the region of the Pamirs was formally concluded on 11 March 1895.⁴

The rapprochement with Russia was accompanied by a movement towards friendlier relations with France, and by the autumn of 1894 Anglo-French co-operation in Morocco had grown sufficiently conspicuous to occasion a good deal of annoyance at Rome.⁵ But negotiations for a broader understanding came to grief on the fatal rock of Egypt.⁶ This outcome can scarcely have been a surprise to Rosebery, who had seen in the threat of an arrangement with Paris a means of bringing pressure to bear on Germany.⁷ The attempted en-

¹ Lascelles to Kimberley, No. 231, 23 Oct. 1894, F.O. 181/717 (1).

² Rosebery to Howard (chargé d'affaires at St. Petersburg), No. 219 Confidential, 25 July 1893, F.O. 181/716 (3); Rosebery to Morier, Private, 12 Sept. 1893, Morier Papers; G.E. Buckle, The Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd ser., ii. 334.

³ Langer, i. 145.

⁴ Accounts and Papers, Treaty Series No. 8 (1895), cix [C-7643], 159-162; A. Krausse, Russia in Asia, 1558-1899, pp. 373-374.

⁵ A.J.P. Taylor, 'British Policy in Morocco, 1886-1902', English Historical Review, lxvi. 361-362; cf. Langer, i. 145.

⁶ A.J.P. Taylor, The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918, p. 353.

⁷ G.P. viii, No. 2054.

tente with St. Petersburg was a project at once more practicable - or so it appeared - and more rich in potential advantages. Originally the main motives behind it were probably the same as those which were responsible for friendliness towards the French - a desire to remind Germany that Great Britain could turn if necessary to other combinations than the Triple Alliance, coupled no doubt with a hope of reducing tensions at least until the Spencer Programme had been carried out. By the beginning of 1895, however, a new use for an Anglo-Russian understanding was apparently becoming possible. Whereas an Anglo-French arrangement could easily lead to Great Britain's being drawn into new friction with Berlin, it now seemed that an entente between London and St. Petersburg might be brought about with Germany's blessing, as part of a grand design for the isolation of France.

In the autumn of 1894 Anglo-German relations remained in a deplorable condition. Despite the end of the clash over the Congo Agreement, a tendency on the Germans' part to be disagreeable towards Great Britain was still much in evidence. Count Hatzfeldt told Kimberley in November that Berlin would not 'permit' Great Britain to annex the Portuguese Colonies, and the Foreign Secretary had to give his interlocutor a polite reminder that since the British fleet would have little difficulty in sinking the Kaiser's, such a word as 'permit' was inappropriate.¹ In the German press there was waged a vigorous anti-British campaign, which Rosebery believed to be sanctioned by the government.² The Prime Minister also suspected - and this was later confirm-

¹ Kimberley to Malet, Private, 5 Dec. 1894, F.O. 343/3.

² Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 31 Oct. 1894, F.O. 343/3.

ed by the German ambassador in Vienna - that 'Berlin or he who guides Berlin' was being actuated by hostility to the domestic Liberalism of the British administration.¹ Sir Edward Malet shared this view,² but was conscious as well of an evil influence exercised by his personal bête noire - Dr. Kayser, the chief of the German Colonial Department.³ In conversation with Hatzfeldt Rosebery made no secret of his profound dissatisfaction not only with Germany's attitude towards London, but also with her policy towards Spain, Greece, Italy and Austria. He warned that the unpleasant tone adopted by Berlin on financial and commercial issues could drive Madrid and Athens into the Russo-French camp, and he complained in addition that the Triple Alliance was being weakened by the declining intimacy of Germany's relations with her partners.⁴

Although British irritation and disillusionment with Germany were obvious, Marschall did not believe that a real Anglo-Russian understanding was likely to prove a feasible project. He suspected that the prospect of such an entente was perhaps only a bogey invented by Rosebery to frighten Berlin.⁵ Hatzfeldt's opinion was different. Where-

¹ Ibid.; Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 6 Jan. 1895, F.O. 343/3; Monson to Kimberley, No. 332 Secret and Most Confidential, 27 Dec. 1894, F.O. 7/1215.

² Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 6 Jan. 1895 (with minute by Malet), F.O. 343/3.

³ Malet to Kimberley, No. 13 Secret, 16 Jan. 1895, F.O. 64/1350; cf. Malet to Salisbury, Private, 6 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 120, Salisbury Papers.

⁴ G.P. ix, No. 2161 (Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 11 Nov. 1894).

⁵ Ibid., No. 2162 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 16 Nov. 1894); cf. Langer, i. 146.

as he considered an Anglo-French settlement to be all but impossible, the ambassador reasoned that with the problem of the Pamirs apparently close to solution, there was little standing in the way of a general Anglo-Russian accord except the question of free passage through the Straits. He judged it by no means inconceivable that Great Britain would concede free passage on condition that the Russians promised not to support France in any enterprise directed against British interests in the Mediterranean.¹

That Rosebery was contemplating actual steps to put into effect so fundamental a change of policy is highly unlikely; but it is likely enough that during this period - Hatzfeld wrote in early November - the Prime Minister was becoming gradually more flexible in his thinking. By the turn of the year, at any rate, the idea of opening the Straits was one which he did not altogether exclude from his thoughts on the future.

Even during the summer, indeed - in the initial phase of his movement towards Russia - Rosebery had already allowed Count Deym to know that he had the possibility of some sort of concessions on the Straits Question in mind. At that time, however, he had made it clear that he regarded the notion with disfavour. He intended, he said, to have a study undertaken of the extent to which Russian demands, if put forward, could safely be met, and of the guarantees which would have to be required; but he voiced extreme doubt that any guarantees could be found which would permit significant concessions to be made without prejudice to the interests of the British Empire.² When he spoke thus,

¹ Ibid., No. 2161.

² Deym to Kálnoky, No. 25B Secret, 12 July 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

in July, Deym had just informed him at long last regarding the outcome of the Austro-German discussions on his Near Eastern proposal. The Prime Minister expressed himself as being satisfied with the result achieved.¹ That he should have done so is not surprising: he had, after all, presented his proposal under pressure from an anxious Austria, and Austria now seemed calm. If she was content with the modicum of reassurance obtained at Berlin, Rosebery had no motive to try and revive her uneasiness. Instead he stressed the encouraging aspects of Caprivi's attitude. While declining to enter into obligations, the Chancellor had intimated that Germany believed in the upholding of treaties, and that she recognized the impropriety of changes being made in treaty arrangements without the consent of signatory Powers.² In this language, Rosebery said, he saw reason for hope that if St. Petersburg sought to bring about a Russo-German understanding in favour of free passage, Berlin would reject the overture. He predicted also that if the Triple Alliance supported Great Britain diplomatically against a peaceful Russian initiative, Russia would probably not resort to arms to impose her will. Though reiterating that Great Britain could not single-handedly risk war over the Straits with Russia and France together, the Prime Minister left Deym in no doubt that notwithstanding the German refusal of commitments, British

¹ G.P. ix, No. 2160 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 13 July 1894); Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 47 Secret, 9 July; No. 25B Secret, 12 July 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² Ibid.; G.P. ix, No. 2157 (Memorandum by Caprivi, dated 10 June 1894; Memorandum by Szogyény (Anlage II) given to Marschall on 10 June 1894); No. 2160.

³ Henson to Kimberley, No. 304 Most Confidential, 28 Nov. 1894

policy remained opposed to Russian designs on the waterway.¹

There is no evidence that these remarks of Rosebery's were insincere: but they were uttered in July, and between July and the beginning of winter the international situation developed in such a way as to make a general settlement with Russia more desirable from the British standpoint than before. It was not only that German unpleasantness towards London had continued. We have noticed Rosebery's charge, made in early November, that the Triple Alliance was being undermined by Germany's lessened intimacy with Vienna and Rome. Information reaching the Foreign Office a few weeks later suggested that the coalition was touching new heights of disarray. Italy, knowing that she needed the friendship of both Germany and Great Britain,² was inevitably chagrined by the estrangement which the Germans were promoting between themselves and the British.³ The Quirinal suspected, moreover, that German agents in many places were working against Italian interests.⁴ The Austrians were outspokenly annoyed at nearly everything Berlin did: they complained of 'thorough confusion' at the Wilhelmstrasse, and condemned more than ever their ally's erratic, impulsive diplomacy.⁵ The fall of Caprivi from the

¹ Ibid.; Deym to Kálnoky, Tel. No. 47 Secret, 9 July; No. 25B Secret, 12 July 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

² G.P. viii, No. 1765 (Bülow to the German Foreign Office, 17 June 1894); No. 1767 (Bülow to Caprivi, 20 June 1894).

³ Malet to Kimberley, No. 253 Confidential, 1 Dec.; No. 263 Confidential, 14 Dec. 1894, F.O. 64/1326.

⁴ Monson to Kimberley, No. 327 Secret, 14 Dec. 1894, F.O. 7/1215.

⁵ Monson to Kimberley, No. 304 Most Confidential, 28 Nov.;

Chancellorship at the end of October had not helped matters. In this relic of the 'neue Kurs' Vienna had seen a sympathizer:¹ Kálnoky was much distressed at his dismissal.² Germany had drawn still farther back from the policy of her post-Bismarckian experiment.

In these circumstances it would have been understandable if London had despaired of the Triple Alliance altogether. The French ambassador at Berlin began speaking airily to Marschall about the prospect of a new triple combination - perhaps stronger than the old - embracing France, Russia and Great Britain.³ Yet in truth nothing was more remote from Rosebery's intentions than to cut his wire to the capitals of the Dreibund and proceed to erect a rival bloc.⁴ What he wished to do was to make Germany behave in a more tolerable fashion towards her would-be friends, to preserve the Triple Alliance and if possible to supplement it - not to throw the weight of Great Britain into the scales against it.⁵ As a supplement, an entente between

No. 310 Most Confidential, 5 Dec. 1894, F.O. 7/1215; Tel. No. 68 Most Confidential, 4 Dec. 1894, F.O. 7/1216.

¹ Monson to Kimberley, No. 82 Secret, 31 Mar. 1894, F.O. 7/1213.

² Monson to Kimberley, No. 263 Most Confidential, 2 Nov. 1894, F.O. 7/1215.

³ Malet to Kimberley, No. 253 Confidential, 1 Dec. 1894, F.O. 64/1326.

⁴ Above, p. 279; cf. Kimberley to Lascelles, No. 333 Confidential, 10 Dec. 1894, F.O. 65/1471.

⁵ Ibid.; Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 6 Jan. 1895, F.O. 343/3; cf. Malet to Kimberley, No. 253 Confidential, 1 Dec. 1894, F.O. 64/1326; Deym to Kálnoky, Strictly Confidential, 15 Nov. 1894, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

London and St. Petersburg was an attractive possibility, for it could be in the interests of Germany and Italy as well as of the British themselves. Both at Berlin and at Rome there were those in high places who appreciated this fact. The Italian government welcomed the Anglo-Russian rapprochement, and urged that its practical application should not be confined to Eastern and Central Asia.¹ Among Germans there were sharply differing views. Marschall, as we have observed, did not take the rapprochement very seriously: to Malet he politely expressed his approval of this 'further guarantee of European peace', but except by emphasizing that Germany had no objections, he did little either to encourage or to discourage the British in their policy.² Count Hatzfeldt did have objections: he warned Kimberley against closer relations with St. Petersburg on the ground that they might lead to a Russian demand for free passage of the Straits. Following the familiar line of a year earlier, the ambassador pointed to the dangers that would threaten the British naval position in the Mediterranean if the Black Sea fleet effected a junction with the French, and he went on to advocate tighter bonds linking London to the Triple Alliance.³ Different arguments were heard, however, by the British embassy at Berlin. Marschall told Malet explicitly that he did not expect improved Anglo-Russian relations to have the effect of causing

¹ Ford to Kimberley, Tel. No. 74 Confidential, 10 Dec. 1894, F.O. 45/719; see also below, p. 340.

² Malet to Kimberley, No. 256 Confidential, 8 Dec. 1894, F.O. 64/1326.

³ Kimberley to Gosselin (chargé d'affaires at Berlin), No. 316 Secret, 19 Nov. 1894, F.O. 64/1324.

Russia to raise the Straits Question.¹ The Kaiser and Baron Holstein, far from agreeing with Hatzfeldt, both let it be known that they were entirely in favour of a general Anglo-Russian understanding, and would willingly see it extended, on certain conditions, to include an agreement for the opening of the Straits to all Powers.² At London, meanwhile, Hatzfeldt and Deym had received denials that either a general political understanding or an agreement on the Straits was intended by the British government.³ Thus a rather odd state of affairs had arisen: having begun a policy apparently largely as a riposte to Germany, the British found themselves being encouraged from Berlin to carry their policy further than they themselves were prepared to admit having contemplated.

The attitude of Wilhelm and Holstein requires little explanation. To avoid the risk of war on two fronts, it was necessary to separate Russia and France. But as long as British and Russians remained rivals, with London obstructing everywhere the realization of Russian aspirations, St. Petersburg would continue to have a strong motive to cling to the possessor of the mighty fleet at Toulon. If London could be persuaded to pay the price necessary to make Russia lose interest in her ally, then Germany and Italy as well as Great Britain would enjoy security from being at-

¹ Malet to Kimberley, No. 256 Confidential, 8 Dec. 1894, F.O. 64/1326.

² Confidential Memorandum by Colonel Swaine (military attaché at Berlin), dated 15 Nov. 1894 (enclosed in Gosselin to Kimberley, No. 229 Secret, 16 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4592); Malet to Rosebery, Private, 22 Dec. 1894, F.O. 343/13.

³ G.P. ix, No. 2163 (Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 22 Nov. 1894); No. 2164 (Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, 22 Nov. 1894).

tacked by a coalition.

The Kaiser outlined his position to Colonel Swaine, the British military attaché at Berlin, on 15 November. He saw no reason, he said, for Great Britain and Russia not to settle on a firm basis their respective spheres of interest in Asia. If the Russians were granted free passage of the Straits, he went on, they would probably renounce all dreams of acquiring Constantinople.¹ In 1892 and 1893 Wilhelm had warned the British of Russian designs on the Ottoman capital,² but now he argued that since Russia could have seized the city if she had wished at any time in the past five or six years, her failure to act indicated that she did not covet it any longer. As for the Austrian contention that free passage would cause the Balkan States to fall under Russian influence, the German ruler rejected it as altogether unconvincing. He sounded but one note of caution: that if the British did decide to raise the Straits Question, they should not take their initiative without first talking the matter over with Austria and Italy. 'Don't spring it upon us as you did the Congo Treaty. In the first place you will make us very angry, and in the second, frightened out of her wits, you will drive Italy into the arms of France.'³

¹ Confidential Memorandum by Colonel Swaine, dated 15 Nov. 1894 (enclosed in Gosselin to Kimberley, No. 229 Secret, 16 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4592).

² Malet to Rosebery, Private and Secret, 17 Dec. 1892, F.O. 343/12; Malet to Rosebery, No. 285 Secret, 27 Nov. 1893, F.O. 64/1295.

³ Confidential Memorandum by Colonel Swaine, dated 15 Nov. 1894 (enclosed in Gosselin to Kimberley, No. 229 Secret, 16 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4592).

In December Baron Holstein spoke at some length to Malet regarding the diplomatic system which could be created if the Anglo-Russian rapprochement were extended to include a Near Eastern settlement, with the Powers of the Triple Alliance 'contributing their share'. Great Britain, Holstein argued, should be careful to keep Italy with her in all matters affecting the Mediterranean, but he suggested that if it was brought about by agreement among London, Rome and St. Petersburg, the opening of the Straits might not be dangerous to any vital British interest. An understanding based on reciprocal advantages seemed to him 'not beyond imagination'; whereas if a Russian proposal on the Straits met resistance from London and Rome, he feared that St. Petersburg might come to an arrangement with France which would jeopardize the British naval position. What Holstein envisaged was the continued existence of the Triple Alliance, ensured by British support of Italy, and the association of the Alliance, through the Italians as common factor, with a new triple entente of Great Britain, Italy and Russia. In this way the peace of Europe was to be rendered secure: there would be a 'union of all the Powers with the exception of France - in fact the isolation of France in great questions which may come forward'.¹

By this discourse on diplomatic grand strategy Malet was not impressed - a 'far-viewing survey', he called it, 'I will not use the words far-seeing'. He suspected Holstein of being primarily desirous of persuading London to do more to maintain Italy's confidence that Great Britain would defend her against a French attack.² On reading the

¹ Malet to Rosebery, Private, 22 Dec. 1894, F.O. 343/13.

² Ibid. Foreign Policy, 1792-1902, p. 481.

ambassador's criticism, however, Rosebery retorted that to him Holstein's remarks seemed 'sensible enough'. Unfortunately he did not set forth his reactions to them in any detail;¹ yet since the German official had been speaking of what would have amounted to a revolution in British Eastern policy, even so vague an expression of general approval from the Prime Minister, coupled with his failure to qualify that approval with any reservations concerning the Straits, seems a highly noteworthy fact. If it had not been so somewhat earlier, Rosebery's mind was now open: he was prepared to listen with some sympathy to suggestions for radical innovation. The Armenian Question, as we shall shortly see, had reached by this time a critical state:² apart altogether from difficulties occasioned by the condition of the Triple Alliance, a decision to protect Constantinople in a diplomatic crisis, and thus champion the independent rule of the Sultan, was now less likely than before to be adequately supported by British public opinion.³ That Abdul Hamid was the 'wrong horse' was already becoming conspicuously apparent. Rosebery had once admitted to Deym that if free passage of the Straits were conceded, Constantinople would in effect be handed over to Russia.⁴ He may not have altered his view, but he may have been beginning to reconcile himself to acceptance of the conse-

¹ Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 6 Jan. 1895, F.O. 343/3.

² Below, pp. 330-349.

³ Cf. Lillian M. Penson, 'The New Course in British Foreign Policy, 1892-1902', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th ser., xxv. 134.

⁴ H. Temperley and Lillian M. Penson, Foundations of British Foreign Policy, 1792-1902, p. 481.

quence foreseen.

In the event, Great Britain's declared policy remained unchanged. Holstein had been speaking personally, and he was not the responsible minister; the Kaiser, as the British well knew, often spoke without weighing his words.¹ Yet, despite Hatzfeldt's language, London had been given some reasonable ground for believing that Germany might have lost interest in obtaining firmer British commitment to Austria, and that she might actually prefer to see Great Britain peacefully accord the Tsar satisfaction in the Near East. It could be assumed, in addition, that Baron Blanc would probably be receptive to a revival of the idea which he himself had been advocating during the previous winter.² The one certain source of diplomatic opposition to a reversal of the British stand lay on the Danube. Germans and Italians would both benefit from the isolation of France; so would Great Britain. When Rosebery referred to the connection between London and the Triple Alliance being 'through Italy', the foe of France, and made it clear (to Malet) that he wished to preserve this 'central keystone' of the international situation,³ he was implying that he saw in France a continuing adversary. Rivalry with the French was far more a fixed point in his thinking than rivalry with Russia.⁴ Austria, by contrast, desired the iso-

¹ A.G. Gardiner, The Life of Sir William Harcourt, ii. 325 (quotes Kimberley to Harcourt, 21 Nov. 1894).

² Above, pp. 280-281.

³ Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 6 Jan. 1895, F.O. 343/3; above, p. 279.

⁴ Cf. M.P. Hornik, Der Kampf der Grossmächte um den Oberlauf des Nil, p. 117.

lation of St. Petersburg rather than of Paris: hence Kálnoky's attempt to improve relations with the Quai d'Orsay.¹ In the late autumn Rosebery's public enthusiasm for the Anglo-Russian rapprochement had given rise to press rumours of an impending revision of British Eastern policy. The reports produced a considerable impression at the Ballplatz, and Monson was struck by Austrian 'sensitiveness' on the subject. He assured Kálnoky that the blame rested on irresponsible journalists, and expressed confidence that London would not negotiate with Russia about the Straits without the 'concurrence' of the Austrian Emperor.² Concurrence was not to be expected; but to proceed without it would mean that inevitable controversy at home would be accompanied by anguished remonstrances from Vienna. Rosebery let matters drift: within a few months his government had fallen, and even before that event the Anglo-Russian rapprochement was fading away.³

While the rapprochement lasted, however, it was of some use in one aspect of Near Eastern affairs. The British, we shall find, did not adopt the idea of Anglo-Russian co-operation in the Armenian Question as a means of imparting new meaning and substance to the incipient friendship of the two Powers. Instead they set out to exploit their improved relations with St. Petersburg in the interests of the Armenians. The diplomacy of the Armenian problem is sufficiently a story in itself to merit separate treatment.

¹ Above, p. 300.

² Monson to Kimberley, No. 303 Most Confidential, 28 Nov. 1894, F.O. 7/1215.

³ Below, pp. 391-393.

1893).

² Above, pp. 14, 24-25.

VIII

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE ARMENIANS, 1894-'95

Les deux questions arménienne et bulgare s'éclaircissent et s'expliquent l'une par l'autre; en réalité elles ne sont qu'une forme différente de la question d'Orient; en d'autres termes, la question d'Orient s'est déplacée d'Europe en Asie et, de même que l'Angleterre a inventé la Bulgarie pour fermer aux Russes l'accès de la Méditerranée par Constantinople, elle est tentée maintenant d'inventer l'Arménie pour fermer aux Russes l'accès de la Méditerranée par Alexandrette et de Constantinople par l'Asie Mineure.

- Paul Cambon, April 1893¹

At the Foreign Office in London, Cambon's description of Great Britain's Armenian policy would have occasioned smiles of astonished amusement. We have seen that Russia's military dispositions were not such as to suggest any intention on her part of reaching the Straits through Asia Minor, and that Lord Rosebery, though alarmed for a time by the thought of a sea-borne coup de main, displayed no symptoms of disquiet concerning the security of the Asiatic approaches.² Moreover, even if the Foreign Secretary had sensed a need for a barrier against Russian aggression in that quarter, his method would probably have been to emulate the example of Sir William White: he would have extended his wholehearted sympathy, instead of mere acquiescence and reluctant, grudging, minimal support, to Germany's economic aspirations in Turkey. Most certainly he would not have chosen to foster the development of Armenian nationalism.

¹ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 209 (Cambon to Develle, 18 Apr. 1893).

² Above, pp. 14, 84-85.

It is true, of course, that in Bulgaria, under the nationalist leadership of Stambouloff, Great Britain had found an invaluable prop for her policy of obstructing a Russian advance towards Constantinople through the Balkans. As White had realized, however, there was no valid analogy between the Bulgarian and Armenian situations: since they were deficient in numbers, and their nationalism was lacking in vitality and sturdiness, the Armenians were incapable of fulfilling in Asia the function of anti-Russian buffer which Bulgaria fulfilled in Europe.¹ During the Liberal ministries of the 'nineties, the late ambassador's estimate of Armenian potentialities was still accepted both at the Constantinople embassy² and in Whitehall. As a race, commented the Intelligence Division of the War Office in 1893, the Armenians were wanting in 'some of the important qualities' necessary for self-government. It was admitted that they were intelligent and enterprising, and that under a more just and efficient central administration they could make a major contribution to Turkey's progress. But for the rôle of separate State or autonomous Province they were held to be 'quite unfitted'. In their lack of a spirit of cohesion, their lack of self-

¹ A. Cahuet, La Question d'Orient dans l'Histoire Contemporaine, 1821-1905, p. 465; C.L. Smith, The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople, 1886-1891, pp. 105, 108; 'Odysseus', Turkey in Europe, p. 432.

² In 1894 the ambassador at Constantinople forwarded to the Foreign Office a Memorandum by an unofficial observer whom he apparently deemed well-qualified, in which it was maintained that 'sensible' Armenians did not even aspire to a 'separate national existence under an Armenian head': Currie to Kimberley, No. 147, 3 Apr. (encloses anonymous Memorandum), F.O. 78/4540. A few days previously, the ambassador had endorsed the view that the Armenian movement in Turkey was not indigenous but organized by Russian Armenians: Currie to Kimberley, No. 131 Confidential, 28 Mar. 1894, F.O. 78/4540.

respect and of respect for each other, their lack of character, of courage and of soldierly virtues in general - evidenced by the 'excessive meekness' with which they submitted to Kurdish raids - Intelligence saw good grounds for believing that an effort to create an independent Armenia would prove a fiasco. Far from forming a bulwark against Russian invasion, such a State was expected to afford a tempting target for attack to all the warlike and predatory peoples surrounding it.¹

Lord Rosebery himself not merely had no interest in the ideal of Armenian autonomy, but displayed scant enthusiasm even for the cause of reform within the existing Ottoman administration. Doubtless his reserve was due in some degree to the knowledge that in the absence of armed coercion an attempt at securing worth-while reforms could not possibly succeed: there was, indeed, every reason to anticipate that it would result only in a further exacerbation of Anglo-Turkish relations, and its inevitable failure in a further diminution of British prestige in the East.² Judging from the Foreign Secretary's private comments on the question, however, he did not greatly regret his inability to act effectively, and would probably have shown but little less aloofness if an opportunity for fruitful intervention had been at hand. The truth is that Rosebery did not much care what happened to the Armenians, so long as he could avoid being politically embarrassed by the protests of their British sympathizers. In March 1893, having instructed Sir Clare

¹ Confidential Military Report on Eastern Turkey-in-Asia (compiled for the Intelligence Division of the War Office), dated 1893 (Vol. I, p. 8; cf. p. 140), W.O. 33/54; cf. H.A.L. Fisher, James Bryce, i. 185.

² Cf. Currie to Kimberley, No. 541, 26 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4544.

Ford to take action in behalf of Armenians unjustly arrested,¹ he confided to the German ambassador in London that he had done so for the purpose of protecting himself against public opinion. It was 'curious', he added, that the British Radical Left, champions of a disastrous isolationism with respect to the great issues of European politics, were nevertheless 'always trying to meddle in the affairs of foreign countries which did not matter to England in the least'.²

In upholding the principle that humanitarian altruism could not be made the basis of British foreign policy, Rosebery was unshakably consistent. In July 1893, writing of French proceedings in Siam, he observed that Great Britain could not afford to be the 'Knight Errant of the World, careering about to redress grievances and help the weak' - not even if the French were to 'cut the throats of half Siam in cold blood'. But, whereas he was sincerely and deeply indignant at the conduct of France towards the Siamese - conduct which he denounced as 'base', 'cruel', 'treacherous' and 'cynically vile'³ - he felt no similar sense of moral outrage, at any rate prior to the massacres of 1894, regarding the behaviour of Turks towards the Armenians. He did not subscribe to the popular stereotype of Armenians as a group of persecuted, martyred innocents. His willingness, in the early stages of the Thoumaian-Kayaian case, to believe that the two professors might well be guilty as charged, was symptomatic: at least some of the Christians, he suspected,

¹ See above, p. 38.

² G.P. ix, No. 2181 (Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, 29 Mar. 1893). The translation quoted is that of E.T.S. Dugdale, German Diplomatic Documents, 1871-1914, ii. 212.

³ Rosebery to Queen Victoria, 26 July 1893 (printed in the Marquess of Crewe, Lord Rosebery, ii. 425-427).

were getting precisely what they deserved. In August of '93, after he had succeeded in appeasing public opinion by obtaining the professors' release, and had exhausted the immediate usefulness of the Armenian question as a means of deterring the Sultan from mischief on the Nile,¹ the Foreign Secretary reverted to the flippant scepticism about Christian sufferings which had characterized his private reaction to the first pleas for intervention.² 'The present Armenian contention', he remarked, 'appears to me to be two-fold. An Armenian, like the King, can do no wrong; it must therefore always be unjust to punish an Armenian. Based on these principles our Eastern policy should be simple and congenial.'³ To Gladstone he suggested that Armenian criminals ought not to be protected 'by a halo of hereditary holiness', and maintained that the Liberal administration had now done as much as could be expected for 'this astute if pious race'.⁴

During the last few months of 1893 and in early 1894, the Sultan's angry recollection of British hostility towards his Armenian repression played a part of appreciable importance in weakening still further Great Britain's influence on the Bosphorus.⁵ For the time being, however, little was happening to intensify his resentment to any serious degree. In October

¹ See above, pp. 39-50.

² For examples of Rosebery's scepticism and flippancy in the spring, see Dr. G.F. Herrick to Rosebery, 1 May; 10 May 1893 (both with minutes by Rosebery), F.O. 78/4501.

³ Minute by Rosebery, 'Armenians in Turkey', dated 2 Aug. 1893, F.O. 78/4501.

⁴ Rosebery to Gladstone, 10 Aug.; 16 Aug. 1893, Add. MS. 44290; see also Gladstone to Rosebery, 12 Aug. 1893, Add. MS. 44549.

⁵ Currie to Rosebery, No. 107 Confidential, 7 Mar. 1894, F.O. 78/4540; see above, pp. 50-52.

Sir Clare Ford once again performed the ritual of advocating better treatment for the Armenian population, and the appointment of honest, more liberal-minded officials.¹ At London, in the following April, Kimberley tried to impress upon the Ottoman ambassador that local authorities should be restrained from embarking on oppressive measures against Christians, and that proceedings against alleged plotters should be conducted with fairness. But this activity was an irritation to the Turks rather than a major provocation. The new Foreign Secretary was careful to say that he fully acquitted the Porte of any intention of persecuting the Armenians, and he professed entire acceptance of Ottoman assurances that Abdul Hamid wished no injustice to be inflicted on his Christian subjects.² Moreover, the pro-Armenian agitation in Great Britain had largely subsided by the end of 1893, and the Turks gave the Foreign Office credit for bringing about this change.³ On balance it seems correct to state that the winter and spring of 1893-'94 constituted a period of relaxation of Anglo-Turkish tension on the Armenian question - a hiatus between the troublesome incidents of the preceding

¹ Ford to Rosebery, No. 476, 12 Oct.; No. 482, 13 Oct. 1893, F.O. 78/4483. The Turkish ambassador in Berlin, on orders from Abdul Hamid, informed the Wilhelmstrasse that Ford was advocating Armenian autonomy: G.P. ix, No. 2182 (Memorandum by Marschall, dated 8 Oct. 1893); cf. R.B. Mowat, The Concert of Europe, p. 132. Doubtless the Turks hoped that this exaggeration would make Germany more willing to do as Abdul Hamid was asking, and use her influence to restrain Great Britain from further interference in Armenian affairs. The Germans declined, however, to give London any official advice: G.P. ix, No. 2183 (Marschall to Hatzfeldt, 10 Oct. 1893).

² Kimberley to Currie, No. 103A, 4 Apr.; No. 130, 18 Apr. 1894, F.O. 78/4537.

³ Rosebery to Nicolson (chargé d'affaires at Constantinople), No. 8A, 10 Jan. 1894, F.O. 78/4537.

year and the tragic catastrophe of the coming autumn.

This period did, however, bring evidence of a development which was to have important consequences for the future of the Armenian problem. The Russian ambassador was now beginning to take a keener interest than heretofore in the situation. Both at the Porte and at the Palace it was believed that Nelidow's object was to increase Russian influence in Asia Minor by putting himself in a position to claim responsibility for any improvement in the Armenians' lot, and his advice that the Sultan should adopt a conciliatory attitude towards the minority met with an unfavourable reception from the Ottoman authorities.¹ Shortly afterwards, in mid-June, the Turks found some plausible grounds for their suspicions in a decision by St. Petersburg to send famine relief to Armenians at Erzeroum, and in reports that a number of Russian Armenians with Russian Army training were about to leave Batoum for Turkish territory.² From these items of intelligence it was certainly possible to argue that the government of the Tsar might be seeking simultaneously to gain Armenian gratitude and confidence, and to infiltrate the Armenian communities with its military agents. If Russia had in mind an advance on the Straits through Asia Minor, or on the Persian Gulf, such measures obviously held out a prospect of considerable advantages: they would enable her to arrange at will disorders sufficiently widespread to afford a pretext for invasion by Russian forces, ostensibly coming to the rescue of persecuted Christians, and they would ensure that during the advance the attacking commander could count on the good will

¹ Currie to Kimberley, No. 263 Confidential, 29 May, F.O. 78/4541; Tel. No. 70 Confidential, 3 June 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

² Memorandum by A. Block, dated 19 June 1894 (enclosed in Currie to Kimberley, No. 300, 19 June 1894, F.O. 78/4541).

of the Armenians on his lines of communication.

That ideas of this sort were prominent in the thinking of some of the Tsar's officials and officers is more than likely, and that they formed one of the motives for Neli-dow's increased attention to the Armenian question is not improbable. Yet a more compelling motive lay elsewhere. In advocating concessions to the Christian population the ambassador was acting less with a view to the eventual creation of disturbances than with a view to forestalling any imminent crisis. Having given priority to her aspirations in Eastern Asia, Russia had no immediate intention of waging war in Asiatic Turkey. Accordingly, she had no cause to desire an early outbreak of Armenian rebellion. Far from seeking to use Armenian revolutionary nationalism as an instrument of aggressive designs, St. Petersburg hoped to weaken the movement, at least for the moment, by reducing the great weight of the grievances which nourished it. One reason for this policy was the fact that many of the Armenian revolutionaries were influenced by nihilism - a doctrine for which Alexander III, whose father had been the victim of a nihilist plot, felt an understandably intense dislike.¹ A more important reason was the fact that Russia feared any major success by Armenian nationalists as a danger to her military and political position in the Transcaucasian region. It was evident that if Ottoman Armenians were to achieve independence or autonomy, their example might well attract and embolden their discontented kinsfolk under the rule of the Tsar.² Furthermore, even

¹ Currie to Rosebery, No. 83, 14 Feb. 1894, F.O. 78/4539; J.A.R. Marriott, The Eastern Question, p. 398.

² Monson to Kimberley, No. 314, 8 Dec., F.O. 7/1215; Kimberley to Lascelles, No. 344, 12 Dec. 1894, F.O. 65/1471; J. Bryce, Transcaucasia and Ararat, p. 432; Fisher, loc. cit.

if disaffection among her own Armenians remained within tolerable limits, Russia could not be expected to welcome the birth of an Armenian 'Bulgaria' astride the route of possible future offensives in the direction of the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean or the Straits. The vitality of Armenian nationalism appears to have been over-estimated in St. Petersburg, and (as became clear in 1895) the Tsarist government was firmly resolved that Great Britain should not be allowed to exploit that vitality for the purpose of erecting yet another buffer between Russians and Turks.¹ Since Armenian agitation, followed by retaliatory cruelties on the part of Abdul Hamid, would inevitably give the British an opportunity of pressing for the establishment of an autonomous State, Russia must have preferred that so long as a pretext for the invasion of Turkey was not wanted, the situation in the Armenian provinces should be kept as tranquil as was feasible. It was almost certainly with such a preference in mind that the Russians made their attempt, in the spring of 1894, to bring about a modicum of improvement in the administration of Turkey-in-Asia.

Whereas St. Petersburg apparently planned to hold Armenian nationalism in check by persuading Abdul Hamid to accord limited concessions, the Turks had a less subtle scheme: that of massacring the Armenians. In the late summer and autumn of 1894 the state of affairs in Asiatic Turkey deteriorated dramatically.² There seems to be no doubt that the killing of

¹ G.P. Gooch, History of Modern Europe, 1878-1919, p.236; E.H. Thruston, Earl of Rosebery, Statesman and Sportsman, p. 197; Anonymous, The Foreign Policy of Lord Rosebery, p. 59.

² Accounts and Papers, Turkey No. 1 (1895), Part I, cix [C-7894], 255-325; C. Freiherr von der Goltz, Denkwürdigkeiten, p. 157; E. Driault, La Question d'Orient, pp. 354-355.

Christians was organized,¹ and that it was carried out with the sympathy and sanction of the authorities at Constantinople.² At the beginning of September it was learned that Abdul Hamid had responded to reports of a Christian rising by dispatching Kurdish irregular cavalry to the Vilayet of Bitlis, and the British embassy had to intervene with strong but fruitless advice that only 'regular and disciplined' troops should be stationed in the Armenian territories.³ In early October the embassy heard that even Ottoman regulars were participating in atrocities against Armenian villages in the Bitlis region.⁴ The Turks denied the allegation, but on receiving a proposal that a British Vice-Consul should visit the disturbed districts, they placed such obstacles in his way that the idea of an investigation on the spot had to be abandoned for the time being.⁵ Despite Turkish obstruction, however, sufficient information had been obtained by the middle of the month to satisfy Sir Philip Currie that a large number of the inhabitants in the Bitlis Vilayet had been murdered, that many others had fled, and that in consequence the province was 'almost entirely depopulated'.⁶

¹ Cf. A.N. Mandelstam, Das armenische Problem im Lichte des Völker- und Menschenrechts, pp. 11, 24.

² Cf. N. and H. Buxton, Travel and Politics in Armenia, pp. 42-43.

³ Currie to Kimberley, No. 405, 4 Sept. (encloses copy of Currie to the Grand Vizier, Private, 2 Sept.), F.O. 78/4542; No. 450, 3 Oct. 1894, F.O. 78/4543.

⁴ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 166, 4 Oct. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

⁵ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 167, 5 Oct.; Tel. No. 168, 9 Oct., F.O. 78/4546; Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 80, 8 Oct.; Tel. No. 81, 12 Oct. 1894, F.O. 78/4545.

⁶ Currie to Kimberley, No. 476, 15 Oct. 1894, F.O. 78/4543.

Through October, in its dealings with the British embassy about Armenia, the Porte confined itself to the tactics of deception and delay.¹ Then, in November, it took the initiative in precipitating what turned out to be a significant incident. Abdul Hamid was passing through another of those phases in which his obsession with imagined British plots became unusually conspicuous: he had recently shown strong suspicion, for example, that London might be conspiring with the Italians to deprive him of Tripoli.² On 8 November he had his government lodge a complaint with Currie to the effect that a British Vice-Consul named Hallward had been inciting Armenians to revolt. At first the ambassador reacted with vigour: he proposed to dispatch Colonel Chermiside to the interior to investigate Hallward's proceedings, and when the Turks sought to avoid this undesired result by maintaining that their accusation was 'unofficial', he categorically refused to accept their contention. So grave a charge against a British consular officer, he said, could not be treated on an 'unofficial' basis, and on this point he declined all discussion.³

It was in connection with the Hallward case that the divergent attitudes of Kimberley and Currie on the Armenian question first became perceptible. Currie had been sent to

¹ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 168, 9 Oct., F.O. 78/4546; No. 485, 20 Oct. 1894, F.O. 78/4543. On the general nature of Turkish diplomatic methods, cf. J. Mavrogordato, England in the Balkans, p. 7.

² Kimberley to Currie, No. 311A, 10 Oct., F.O. 78/4538; Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 178, 18 Oct. (with minute by Kimberley); Tel. No. 179, 19 Oct. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

³ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 189, 9 Nov., F.O. 78/4546; No. 518, 15 Nov. 1894 (encloses copy of a 'Notice' from the Porte), F.O. 78/4544.

Constantinople to enhance British prestige and influence on the Bosphorus, not to wrangle with the Turks in the interests of Christian minorities. His original task seems still to have been uppermost in his mind, and he displayed no enthusiasm for the Armenian cause.¹ The threat to send the military attaché to the interior had a strictly limited purpose: to compel the Porte to withdraw its allegation against Hallward. Once this objective had been accomplished, the ambassador intended to cancel the mission and allow the situation to revert to what it had been before.² By contrast, both Kimberley and his Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Thomas Sanderson, looked upon the Hallward incident as a heaven-sent pretext for insisting on a journey by the attaché which would take him through the disturbed districts. They believed that the British embassy should refuse to accept withdrawal of the charge without investigation, and should press its proposal for the sending of Chermiside.³ Whereas Currie wished to treat the Turks as gently as was practicable, the Foreign Office was prepared to be disagreeable. It was not that Kimberley was unaware of the political damage which Great Britain would suffer by offending the Sultan yet again over the Armenian issue; he was in fact fully conscious of that consideration.⁴ At least as late as September he had been willing, albeit with reluctance, to abide by the same

¹ A.G. Gardiner, Life of Sir William Harcourt, ii. 327-328.

² Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 189, 9 Nov.; Tel. No. 190, 9 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

³ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 189, 9 Nov. (with minute by Sanderson), F.O. 78/4546; Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 88, 10 Nov.; Tel. No. 89, 10 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4545.

⁴ Kimberley to Bryce, Private, 13 June 1894, Bryce Papers.

order of priorities that guided the ambassador, and to subordinate humanitarian impulses to the winning of Ottoman goodwill. 'One cannot help feeling disgust at the brutality of these Turks,' he wrote, 'and their barbarities make it unpleasant to be obliged as a matter of policy to cultivate friendship with them - but after all our Afghan ally is even worse.'¹ By November, however, the Foreign Secretary was moving away from the emphasis on cultivating friendship, and was making up his mind to adopt a firmer stand in behalf of the Armenians. Farther removed from the pressures of public opinion, with which Kimberley's own inclinations were in harmony, Currie still clung to a policy of conciliation which was gradually becoming for his chief as impossible as it was distasteful.

For the moment Currie had his way. The Sultan withdrew the allegation against the Vice-Consul, and informed the British embassy that he was opposed to Chermiside's projected mission on the ground that it would embolden the Armenians to further acts of rebellion. A Turkish commission, he added, would be dispatched to find out what had really been taking place. This body was to be composed of trustworthy men, the inquiry would be impartial, and the guilty would be punished. Currie argued strongly that he should be permitted to accept Abdul Hamid's promises and stop Chermiside's departure.² Kimberley knew that accounts of the massacres had reached the Anglo-Armenian Association in London, and he expected a great outcry in the press; yet, hesitating to overrule a respected

¹ Currie to Kimberley, No. 400, 2 Sept. 1894 (with minute by Kimberley, dated 11 Sept. 1894), F.O. 78/4542.

² Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 194, 16 Nov., F.O. 78/4546; Memorandum by A. Block, dated 17 Nov. 1894 (enclosed in Currie to Kimberley, No. 524, 17 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4544).

man on the spot, he unenthusiastically acquiesced in the ambassador's proposal.¹

It was not long before the full magnitude of Currie's blunder became apparent. The ambassador had been tricked: the success enjoyed by Abdul Hamid in 1892 with Sir Clare Ford,² an adversary scarcely worthy of the Imperial talents, had been repeated, in a much more critical situation, with the erstwhile Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office. Under pressure from the British to appoint the commission and send it to the troubled areas without delay,³ The Sultan did act promptly; but when the establishment of the investigating body was announced in the Constantinople press on 23 November, its terms of reference were found to provide for an inquiry into the 'criminal conduct of Armenian brigands'. Simultaneously, moreover, decrees were published conferring decorations on two officials implicated in the massacres, and another official who had protested against the slaughter was removed from his post.⁴ Obviously Abdul Hamid had no intention whatever of honouring his pledges of impartiality. Kimberley was extremely indignant, and judged the announcement regarding terms of reference to be of so 'grave' a character as to require the 'immediate and serious consideration

¹ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 93, 16 Nov., F.O. 78/4545; Currie to Kimberley, No. 542, 26 Nov. 1894 (with minutes by E. Barrington, Sanderson and Kimberley), F.O. 78/4544.

² See above, pp. 35, 64.

³ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 94, 19 Nov.; Tel. No. 95, 22 Nov., F.O. 78/4545; Memorandum by A. Block, dated 19 Nov. 1894 (enclosed in Currie to Kimberley, No. 530, 21 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4544).

⁴ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 200, 23 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

of Her Majesty's Government'.¹ Currie, however, refused even now to recognize that the Ottoman ruler was guilty of bad faith, and he was most unwilling to contemplate further action by the embassy. The phraseology used by the Turks, he insisted, was intended merely as a shield for the dignity of the Caliph: 'It does not really impose on anyone, and although the aggressors will be publicly whitewashed they will privately be held responsible for their acts.' There would be a risk of raising 'serious complications', the ambassador went on, if he were to depart from the attitude of 'friendly advice' which he had hitherto maintained. The wisest course, in his view, was to follow for the present a policy of 'entire reserve'.²

In the light of Abdul Hamid's evident preference for decorating the cruel and penalizing the humane, Currie's professed expectation that the persecutors would be punished in private had no convincing logic to support it. The prediction was in any event irrelevant to the problem confronting Kimberley: for British opinion to be satisfied, justice would have to be not only done but done with public knowledge. The Foreign Secretary firmly rejected his representative's plea for inaction, and revived the idea of sending Colonel Chermide on a special mission to the scene of the reported massacres. As a means of enforcing Turkish agreement to this plan, he contemplated invoking the Article of the Treaty of Berlin which bound the Porte to protect the Armenians, and which provided in addition that the application of measures

¹ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 99, 23 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4545.

² Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 201, 24 Nov., F.O. 78/4546; cf. also Currie to Kimberley, No. 541, 26 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4544.

of protection and reform be superintended by the Powers.¹

Regarding the wisdom of Kimberley's suggestion Currie had grave doubts. The Turks, he was convinced, would resist an investigation by the military attaché so strenuously as to render it 'practically impossible'. The ambassador expressed his belief that if Great Britain wished to intervene seriously in the Armenian question, she could indeed do so with hopes of success only by invoking the Treaty; but if action under the Treaty were to be made effective, he pointed out, the co-operation of other signatories would be necessary. Even if all of them consented to play their part, an adequate reform of the administration of Asia Minor would be exceedingly difficult to secure: the Sultan, Currie feared, would yield only after the employment of force. In fact, moreover, there seemed no chance whatever that support from all signatories would be forthcoming. Russia, in the ambassador's judgment, would be not unlikely to respond favourably to a British initiative, and France might well follow suit; but Germany he was sure would refuse, and the participation of Austria and Italy would probably be no more than 'half-hearted'. Currie therefore saw a major danger that all hopes of success would prove illusory, and he was much disturbed by the thought that if Great Britain took the lead in an attempt at reform which ended in fiasco, her prestige in the East would suffer a grievous blow.²

At this point in time, about 26 and 27 November, the difference in outlook between the Foreign Secretary and his

¹ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 99A Confidential, 24 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4545. For the text of the relevant Article of the Treaty (Article LXI), see Sir E. Hertslet, The Map of Europe by Treaty, iv. 2796.

² Currie to Kimberley, No. 541, 26 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4544.

representative on the Bosphorus was at its most pronounced. Kimberley was far from content with Currie's performance: on the 27th he minuted that he could not understand why the ambassador had considered the Sultan's promises of an inquiry to be satisfactory.¹ Currie, on the other hand, was obviously uneasy about the strong attitude of his chief. As he was later to confess to Salisbury, he had been hoping against hope that if he could stay on good terms with Abdul Hamid, the latter might eventually be persuaded to treat British advice with respect. The efforts which he had made along these lines over the past ten months² were now threatened with ruin by the pressure from home for vigour, and more disquieting still was the suspicion - not, as it proved, an unfounded one - that the embassy might be compelled to embark on the wild folly of trying to reform Turkey without possessing the physical means to back up its demands.³ Currie did what he could to reduce the risks by urging the Turks, in friendly tones, to fulfil speedily the Imperial pledge of impartial investigation.⁴ Under both Rosebery and Kimberley the Foreign Office had refrained as a matter of policy from publishing consular reports on the condition of the Armenian population in Ottoman Asia; publication, it had been decided, would not only prejudice what remained of the British political position at Constantinople, but would so exasperate Abdul Hamid as to render the lot of his Christian

¹ Currie to Kimberley, No. 524, 17 Nov. 1894 (with minute by Kimberley, dated 27 Nov. 1894), F.O. 78/4544.

² Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 1), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

³ See below, pp. 360, 378-381.

⁴ Currie to Kimberley, No. 541, 26 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4544.

subjects worse than before.¹ Currie was now able, therefore, to use the possibility of publication as a lever, and he alluded as well to the danger of foreign intervention.² All this was to no avail: by the 27th the commission was on its way to the scene of the massacres, and the Porte gave assurances that the inquiry would be impartial, but Currie learned that Abdul Hamid continued to take the view expressed in the official announcement - that the investigators should concern themselves with criminality and brigandage on the part of the Armenians.³ In this situation the ambassador realized that additional action could not be avoided, but he was determined to keep it within the narrowest limits acceptable to London. A new scheme had just occurred to him: as a 'milder' procedure than an appeal to the Treaty of Berlin, he proposed that Great Britain, France and Russia - the Powers with Consuls at Erzeroum - might jointly call upon Turkey to give the Consuls facilities to 'communicate' with the Ottoman commission, and to report the progress of its work to their governments.⁴

For the Consuls merely to 'communicate' with the commission would not, Kimberley believed, be adequate;⁵ yet in this suggestion from Currie lies the origin of the modus

¹ Kimberley to Bryce, Private, 13 June; Bryce to Kimberley, Private, 14 June 1894, Bryce Papers.

² Currie to Kimberley, No. 541, 26 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4544.

³ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 204, 27 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

⁴ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 205, 27 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

⁵ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 102 Confidential, 28 Nov.; Tel. No. 115, 6 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4545.

operandi by which the British, in uneasy collaboration with France and Russia, sought through the winter of 1894-95 to discharge their obligations to the hapless Armenian minority. The impression has sometimes been conveyed by historians that the decision to turn to France and Russia arose from a desire to wean the Tsar away from the French alliance,¹ or at least to consolidate the budding rapprochement with St. Petersburg and demonstrate its existence to the world.² The evidence indicates, however, that no deep diplomatic motive was responsible for what was done. It is of course inconceivable that the possibility of a broader political potential in collaboration on Armenia did not present itself at an early stage to official minds in London. On 10 December, indeed, British attention was drawn to this idea by the Italians, who expressed pleasure at the recent symptoms of an Anglo-Russian understanding and suggested that it might be extended, as a consequence of the Armenian Question, to the affairs of Asia Minor.³ Currie, moreover, may not have been altogether oblivious to that prospective opportunity when he first put forward his plan. The distrust and disunity afflicting the Triple Alliance were more conspicuous at Constantinople than at most other places in Europe,⁴ and the ambassador was deeply impressed by them. In

¹ Cf. A.J. Marder, British Naval Policy, 1880-1905, pp. 228-229.

² Cf. A.J.P. Taylor, The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918, p. 354.

³ Ford to Kimberley, Tel. No. 74 Confidential, 10 Dec. 1894, F.O. 45/719.

⁴ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 25 Nov. 1893, Villiers Papers; Currie to Kimberley, No. 207 Confidential, 2 Apr. 1895, F.O. 78/4610.

June he was to inform Salisbury that he thought Germany's friendship to be of smaller value than in the past, and added: 'I have a hankering for Russia myself, if public opinion in England would allow you to deal with her.'¹

Yet for all this it is wrong to suspect that either Currie or the Foreign Office eagerly seized upon the Armenian tragedy as a means of giving a 'hankering' practical form. Currie was plainly reluctant to act at all; whatever advantages he saw - if any - in an Anglo-Franco-Russian association seemed to offer no more than a modicum of compensation for the losses which he anticipated in the field of relations with Turkey. The Foreign Office wanted action for reasons of sincere humanitarianism and popular emotion;² it was necessary, Kimberley knew, to be able to assure the British public that a genuinely impartial investigation would be carried out, but he displayed no firm resolve to achieve his end through the particular expedient of co-operation with the Dual Alliance. If he could have obtained a guarantee of impartial inquiry by throwing the burden upon the shoulders of a distant and disinterested Power, he would apparently have done so - and done so with relief.

The idea of Action by the United States of America was first put forward at the end of November, when Abdul Hamid asked that President Cleveland authorize an American Consul to accompany the Ottoman commission.³ Had the British been

¹ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 1), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

² Cf. Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 125, 10 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4545.

³ Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (cited hereafter as Foreign Relations), p. 719 (Terrell, United States Minister at Constantinople, to

desirous of exploiting the Armenian problem in the pursuit of more intimate Anglo-Russian contacts, they would presumably have shown no enthusiasm whatever for such an alternative to the tripartite coalition just proposed by Currie. Their actual attitude is therefore highly significant. Provided that the official selected was a man commanding general confidence, and that he would be free to report independently on any points of disagreement with the Turkish commissioners, Kimberley was prepared to welcome the new arrangement. Not merely did he accept it as affording a 'security for impartiality', but he decided to commend it to the Americans as a method of preventing 'serious diplomatic complications'.¹ Currie's response was equally favourable. He had made his suggestion for collaboration with France and Russia on 27 November, but, although he had been ordered on the following day to approach Nelidow and Cambon, the temporary absence of both the latter from their posts had occasioned delay.² Now, on 1 December, Kimberley informed the ambassador that if a suitable American delegate left at once to join the commission, the British government, while reserving liberty of action for the future, 'might suspend any further immediate steps' of its own.³ It is obvious that Currie was delighted: he described the American Minister's intended choice of personnel as 'excellent', and

Gresham, 30 Nov. 1894).

¹ Kimberley to Goschen, Tel. No. 132, 2 Dec. 1894, F.O. 5/2235.

² Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 102 Confidential, 28 Nov., F.O. 78/4545; Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 206, 29 Nov. 1894 (with minute by Kimberley), F.O. 78/4546.

³ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 106, 1 Dec.; Tel. No. 109, 3 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4545.

leapt at the chance given him to treat as suspended the instructions to communicate with his French and Russian colleagues.¹

On 2 December the British representative on the Potomac was ordered to urge the United States authorities to comply promptly with the Sultan's request.² Already, however, President Cleveland had made up his mind not to do so.³ A recent telegram from the Legation at Constantinople had stated that published accounts of Turkish atrocities were exaggerated,⁴ and moreover, as the Secretary of State explained to the British, it had not been realized that American interference would be greeted with satisfaction in London. Now that a refusal had been formally handed to the Ottoman government, Cleveland was unlikely, the Secretary intimated, to change his stand.⁵ It was only in the light of this intelligence that Kimberley once again instructed Sir Philip Currie, on 4 December, to make contact with the ambassadors of Russia and France.⁶

¹ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 208, 2 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4546; cf. Gardiner, ii. 328.

² Kimberley to Goschen, Tel. No. 132, 2 Dec. 1894, F.O. 5/2235.

³ Foreign Relations, loc. cit. (Gresham to Terrell, 2 Dec. 1894).

⁴ L.J. Gordon, American Relations with Turkey, 1830-1930, p. 24; Foreign Relations, pp. 718-719 (Terrell to Gresham, 28 Nov. 1894).

⁵ Goschen to Kimberley, Tel. No. 136 (Paraphrase), 3 Dec. 1894, F.O. 5/2235.

⁶ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 111, 4 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4545; cf. Currie to Kimberley, No. 575, 13 Dec. 1894 (summarizes recent events in the Armenian question), F.O. 78/4544.

Meanwhile information on the true scale of the massacres, with which the United States Minister was provided by Currie, had been telegraphed to Washington.¹ Aware for the first time both of the seriousness of the situation and of British views, the President reversed himself and agreed to the dispatch of a Consul.² This volte-face led to no result: by now, as a substitute for American participation, the Sultan had invited the nomination to the commission of a British consular officer.³ Kimberley was willing to acquiesce, on condition that the Consul should have the right to examine witnesses as well as to submit an independent report. The French and Russians, it was hoped, would have their Consuls at Erzeroum accompany the commission in a similar rôle.⁴ The Foreign Secretary would still have been glad, however, to share the task of supervision with both the United States⁵ and the European Powers in general. Because of the pressure of time and for reasons of convenience it appeared best that the Powers with consular representation at Erzeroum should assume immediate responsibility, but all the great Continental capitals were notified that in the process of obtaining authoritative information

¹ Foreign Relations, p. 719 (Terrell to Gresham, 2 Dec. 1894).

² Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 223, 6 Dec., F.O. 78/4546; Goschen to Kimberley, Tel. No. 137, 5 Dec. 1894, F.O. 5/2235; Foreign Relations, pp. 719-720 (Gresham to Terrell, 5 Dec. 1894).

³ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 222, 6 Dec., F.O. 78/4546; Kimberley to Currie, No. 388A, 6 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4538.

⁴ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 115, 6 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4545.

⁵ *Ibid.*, cf. Currie to Kimberley, No. 575, 13 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4544.

Great Britain would welcome the co-operation of as many of them as possible.¹

There seems no reason to question the sincerity of this invitation, though admittedly it was predictable that British intentions regarding countries other than France and Russia would be put to the test in only one case. The Austrians were sympathetic but inactive: Kálnoky concurred in principle with Kimberley's opinion that as many Great Powers as possible should co-operate on the Armenian problem, but he pointed out that Vienna had no Consuls in the affected regions.² The Germans, besought by the Sultan to promise benevolence towards him in the event of a British call for joint measures, firmly refused to give such a commitment in existing circumstances; instead they advised him to reform his administration, appoint reliable governors and punish the guilty of all races with impartial severity.³ But Prince Radolin was sceptical that atrocities had taken place on the scale widely alleged,⁴ and German newspapers did not echo the intense indignation of the press in Great Britain.⁵ Except for some support of a more interested ally - Italy - Berlin therefore confined itself to advice,

¹ Kimberley to Dufferin, Tel. No. 87, 6 Dec. 1894, F.O. 27/3175. Identical telegrams were sent to Monson at Vienna; Malet at Berlin; Ford at Rome; Lascelles at St. Petersburg.

² Monson to Kimberley, Tel. No. 70, 7 Dec., F.O. 7/1216; No. 314, 8 Dec. 1894, F.O. 7/1215.

³ G.P. ix, No. 2187 (Radolin to the German Foreign Office, 30 Nov. 1894); No. 2188 (Hohenlohe to Radolin, 1 Dec. 1894); No. 2189 (Radolin to Hohenlohe, 5 Dec. 1894).

⁴ Currie to Kimberley, No. 548 Confidential, 28 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4544.

⁵ J. Lepsius, Armenia and Europe, p. 1; cf. pp. xiii-xiv.

and to expressing approval of the arrangements being made by others for international supervision of the Ottoman inquiry.¹

The Italians, by contrast, adopted a forward policy: their ambassador at Constantinople suggested to Currie that Italy's Consul at Trebizond, who had jurisdiction at Erzeroum also, should join in accompanying the Turkish commissioners. To this proposal Currie had no objection, but he urged delay in the submission of any demand to the Turks.² Since France and Russia had not yet replied to the British request that they take part, nothing had yet been definitely settled with the Porte; and until Turkey was finally and irrevocably committed to permitting at least the tripartite supervision of the investigation, neither Currie nor Kimberley wanted to take the risk of complicating the situation. The Ottoman authorities might be alarmed, it was feared, by the interference of yet another foreign government.³ Accepting British advice, the Italians held their hand;⁴ but once the French, Russians and Turks were officially in agreement on consular action in the inquiry, as they were by 14 December,⁵ London let it be known that the

¹ Malet to Kimberley, Tel. No. 46, 8 Dec., F.O. 64/1327; No. 272 Confidential, 22 Dec. 1894, F.O. 64/1326; Currie to Kimberley, No. 548 Confidential, 28 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4544.

² Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 230, 8 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

³ Kimberley to Ford, Tel. No. 85, 9 Dec., F.O. 45/719; Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 234, 10 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

⁴ Ford to Kimberley, Tel. No. 74 Confidential, 10 Dec.; Kimberley to Ford, Tel. No. 86, 10 Dec. 1894, F.O. 45/719.

⁵ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 240, 13 Dec.; Tel. No. 241, 14 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

presence of an Italian representative with the commission would be regarded favourably.¹ The Russians took a different view. They professed to believe that Italian participation would impart in some fashion a 'political' character to the proceedings, and that it might lead to a Christian rising.² What they probably meant was that Italy might be expected to stand loyally by Great Britain, even if the latter were to pursue a more strongly pro-Armenian policy than St. Petersburg, conscious of the agitation in Russian Armenia,³ would be prepared to endorse. At all events, Nelidow offered determined opposition to the idea of Italian action. Currie was not deterred, however, from giving the Italian ambassador vigorous support.⁴ Assistance was likewise forthcoming from the German embassy, but the French associated themselves fully with Russian objections.⁵ Between them Nelidow and Cambon proved more than a match for their adversaries: acting under Franco-Russian influence, the Turks flatly rejected Italy's request.⁶

It was in this way, through a minor British diplomatic

¹ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 133, 14 Dec., F.O. 78/4545; Kimberley to Malet, No. 338, 14 Dec. 1894, F.O. 64/1324.

² Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 247, 16 Dec.; Tel. No. 265 Confidential, 26 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

³ Monson to Kimberley, No. 314, 8 Dec., F.O. 7/1215; Kimberley to Lascelles, No. 344, 12 Dec. 1894, F.O. 65/1471.

⁴ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 247, 16 Dec.; Tel. No. 265 Confidential, 26 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

⁵ *Ibid.*; D.D.F., 1st ser., xi, No. 322 (Cambon to Hanotaux, 26 Dec. 1894).

⁶ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 267 Confidential, 29 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4546; G.P. ix, No. 2199 (Marschall to Bulow, 30 Dec. 1894).

defeat, that the tripartite nature of the Armenian coalition was preserved. The Americans too were excluded: Abdul Hamid declined to countenance the participation of the United States in addition to that of Great Britain.¹ Thus the inquiry of the Ottoman commission was supervised by British, Russian and French representatives alone - though not by the Consuls at Erzeroum in person. Apparently owing to the decrepitude of the Russian Consul, St. Petersburg insisted that mere delegates be sent;² and Kimberley, while he would have preferred to adhere to the earlier plan, hoped that the alternative arrangement would work well enough.³

The policy of the Foreign Secretary in late December was simply to await the outcome of the investigation.⁴ The Armenians' most devoted sympathizer in the cabinet was James Bryce, the President of the Board of Trade, and he appears to have exerted some pressure for immediate further measures. This advocacy Kimberley resisted. The Russians, he warned Bryce to remember, were 'not by any means hot in this business'.⁵ As for the French, their embassy at Constantinople had shown no great interest in the Armenian question for its own sake,⁶ and Kimberley considered them

¹ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 238, 12 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

² Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 242 Confidential, 14 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4546; cf. Sir R. Graves, Storm Centres of the Near East - Personal Memories, 1879-1929, p. 145.

³ Kimberley to Bryce, Private, 15 Dec. 1894, Bryce Papers.

⁴ Kimberley to Bryce, Private, 25 Dec. 1894, Bryce Papers.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 215, 5 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4546.

to be intervening in it now as the Russians' 'humble satellites'.¹ France being primarily desirous of staying in step with her ally, it was clear that for Great Britain to try and go farther or faster than St. Petersburg was ready to go would mean isolation - or a tête-à-tête with Italy, which would amount to the same thing. In Kimberley's judgment isolation would render the British embassy impotent: he argued, indeed, that if Currie made any proposal or demand which Russia and France refused to support, the Sultan would be less intimated^{id} than encouraged. Moreover, in insisting on sufficient guarantees of fairness, the Foreign Secretary had not been acting on the assumption that the results of an impartial inquiry would redound as much to the discredit of the Turkish authorities as the Armenians pretended. He was less than fully convinced of the complete accuracy of the horrible allegations which he had heard, and maintained that without additional evidence it was impossible to treat them as proved.² 'Probably', he minuted early in February, 'the lying on both sides is about equal.'³ Such cautious scepticism about Armenian veracity had been influencing his thinking for some time.

Nevertheless, the idea of passively awaiting the outcome of the inquiry was short-lived. The work of the Turkish commission was destined to drag on through the entire winter and spring of 1895, being formally terminated only on 21

¹ Kimberley to Bryce, Private, 25 Dec. 1894, Bryce Papers; cf. Kimberley to Gladstone, 27 Mar. 1895, Add. MS. 44229.

² Kimberley to Bryce, Private, 25 Dec. 1894, Bryce Papers; cf. Kimberley to Gladstone, Private, 30 Dec. 1894, Add. MS. 44229.

³ Currie to Kimberley, No. 84 Confidential, 31 Jan. 1895 (with minute by Kimberley, dated 8 Feb. 1895), F.O. 78/4607.

July.¹ At an early stage it became apparent that the results were unlikely to be satisfactory. Delving into their formidable armoury of wiles, the commissioners and other Ottoman officials brought forth every conceivable device of delay, concealment and obfuscation.² In this respect matters were improving somewhat by May, as a consequence of efforts by the ambassadors of the three Powers at Constantinople,³ but meanwhile oppression of the Armenians, in rural districts especially, had been not merely continuing but increasing.⁴ Inevitably, the government in London was subjected to pressure from public opinion for more extensive and more effective intervention. The British people, Currie informed the Sultan in March, felt that they could no longer 'share responsibility' for the state of affairs in the Armenian provinces, and the cabinet would accordingly be obliged to demand the introduction of reforms.⁵

As early as January Currie had reported that although he had not discussed the question of reforms with Cambon and Nelidow, he had reason to believe, from what the two ambassadors had told his Austrian colleague, that Russo-French acquiescence could be obtained for certain limited

¹ For details of the proceedings, see Accounts and Papers, Turkey No. 1 (1895), Part II, cix [C-7894-1], 469-829.

² Graves, pp. 145-146; cf. Lascelles to Kimberley, No. 59, 13 Mar. 1895, F.O. 65/1490; Currie to Kimberley, No. 249, 20 Apr. 1895, F.O. 78/4611.

³ Graves, p. 148.

⁴ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 28, 18 Mar., F.O. 78/4626; Currie to Kimberley, No. 232, 17 Apr. 1895, F.O. 78/4610; cf. H. Whates, The Third Salisbury Administration, 1895-1900, p. 27.

⁵ Currie to Kimberley, No. 189, 27 Mar. 1895, F.O. 78/4609.

proposals.¹ This expectation proved justified, and on 17 April a scheme of reforms was approved by the French, British and Russian embassies.² It included provisions calling for an amnesty for many prisoners, the re-hearing of some trials, speedier trials in future, improvements in the system of tax collection, admission of Christians to the judiciary and gendarmerie in numbers proportional to the Christian population in each locality, and the appointment of a special commission to see that no Ottoman subject was held in custody without a proper warrant of arrest. Moslem governors or 'Valis' in the Armenian provinces were henceforth to have Christian vice-governors. With full authority over the Valis there was to be a High Commissioner, who would receive petitions from the inhabitants and superintend implementation of the reforms. If Moslem, this official also was to be assisted by a Christian. In addition a permanent Commission of Control, composed of three Moslems and three Christians, was to sit at Constantinople, and be associated with the High Commissioner in the task of supervision.³

During discussion of these proposals among the three embassies, the view taken by the British had been that the nomination of Valis and of members of the Commission of Control should be subject to the consent of the Powers. Nelidow and Cambon had maintained, however, that it would be impossible to induce the Sultan to accept such an ar-

¹ Currie to Kimberley, No. 48, 19 Jan. 1895, F.O. 78/4607.

² Currie to Kimberley, No. 243, 18 Apr. 1895 (encloses Memorandum and Project of Reforms for the Armenian Provinces), F.O. 78/4610.

³ Ibid.; Annual Register for 1895, p. 285.

rangement without resort to measures which St. Petersburg and Paris would be unwilling to employ.¹ Thus the draft scheme to which Currie agreed on 17 April contained no clause permitting a European veto on Abdul Hamid's selection of personnel. In the case of Valis, all that was to be required was that the Turks should keep the Powers informed of intended appointments, so that a protest could be lodged against any unsuitable choice. In the case of the Commission of Control, the only proposed right of foreign interference lay in a privilege to be enjoyed by the embassies of communicating directly with the Commission in order to make representations. Currie reported that this provision, if 'skilfully worked', might be enough to give the Ottoman body 'something of an international character'.²

Though Currie was prepared to be content with these safeguards, such as they were, his government was not satisfied. Bryce had warned the Foreign Office in February that for the nomination of a Valis to be subject to international approval was in his judgment an indispensable condition of any adequate reform.³ While he was still as conscious as ever of the necessity of retaining Russian support,⁴ Kimberley realized, on reading the draft of 17 April, that its failure to provide for the veto Bryce advocated would invite strong criticism from the Armenians' sympathiz-

¹ Currie to Kimberley, No. 245, 18 Apr. 1895, F.O. 78/4610.

² Ibid.; Currie to Kimberley, No. 243, 18 Apr. 1895 (encloses Memorandum and Project of Reforms for the Armenian Provinces), F.O. 78/4610.

³ Minute by Bryce, dated 5 Feb. 1895, F.O. 78/4647.

⁴ Kimberley to Gladstone, 27 Mar.; Private, 20 Apr., Add. MS. 44229; Kimberley to Bryce, Private, 29 May 1895, Bryce Papers.

ers in general. Reminding Currie of this fact, the Foreign Secretary urged that the omission be rectified, and that not only the choice of Valis but that of the High Commissioner as well be made subject to the assent of the Powers.¹ Currie found, however, that so far as Valis were concerned, his Russian and French colleagues were adamant in their opposition to Kimberley's wishes.² Lobanow, the Tsar's foreign minister, had been making no secret of his doubts that major reforms were practicable,³ and he believed that in endorsing a scheme as extensive as that adopted on the 17th, Nelidow had already gone too far.⁴ Nevertheless, when the British cabinet examined the scheme at the beginning of May, it concurred with Bryce's opinion that a veto on Valis should be demanded, and Currie was accordingly instructed on the 3rd to try once again to secure Russo-French acquiescence. Once again he was rebuffed,⁵ but shortly afterwards the draft was amended to provide for approval of the Powers in the case of the appointment of the High Commissioner.⁶ On 11 May the revised programme was

¹ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 36A, 28 Apr. 1895, F.O. 78/4626.

² Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 156A, 29 Apr. 1895, F.O. 78/4628.

³ Lascelles to Kimberley, No. 59, 13 Mar.; No. 81, 28 Mar.; No. 90, 10 Apr. 1895, F.O. 65/1490.

⁴ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 156A, 29 Apr. 1895, F.O. 78/4628; Lascelles to Kimberley, No. 124 Confidential, 8 May 1895, F.O. 65/1491.

⁵ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 38, 3 May, F.O. 78/4626; Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 164, 3 May 1895, F.O. 78/4628.

⁶ Amended draft of Memorandum and Project of Reforms for the Armenian Provinces; Currie to Sanderson, Private Tele-

submitted by the embassies to the Imperial Palace.¹

Through the rest of the month the Sultan and his ministers temporized;² then, in the first week of June, Abdul Hamid summoned up enough courage to reject much of the three-Power scheme altogether.³ He dared to take this step perhaps only because of the growing divergence between British and Russian attitudes which manifested itself in the latter part of May.⁴ Agitation among Armenians in Russia was reaching a new peak: it was reported that many of them were in contact with Armenian revolutionary committees abroad, that arms were being purchased, and that efforts were to be made from Russian territory to organize a general insurrection of the Armenian population in the neighbouring Ottoman provinces.⁵ Apparently fearing lest the flood-gates of Armenian nationalism might be opened by too much evidence of solicitude on the part of the Powers, and that Russia as well as Turkey would suffer, the government at St. Petersburg became more cautious and unenthusiastic than ever in its support of reform.⁶

gram, 9 May 1895 (both with Currie to Kimberley, No. 243, 18 Apr. 1895, F.O. 78/4610).

¹ Currie to Kimberley, No. 308, 11 May 1895, F.O. 78/4612.

² Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 194 Confidential, 28 May 1895, F.O. 78/4628.

³ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 220, 3 June 1895, F.O. 78/4628.

⁴ Cf. Gosselin (chargé d'affaires at Berlin) to Kimberley, No. 136 Confidential, 8 June 1895, F.O. 64/1350.

⁵ Lascelles to Kimberley, No. 132 Confidential, 22 May; No. 136 Confidential, 24 May; No. 147 Confidential, 5 June 1895, F.O. 65/1491; Tel. No. 58, 22 May 1895, F.O. 65/1494.

⁶ Kimberley to Bryce, Private, 29 May 1895, Bryce Papers.

Meanwhile public feeling in Great Britain was becoming steadily stronger,¹ and Abdul Hamid's unsatisfactory reply at the beginning of June necessitated that some study be given to possible means by which compliance with the ambassadorial demands could be enforced. On the 5th Colonel Chermside completed a memorandum in which the difficulties of acting effectively were clearly set forth:

In case of hostilities between Turkey and England the seizure of the Gallipoli Peninsula by a joint Naval and Military Expedition is the most decisive operation which England could undertake - but for this a very considerable military force is a sine qua non. All naval operations without military support must be of very limited scope, and some such purely naval operations, as for instance in the Red Sea, might be a long time in producing an appreciable or decisive effect.

If a British attack on Turkey were to be made without substantial land forces, Chermside calculated that the 'maximum result with the minimum exercise of power' could be obtained by combining a blockade in the Red Sea and the cutting of the Sultan's sea routes to Arabia with a policy of encouraging the Arabs to rise against Imperial rule. On the other hand, if a mere naval demonstration or local action rather than war was intended, he argued that the most suitable place would be the island of Mitylene. Mitylene was attractive, he pointed out, in that it had good harbours and was lightly defended. He did recognize a risk, however, that other Powers might suspect London of ulterior designs. Crete he judged to be less open to that objection, but Crete had a large garrison, and a fleet without a land force could do nothing convincing there.²

¹ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 52, 27 May 1895, F.O. 78/4626.

² Memorandum by Chermside, dated 5 June (enclosed in Currie to Kimberley, No. 368 Secret, 6 June 1895, F.O. 78/4613).

Whatever naval or military steps were adopted, it was evident that they would have to be taken without foreign assistance. The Russians had already warned London in May that under no circumstances would they associate themselves with 'measures of constraint'.¹ This was not interpreted by the British to mean, however, that the Tsar would intervene in defence of Turkey if London chose to act independently. Lobanow made it plain that St. Petersburg would not tolerate the creation on the Russian frontier of a new 'Bulgaria', in the form of a territory in which Armenians would enjoy exceptional privileges;² but if the British proclaimed that their purposes were strictly limited to securing acceptance of the three-Power programme, Russia seemed unlikely to react violently against the threat or indeed the use of force.³ At the Admiralty, Spencer was confident that she would acquiesce in a British seizure of any point except perhaps Constantinople itself. On 9 June he alerted the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean fleet: 'I fully expect that you may be ordered to Mitylene or even the Dardanelles this week.'⁴ Unless he changed his

¹ Kimberley to Lascelles, No. 169A, 30 May, F.O. 65/1489; Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 58, 31 May 1895, F.O. 78/4626.

² Lascelles to Kimberley, No. 142 Confidential, 4 June 1895, F.O. 65/1491; Tel. No. 61, 4 June; Tel. No. 62, 13 June 1895, F.O. 65/1494.

³ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 255 Confidential, 18 June 1895, F.O. 78/4628; Memorandum by A. Block, dated 19 June (enclosed in Currie to Kimberley, No. 391 Confidential, 19 June 1895, F.O. 78/4613); cf. Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 6), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

⁴ A.J. Marder, British Naval Policy, 1880-1905, p. 230 (quotes Spencer to Seymour, 9 June 1895, Spencer Papers).

views between now and the end of the month, Currie was somewhat more cautious. Writing to Salisbury on the 27th, the ambassador predicted that Russia would not make difficulties, but he qualified his forecast with two conditions: not only would the limited objective of British operations have to be 'perfectly clear', but to help make it clear action at the Dardanelles would have to be avoided.¹

In the event there was no action anywhere. More than a year later John Morley told Sir Charles Dilke that Kimberley had advocated the forcing of the Dardanelles, but that the proposal had been successfully opposed by Sir William Harcourt.² If the Foreign Secretary did put forward such an idea, it appears probable that he thought of it as a possibility to be held in reserve, rather than as a plan to be immediately carried out. It was never discussed in more than hypothetical terms; or if it was, the fact was kept secret even from Sir Thomas Sanderson, Currie's successor as Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office. In July Sanderson minuted for Salisbury's benefit that the Liberal government had not given 'practical consideration' to any naval or military measures.³ On the very day of the Liberals' defeat in the House of Commons - 21 June - the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean commented that from what he heard, the cabinet seemed not to have made up

¹ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 6), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

² S. Gwynn and Gertrude M. Tuckwell, The Life of the Rt. Hon. Sir Charles W. Dilke, Bart., M.P., ii. 491n; cf. also Marder, *loc. cit.*; W.L. Langer, The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902, i. 196.

³ Minute by Sanderson, dated 15 July 1895 (with Currie to Kimberley, No. 368 Secret, 6 June 1895, F.O. 78/4613).

its mind what to do should Turkey prove obdurate.¹ Currie informed Salisbury that 'as far as I understood their intentions' the previous administration had been 'prepared to make a naval demonstration and to take further action if necessary'. But this assertion represented merely a reasonable deduction: the ambassador had received no authoritative statement of policy from London.²

Continuing Liberal indecision during June can no doubt be attributed at least in part to the diplomatic tactics of Abdul Hamid. As early as 28 May, before the Turkish rejection of essential points in the three-Power programme, the Mediterranean Commander-in-Chief had been instructed to proceed with his squadron from Alexandria to Beirut, as a means of intimidating the Sultan.³ The warships reached Beirut almost simultaneously with the Turkish reply to the ambassadors,⁴ and before long Abdul Hamid apparently decided that it might be unsafe to adhere too rigidly to the position he had adopted. On 8 June the Ottoman ambassador in London explained to Kimberley that since the answer given by his government had been drawn up 'in great haste', it should not be regarded as 'final and complete'. The whole matter, he added, was still under consideration at the Palace.⁵ In view of this indication that Turkey might

¹ Seymour to Currie, Private, 21 June 1895 (enclosed in Currie to Salisbury, Private, 30 June 1895, Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers).

² Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 6), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

³ Harder, p. 229.

⁴ Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 62, 4 June 1895, F.O. 78/4626.

⁵ Kimberley to Currie, No. 228, 8 June 1895, F.O. 78/4606.

change her stand, the cabinet had some justification for its postponement of a decision on strong measures. Instead of being sent to the Dardanelles or Mitylene as Spencer anticipated on the 9th, the squadron at Beirut was ordered on the 11th simply to cruise along the coasts of Syria and Asia Minor, making a call at Alexandretta.¹ The latter point, in view of the powerful forces which Turkey could easily concentrate in the vicinity, had been described in Chermiside's memorandum as unsuitable for a naval demonstration 'formally notified as such';² but both Chermiside and Currie had judged an informal visit to be desirable.³

On 17 June the Porte communicated a new reply to the reform proposals. Currie thought it very ambiguous, but observed that if it were 'favourably construed', it seemed to mean that the reforms were 'accepted in principle'.⁴ The embassies found it impossible, however, to extract from the Turks an intelligible explanation of what their answer signified.⁵ London now suggested that Nelidow, Cambon and Currie be instructed to demand a precise reply within forty-eight hours, in order that their governments might be enabled to 'decide what course they shall pursue'.⁶

¹ Marder, p. 230.

² Memorandum by Chermiside, dated 5 June (enclosed in Currie to Kimberley, No. 368 Secret, 6 June 1895, F.O. 78/4613).

³ Ibid.; Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 228 Secret, 5 June 1895, F.O. 78/4628.

⁴ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 251, 17 June; Tel. No. 253 Confidential, 17 June 1895, F.O. 78/4628.

⁵ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 255 Confidential, 18 June 1895, F.O. 78/4628.

⁶ Kimberley to Dufferin, Tel. No. 82, 19 June 1895, F.O.

Russia refused to co-operate,¹ and on the 23rd Currie warned the Foreign Office that unless Abdul Hamid was subjected to greater pressure than St. Petersburg was willing to take part in exerting, all hope of anything more than nominal Turkish concessions would have to be abandoned.²

Currie's attitude was at this time quite different from what it had been a few months earlier. Originally he had wished to be pleasant towards the Ottoman tyrant, trouble him as little as possible about Armenians, and thus endeavour to cultivate his friendship. From the outset it had been the opinion of the ambassador that Abdul Hamid would not grant reforms in response to words alone,³ and we have noticed his fear that an attempt at obtaining reforms which was not carried through to success would be ruinous to British prestige.⁴ At first, then, he preferred inaction; but once he was committed to particular proposals, the same reasoning which had held him back before began to impel him forward, and to make him an advocate of firmness and vigour. Nelidow and Cambon were committed too, and were eager to avert an humiliation; but Nelidow was restrained by Lobanow.⁵ In any case, since it was the British who had

27/3223. An identical telegram was sent to St. Petersburg.

¹ Lascelles to Kimberley, Tel. No. 64, 21 June, F.O. 65/1494; Kimberley to Lascelles, No. 215A, 22 June 1895, F.O. 65/1489.

² Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 260, 23 June 1895, F.O. 78/4628.

³ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 6), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

⁴ Above, p. 337.

⁵ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 6), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

taken the lead, it was they who were in danger of suffering the worst political losses through failure. Unless the Turks could be made to accept the reform scheme, Currie expected that the fruits of his efforts to restore British influence on the Bosphorus would be swept away, and that his country and he himself would be the laughing-stock of the Near East. On 27 June he lamented to Salisbury:

Since the late Govt. were driven into the violent line they have taken about Armenia, I have been forced, notwithstanding all my reluctance, into a position of hostility towards the Sultan. I can only hope now that the reforms will be pushed through. Otherwise our influence, which has stood well lately, will sink to the Fordian level.¹

When Currie telegraphed his warning of the 23rd on the need for stronger pressure, the Liberal ministry was on the point of leaving office. Kimberley replied, perhaps with a sigh of relief, that further decisions would have to come from his successor.² The problems thus bequeathed to Salisbury constituted a burdensome and unwelcome aspect of his inheritance from the Rosebery administration.³ To the general nature of that inheritance we shall shortly have to turn our attention; but first we must briefly acquaint ourselves with the outlines of Rosebery's policy in one other specific question - that of Bulgaria. The British-led foreign interference in the Armenian Question, we shall find, had not been without repercussions in the affairs of the Balkan Peninsula.

¹ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 1), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

² Kimberley to Currie, Tel. No. 91, 24 June 1895, F.O. 78/4626.

³ See below, pp. 378-381.

THE EUROPEAN APPROACHES:

GREAT BRITAIN AND BULGARIA, 1892--'95

Rosebery's policy with regard to Bulgaria in the 'nineties consisted of attempts to maintain intact what he recognized as two great obstacles to a Russian adventure on the Balkan flank of the Straits. One of those obstacles, as we have already seen, was Bulgaria herself, governed with a firm hand by the Russophobe Stambouloff.¹ After the Eastern Roumelian revolution of 1885, the Foreign Office in London had come to realize that Bulgarian nationalism, in earlier days a disruptive force within the Ottoman Empire, was now the most promising instrument available for preventing future incursions by the Tsar's armies into European Turkey. Accordingly, reversing the stand of 1878, the British Conservative government had thrown its support (albeit with reservations) to the Bulgarian nationalist movement.² Rosebery, as Foreign Secretary in the short-lived Liberal ministry of 1886, had proved to be in essential agreement with this altered approach.³ Whichever party held power at Westminster, Great Britain saw in the vigour and independence of the Bulgarian Principality a valuable protection for Turkey and her strategic waterway.

In order that the new bulwark against Russia might be as

¹ Above, pp. 322-323.

² C.L. Smith, The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople, 1886-1891, pp. 20-29, 108; J.A.R. Marriott, Modern England, 1885-1945, p. 91.

³ Smith, pp. 37, 42.

secure as possible, London naturally hoped not only for political stability at Sofia, but for the growth of close and harmonious relations between the Principality and its suzerain, the Ottoman Sultan.¹ In that he was a strong leader, and an exponent both of nationalist resistance to Russia and of alignment with Abdul Hamid,² Stambouloff was an ideal Bulgarian statesman from the standpoint of British interests. By the time when Rosebery left the Foreign Office for the Premiership in 1894, however, the position of this Balkan 'Bismarck' was being fatally undermined by the attitude of Prince Ferdinand, and by the clandestine alliance into which the latter had entered with his minister's avowed opponents.³ In May Stambouloff fell from power, and a period opened in which Russophile elements, encouraged by sympathy within the government itself, gained significantly in boldness and in influence.⁴ During the summer the British Agent at Sofia, a diplomat named Dering, saw a danger that the new trend in Bulgarian politics might lead to the 'beginning of the end' of the Principality as an 'autonomous and free-acting' entity.⁵ Sir Arthur Nicolson, after succeeding Dering at the Agency in late

¹ C. Jelavich, Tsarist Russia and Balkan Nationalism, 1879-1886, p. 238; cf. Marriott, *loc. cit.*

² W. Miller, The Ottoman Empire and Its Successors, p. 449; W.S. Murray, The Making of the Balkan States, p. 174; Ford to Rosebery, No. 196, 17 May 1893, F.O. 78/4479.

³ Dering to Kimberley, No. 41 Very Confidential, 12 Apr. 1894, F.O. 78/4568; A.H. Beaman, Stambuloff, pp. 182-189.

⁴ Dering to Kimberley, No. 85 Very Confidential, 12 July; No. 86, 17 July 1894, F.O. 78/4569.

⁵ Dering to Kimberley, No. 91 Very Confidential, 9 Aug. 1894, F.O. 78/4569.

September, soon began arguing for a calmer view: he maintained that although the Russophile parties were indeed in control, their sympathies for the Tsarist Empire, being largely 'platonic and a matter of sentiment', were unlikely to have any practical effect on policy.¹ Nicolson's confidence, shared by Stambouloff,² had a good deal to confirm it. The government appeared determined that if the Russo-Bulgarian estrangement were to be ended, this should be done without the sacrifice of a single iota of the Principality's independence.³ But, whereas there was little evident prospect in the late autumn and winter of a precipitate movement towards reconciliation with St. Petersburg,⁴ another threat to the Balkan status quo was arising from an agitation which the Bulgarian authorities permitted against Turkish misrule in Macedonia.⁵ Under Stambouloff, the semi-official newspaper Svoboda had more than once advocated military alliance between Sofia and the Sultan.⁶ By the summer of 1895 Bulgaria had drifted so far from such ideas that the possibility of war between the Principality and its suzerain could no longer be ruled

¹ Nicolson to Kimberley, No. 134, 28 Oct. 1894, F.O. 78/4569.

² Nicolson to Kimberley, No. 135, 1 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4569.

³ Nicolson to Kimberley, No. 139, 5 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4569; Anonymous, Bulgarien nach dem Sturze Stambouloffs, pp. 51-52.

⁴ Nicolson to Kimberley, No. 146, 20 Nov.; No. 151, 29 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4569; No. 15, 28 Jan. 1895, F.O. 78/4661.

⁵ Nicolson to Kimberley, No. 153, 4 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4569; No. 12, 19 Jan.; No. 14, 27 Jan.; No. 41, 25 Mar.; No. 66, 26 May 1895, F.O. 78/4661.

⁶ Ford to Rosebery, No. 196, 17 May 1893, F.O. 78/4479; Dering to Kimberley, No. 55, 11 May 1894, F.O. 78/4568.

out.¹

It must not be supposed that the policies of Stamboul-off himself had been invariably approved at London. If one barrier to a Russian advance through the Balkans was the vitality of Bulgarian nationalism, a second such barrier, in Rosebery's estimation, lay in the pacific disposition of Alexander III. The British statesman reasoned that the more Bulgaria annoyed the Tsar, the stronger would grow the position of those at the Russian Court who were trying to overcome their master's distaste for military adventure.² Stambouloff was apparently indifferent to this consideration: he seemed at times to delight in giving provocative demonstrations of his Russophobia. In the summer and autumn of 1892, for example, he had the Svoboda publish documents of uncertain authenticity which purported to be proof of sinister Russian designs on the Principality.³ When St. Petersburg denied the allegations, insisting that the evidence was composed entirely of forgeries, the Svoboda retorted that the Tsar's government was guilty of an 'unqualified and official lie'.⁴ In December a plan was revealed to amend the Bulgarian Constitution, so as to remove a clause requiring that children of the Prince be raised in

¹ Nicolson to Salisbury, Tel. No. 17, 29 June, F.O. 78/4664; No. 86, 30 June 1895, F.O. 78/4662.

² Rosebery to Queen Victoria, 16 June 1893 (printed in G.E. Buckle, The Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd ser., ii. 260-261).

³ Lowther to Salisbury, No. 121 Confidential, 16 Aug. 1892; Lowther to Rosebery, No. 131 Confidential, 12 Sept. 1892, F.O. 78/4444.

⁴ Lowther to Rosebery, No. 128 Confidential, 6 Sept. 1892 (encloses a translation of an article published in the Svoboda of the same date), F.O. 78/4444.

the Orthodox religion. That Russia would regard such an amendment as objectionable was obvious,¹ and Stambouloff did nothing to reduce her inevitable irritation by allowing the Svoboda to announce at this moment the imminence of additional 'disclosures', allegedly proving that the religious restriction imposed on the Prince's family had been by origin part of a Russian scheme for Bulgaria's absorption. 'The publication of the Russian papers simultaneously with the change of the Constitution', commented Rosebery, 'hardly strikes one as a conciliatory measure.'² The British did what they could by means of advice to persuade the Bulgarian Premier to abandon the proposed amendment, but in this they were unsuccessful.³ It was now that the Russians made their attempt, already mentioned in another context, to enlist the aid of the Bulgarian Exarch against Stambouloff's plans. Finding themselves thwarted by Abdul Hamid,⁴ they confined themselves thereafter to verbal indignation.⁵ Nothing happened to justify the fears which Rosebery had expressed to Sofia of 'serious consequences';⁶ yet the Foreign Secretary continued to be an

¹ Lowther to Rosebery, No. 170 Very Confidential, 8 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4444.

² Lowther to Rosebery, No. 172, 8 Dec. 1892 (with minute by Rosebery), F.O. 78/4444.

³ Rosebery to Lowther, Tel. No. 20 Secret, 6 Dec.; Tel. No. 21 Secret, 12 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4445; Lowther to Rosebery, No. 177 Very Confidential, 11 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4444.

⁴ Above, p. 126.

⁵ Morier to Rosebery, No. 80, 6 Mar. 1893, F.O. 65/1446.

⁶ Rosebery to Lowther, Tel. No. 20 Secret, 6 Dec. 1892, F.O. 78/4445; Morier to Rosebery, No. 85, 16 Mar. 1893, F.O. 65/1446.

advocate of extreme caution.¹ It was his settled opinion that while the Bulgarians should firmly maintain their independence from Russia, they should respect the susceptibilities of the Tsar to the full extent compatible with national freedom.²

In some respects Stambouloff's methods in dealing with Turkey were also considered by the British to be hazardous. Desiring good relations with the Sultan, the Bulgarian Premier was much displeased at the unfriendly attitude which Abdul Hamid adopted towards the Principality in the late spring of 1893.³ Displeasure became anger in the winter of 1893-'94, when Turkey made known her intention to enforce regulations which would bring about the closing of Bulgarian schools in Macedonia.⁴ The British sought to smooth matters over: the embassy at Constantinople tried to restrain the Turks,⁵ while the British and Austrian Agencies at Sofia pursued a common policy of impressing upon Stambouloff the dangers of a quarrel with the suzerain Power.⁶ But the Premier knew his own mind too well to be

¹ Buckle, loc. cit.; Rosebery to Dering, No. 36, 7 June; No. 37 Secret, 14 June 1893, F.O. 78/4505.

² Ibid.; Lowther to Rosebery, No. 174, 9 Dec. 1892 (with minute by Rosebery), F.O. 78/4444.

³ For the origin of Abdul Hamid's new policy, see above, pp. 126-127. For Stambouloff's reactions, see Ford to Rosebery, No. 251 Confidential, 11 June 1893, F.O. 78/4480.

⁴ Nicolson (chargé d'affaires at Constantinople) to Rosebery, No. 595, 20 Dec. 1893, F.O. 78/4484.

⁵ Nicolson to Rosebery, No. 30, 16 Jan. 1894, F.O. 78/4539; Rosebery to Dering, No. 8, 15 Feb. 1894, F.O. 78/4567.

⁶ Dering to Rosebery, No. 15, 10 Feb.; No. 27, 9 Mar. 1894, F.O. 78/4568.

greatly influenced by admonitions. He responded to Turkish proceedings by encouraging an agitation in Bulgaria on the Macedonian Question. British uneasiness again proved excessive, for this campaign did not lead to tension like that of the following year. Having helped to create popular excitement, apparently as a means of convincing the Sultan that he had best make concessions, Stambouloff had further agitation banned as soon as Abdul Hamid showed himself inclined to give ground.¹ The promises elicited from the Ottoman ruler were such as to occasion much rejoicing in the Principality,² and they were warmly welcomed by Sir Philip Currie as a contribution to improved Turco-Bulgarian relations. When Turkey procrastinated in carrying out her pledges, the British embassy readily acceded to a Bulgarian request for intervention at the Porte.³

After this restoration of a friendly atmosphere, the Svoboda promptly revived the project of military alliance with the Sultan.⁴ The government which now replaced Stambouloff's rejected the idea of alliance as provocative to Russia, but professed a desire that the Principality and its suzerain should remain on the best of terms.⁵ During

¹ Dering to Kimberley, No. 39, 30 Mar. 1894 (encloses Wratislaw (Vice-Consul at Philippopolis) to Dering, 25 Mar. 1894), F.O. 78/4568.

² Currie to Kimberley, No. 186, 24 Apr., F.O. 78/4540; No. 198, 1 May 1894, F.O. 78/4541.

³ Currie to Kimberley, No. 215, 9 May 1894, F.O. 78/4541.

⁴ Dering to Kimberley, No. 55, 11 May 1894, F.O. 78/4568.

⁵ Dering to Kimberley, No. 82, 6 July 1894 (encloses a summary of an article published on 4 July by the Svobodno Slovo, the organ of the new government), F.O. 78/4569.

most of the remainder of 1894 Turco-Bulgarian relations did appear to be cordial.¹ It was only at the beginning of winter that they commenced their slide towards crisis. On 2 December, at a well-attended public meeting held in Sofia by the Macedonian Society, the grievances of the Bulgarian inhabitants of Macedonia were aired and Ottoman maladministration denounced. Turkey made angry protests against the conduct of the Bulgarian authorities in permitting the meeting to take place: the Armenians were already causing trouble enough, remarked the Grand Vizier, and for the Sofia government to allow demonstrations about Macedonia at such a time was unfriendly behaviour.² The government disclaimed responsibility,³ but Macedonian organizations in the Principality were not prevented from continuing their activities. Within a few months, moreover, it became known to London that their propaganda had been extended beyond Bulgaria into Macedonia itself.⁴

In the late winter of 1895, both the British and the Austrians gave Bulgaria advice calculated to discourage her from tolerating incitement of the Macedonian population from her territory.⁵ The Bulgarian régime seems to have

¹ Nicolson to Kimberley, No. 131, 25 Oct.; No. 132 Confidential, 26 Oct. 1894, F.O. 78/4569; Currie to Kimberley, No. 502 Confidential, 1 Nov. 1894, F.O. 78/4543.

² Nicolson to Kimberley, No. 153, 4 Dec., F.O. 78/4569; Currie to Kimberley, No. 574, 12 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4544.

³ Ibid.; Currie to Kimberley, No. 578 Confidential, 16 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4544.

⁴ Currie to Kimberley, Tel. No. 86, 15 Mar. 1895, F.O. 78/4628.

⁵ Monson to Kimberley, No. 69, 2 Mar. 1895, F.O. 7/1225; Kimberley to Nicolson, Tel. No. 7, 16 Mar. 1895, F.O. 78/4664.

lacked the necessary resolution, however, to take adequate measures of repression in good time. Stambouloff had been able to stop the earlier agitation without difficulty, but that of 1895 was far more formidable. The eclipse of the great believer in hostility towards Russia and close relations with Turkey had raised the hopes of enthusiasts for the Macedonian cause,¹ and the interest taken by some Powers in the welfare of Armenians had not failed to produce an impression. If persecuted Armenians could command the solicitude of a foreign people and government, then why not persecuted Macedonians?² The Bulgarian Agent at Constantinople was reported to be among the champions of the view that it would be wise policy to stir up commotion in Macedonia: the disturbances, he allegedly calculated, would no doubt be put down by the Turks with a cruelty comparable to that practised in Armenia, with the result that British public opinion would be roused in this case also to indignation and sympathy.³ Sir Arthur Nicolson did not suspect the Bulgarian ministry of such designs, but he criticized it to Kimberley for the 'hesitating and vacillating' manner in which it had acted throughout, and as a consequence of which the movement had been enabled to grow to a dangerous level.⁴

In May and June the British continued their efforts to

¹ C. Anastasoff, The Tragic Peninsula: A History of the Macedonian Movement for Independence since 1878, p. 63.

² Currie to Kimberley, No. 578 Confidential, 16 Dec. 1894, F.O. 78/4544; cf. N. Buxton, Europe and the Turks, p. 36.

³ Lascelles to Kimberley, No. 112 Confidential, 23 Apr. 1895, F.O. 65/1490.

⁴ Nicolson to Kimberley, No. 66, 26 May 1895, F.O. 78/4661.

restrain Sofia from any action, even diplomatic advocacy of reforms, which might tend to make the Macedonian Question more acute.¹ The Bulgarian authorities had let matters drift so long, however, that it might now have been almost impossible for them to bring the agitation under control; and they chose not to make an attempt.² In Macedonia fighting was apparently breaking out in some localities between Ottoman soldiery and insurgent bands.³ At the time when Salisbury replaced Rosebery in Downing Street, the Sofia government was beginning to take what Nicolson judged to be 'efficacious' steps on the border, but it was plainly beyond Bulgaria's power to seal the frontier altogether against the passage of partisans wishing to assist a Macedonian rising.⁴ Frontier incidents had already occurred, and the Turkish commandant at Adrianople reportedly had orders that in the event of further clashes he was to 'act at once'. Sofia requested explanations, and informed the Porte of its intention to reinforce the Bulgarian troops in Eastern Roumelia.⁵ The Bulgarian foreign minister expressed to Nicolson a suspicion that the Turks might provoke a fresh incident and proceed to invade the Principality.

¹ Nicolson to Kimberley, Tel. No. 11, 24 May; Kimberley to Nicolson, Tel. No. 9, 24 May 1895, F.O. 78/4664; Salisbury to Currie, No. 257, 29 June 1895, F.O. 78/4606.

² Nicolson to Salisbury, Tel. No. 16, 29 June, F.O. 78/4664; No. 86, 30 June 1895, F.O. 78/4662.

³ Gosselin (chargé d'affaires at Berlin) to Kimberley, No. 157, 28 June 1895, F.O. 64/1350.

⁴ Nicolson to Salisbury, Tel. No. 16, 29 June, F.O. 78/4664; cf. Monson to Kimberley, No. 206, 28 June 1895, F.O. 7/1227.

⁵ Nicolson to Salisbury, Tel. No. 17, 29 June, F.O. 78/4664; No. 86, 30 June 1895, F.O. 78/4662.

Though saying that it was not contemplated 'at present', he spoke in terms of possible mobilization - a move which Nicolson strongly urged should be avoided, on the ground that it would have the appearance of a hostile demonstration and might lead to 'very serious consequences'. While the Agent did not believe that war against Turkey was desired in official circles, he had the impression that few Bulgarians appreciated the gravity of the risks which such an adventure would entail. A decision to fight the Sultan, he predicted, would be highly popular in the country.¹

British efforts to maintain Turco-Bulgarian friendship had proved unavailing, but Russia was not interested in exploiting the situation: her eyes were fixed more firmly than ever on the Far East.² The Macedonian agitation resulted neither in war nor in large-scale revolt: at the beginning of July Sir Philip Currie already realized that the revolutionary organizations based on Bulgaria were finding insufficient active support among the people they aspired to liberate,³ and in the event they were so demoralized by their failure that they abstained from further major endeavours until after the turn of the century.⁴ Thus the state of affairs which Salisbury faced in the Balkans on returning to office was not one which presented him with more than a passing problem. The Near Eastern status quo appeared unstable and likely to be short-lived, but for this instability there were causes more deep-seated than the ephemeral excitement over the Macedonian issue.

¹ Ibid. to Salisbury, Private, ² Below, pp. 391-392.

³ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 1 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

⁴ Anastasoff, loc. cit. P.O. 27/308.

SALISBURY'S INHERITANCE IN 1895

In July 1892, when the second Salisbury administration was defeated at the polls, the atmosphere of European politics had been one of calm and placidity.¹ The Straits scare of the previous year, a product of Russian preparations and Franco-Russian friendship, had faded away, and since no further demonstration similar to that at Cronstadt was in prospect for the moment, a revival of unusual anxiety within the immediate future was unlikely. The entente between Paris and St. Petersburg - an agreement which included no precise, practical arrangements for specific cases² - had not yet grown into alliance, nor did it appear to have done so.³ Great Britain did not seem to be threatened, as she did a year later, with the imminent united action of a hostile coalition. In the absence of any emergency demanding outstanding experience and diplomatic talent, Salisbury did not look upon his own departure from the Foreign Office as a calamity, or even as a serious blow to national interests. Just before the change of government he wrote privately to the ambassador in Berlin:

I think there is good hope that the main lines of our policy will not be departed from. What I am afraid of is a too hurried rapprochement with France - involving the abandonment of the Triple Alliance by Italy - a

¹ Malet to Salisbury, Private, 10 July 1892, F.O. 343/12.

² Cf. C. de Freycinet, Souvenirs, 1878-1893, pp. 487-488.

³ Dufferin to Rosebery, No. 256, 17 Sept., F.O. 27/3079; No. 336, 14 Nov. 1892, F.O. 27/3080.

reconstruction of the Dreikaiserbund and Russia on the Bosphorus. I think that the past will be sufficient to warn us against this risk.¹

Salisbury's optimism had proved to be justified. The prerequisite of a major rapprochement with France was the conclusion of some Egyptian settlement satisfying to French amour propre. In September 1891 John Morley had spoken in public against the British occupation of Egypt, and shortly afterwards Gladstone himself had used language which seemed to contain a hint of an intention to withdraw. Under Conservative counter-attack, however, both Gladstone and Morley had retreated precipitately.² In his private views the Liberal leader remained favourable to early evacuation: he believed that Great Britain 'ought to quit Egypt after having fulfilled the work for which we went there' - and in 1896 he wrote that this time had arrived 'some years ago'.³ Yet as Prime Minister he had set his heart in 1892-'93 on doing what he could regarding the question not of Egypt but of Ireland. In the interests of Home Rule he could not risk the disintegration of the government on the Egyptian issue. On the Nile, therefore, Rosebery occupied an almost impregnable position in relation to the 'Little Englanders'; and there was no likelihood of his deciding voluntarily to make significant concessions to France. In addition to being an imperialist, the new Foreign Secretary - unlike Salisbury⁴ -

¹ Salisbury to Malet, Private, 16 Aug. 1892, F.O. 343/3.

² C.L. Smith, The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople, 1886-1891, pp. 151-152.

³ Gladstone to Moustafa Kamel, 14 Jan. 1896 (quoted in T. Rothstein, Egypt's Ruin, p. 338).

⁴ Smith, pp. 152-153; Lady G. Cecil, The Life of Robert,

was a man who neither liked nor admired the French.¹ He had no enthusiasm for the idea of a Franco-British reconciliation: even in 1904, when one was brought about on terms which confirmed Great Britain's Egyptian hegemony, Rosebery was among the few who were critical.² Gladstone gloomily accepted the policy which he could not frustrate without losing his difficult but important colleague. In a conversation with the French ambassador early in 1893, just after the reinforcement of the British garrison, the Prime Minister first mentioned Egypt and then passed on to other subjects 'avec une certaine tristesse, comme si les affaires d'Égypte n'étaient pas de son domaine, et qu'il ne fût pas à même de leur donner la solution qu'il désirait'.³ A few months later he made a statement to the House of Commons reaffirming the provisional character of the occupation, but leaving the date of eventual withdrawal as indefinite as ever.⁴

France and Great Britain thus remained divided by the Egyptian problem, and in 1893 Siam afforded a less long-lived but temporarily more dangerous cause of quarrel. There was not only no 'too hurried rapprochement'; there was no rapprochement at all until 1894. Even then Rosebery did not cease to be conscious of the desirability of keeping Italy

Marquis of Salisbury, ii. 32-37.

¹ Above, pp. 175, 254, 325; A.J.P. Taylor, The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918, p. 342.

² G.M. Trevelyan, Grey of Fallodon, pp. 83-84, 123.

³ D.D.F., 1st ser., x, No. 153 (Waddington to Develle, 31 Jan. 1893).

⁴ Statement by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons, 1 May 1893, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 4th ser., xi. 1650-1656.

⁵ Above, pp. 242-256.

in the Triple Alliance,¹ and although his new friendliness towards France offended and distressed the Italians, it was not carried far enough to drive them to utter despair.² Its significance in their eyes was somewhat reduced, moreover, by the fact that the Rosebery administration never appeared likely to set a record for longevity.³ When London flirted disconcertingly with the Quai d'Orsay, statesmen at Rome, recalling with nostalgia the Mediterranean Agreements of 1887, could find comfort in the thought that before long the Liberals might be replaced by another Salisbury ministry.⁴ Rosebery's assurances to Rome in 1892 and thereafter,⁵ supplemented in 1894-'95 by Italian expectations of warmer sympathy from the Conservatives, held to a minimum the risk that Italy might abandon her existing alignment. By so doing, they protected Austria's rear against the threat of irredentism, and helped reduce the danger that Vienna might feel compelled to seek security within a restored Dreikaiserbund. The danger was reduced in other ways as well. The continued presence of the Levant Squadron within easy reach of the Straits, the appointment of Sir Philip Currie to the Constantinople embassy, and above all Rosebery's personal state-

¹ Malet to Rosebery, Private, 22 Dec. 1894, F.O. 343/13; Rosebery to Malet, Secret, 6 Jan. 1895, F.O. 343/3.

² G.P. viii, No. 1770 (Bülow to Hohenlohe, 25 Nov. 1894); No. 1771 (Bülow to Hohenlohe, 30 Nov. 1894).

³ Ibid., No. 1766 (Bülow to the German Foreign Office, 18 June); G.P. ix, No. 2194 (Marschall to Bülow, 19 Dec. 1894); cf. Staal to Giers, 7 Mar. 1894 (printed in A. Meyendorff, Correspondance Diplomatique du Baron de Staal, ii. 238-239).

⁴ G.P. ix, No. 2195 (Bülow to Hohenlohe, 21 Dec. 1894); cf. G.P. viii, No. 1773 (Bülow to Hohenlohe, 21 June 1895).

⁵ Above, pp. 242-256.

ments to Deym followed by announcement of the Spencer Programme - all these provided the Austrians with evidence of Great Britain's interest in the Near East and of her will to oppose Russian expansion in that region.¹ In conjunction with hopes that Germany might eventually be enticed back into the fold,² the British attitude reassured the Ballplatz in some degree during its period of anxiety in the early months of 1894; and soon disquiet about Russian intentions subsided.³ As Salisbury had anticipated in 1892, an Austro-Russo-German accord, on a basis including 'Russia on the Bosphorus', was safely averted.

Yet the situation which Salisbury inherited in June 1895 was markedly different from that which he had left behind him on losing office less than three years earlier. Bulgaria, which in the days of Stambouloff had been on the whole a factor contributing to peace and security in South-Eastern Europe, had been transformed into a point of instability and danger. Because the weak government which had succeeded Stambouloff's had allowed the Macedonian agitation to get out of control, the Principality seemed for the moment a menace to its suzerain and to the status quo.⁴ Moreover, even if the Turco-Bulgarian estrangement led to no clash of arms, there could be no certainty that the existing balance of power in the Balkans would not be altered by an eventual triumph of Russian influence at Sofia.⁵ Far more critical, however, was the outlook in Asia Minor. The problems of economic penetration were for the time being in the background:

¹ Chapters VI and VII.

² Above, pp. 286, 299.

³ Above, pp. 299-300, 305-306.

⁴ Above, 364-365, 369-372.

⁵ Cf. Nicolson to Kimberley, No. 43, 3 Apr. 1895, F.O. 78/4661.

all railway questions of any immediate importance had been settled in the great scramble of 1892-'93.¹ In 1895 the Germans were still at work on their line to Konia,² and there was no prospect that their dream of a Baghdad Railway would give rise to further diplomatic complications within the near future. When Rosebery's ministry fell, the German embassy on the Bosphorus was playing a scarcely more active part in economic matters than it was in politics.³ British diplomacy in the Near East was not now being deflected into unfortunate courses by the pleas of financiers, as it had been thirty months before: instead it had fallen prey to the pressure exerted by a more numerous and more powerful group, the humanitarians. The most conspicuous of Salisbury's Near Eastern difficulties in June 1895 arose from the fact that the Liberal administration, in dealing with the Armenian Question, had travelled too far along the path of humanitarianism without having any clear and practicable plans for surmounting the obstacles which lay ahead.

It will be remembered that Sir Philip Currie, once committed to the three-Power scheme of reforms, had become determined that everything possible should be done to secure its acceptance by the Turks.⁴ Salisbury, too, realized that the Liberals had tied his hands: 'pledged as we are', he admitted to the ambassador, the programme would have to be pushed through 'in some form or other'. He expected, however, that there would be much delay before any success was achieved, and expressed doubt whether the 'compromise which

¹ See Chapter III.

² Above, p. 122.

³ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 1), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

⁴ Above, pp. 360-361.

will ultimately be arrived at' would have much practical value.¹ Currie did not want a compromise: he wished to insist on the essentials of the proposal already put forward.² The incoming Prime Minister understood the reasons for such an attitude, but did not see how so intransigent a stand could be effectively supported:

It is indelicate to say anything disparaging of one's predecessors, but my impression is that they have forced you into a very awkward corner. Without using force to deprive the Sultan of his independent sovereignty, you are imposing on him terms which no independent sovereign would accept. Force is an excuse to men who have to yield. . . . If concessions can be extracted by force, well and good; the Moslem submits religiously to the decree of Fate. But if he has yielded without force, it is a matter of deep discontent among his subjects. It is to be feared that the Sultan will insist on force; and how are we to apply it in the absence of the co-operation of our allies?³

A commitment to a programme, without the means with which to implement the programme - such was the Liberal legacy in the Armenian Question. The Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean pointed out that while the Dardanelles could be forced if damage to the fleet was accepted, it would 'hardly do' for warships to enter the Sea of Marmora leaving the Dardanelles forts undestroyed behind them - and to destroy the forts, he argued, would require a land force. He expected that London would decide on action at some other

¹ Salisbury to Currie, Private Telegram, 1 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 138, Salisbury Papers.

² Currie to Salisbury, Private, 1 July 1895; Private Telegram, 1 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

³ Salisbury to Currie, Private, 1 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 138, Salisbury Papers. Cf. Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 6), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

place,¹ but Salisbury did not believe that anything useful could be accomplished anywhere by ships attempting to act without troops.² Currie, at the time of the change of government, thought it conceivable that an alternative to any type of force might be found in the convening of a conference of the Powers; but he admitted a difficulty - that in view of the Macedonian problem and the general condition of the Sultan's Empire, the deliberations of a conference could probably not be restricted to the affairs of Armenia.³ Though for a reason which Currie did not mention, concern about the scope of the suggested meeting constituted in Salisbury's eyes a decisive objection to its being held. Since nothing had come of the overtures made to Turkey by Rosebery in 1893,⁴ Great Britain still lacked solid legal basis for her occupation of Egypt. The new Prime Minister accordingly warned Currie that whatever he - the ambassador - did about Armenia, he should not assent to a conference, as France would certainly take advantage of the occasion to raise the Egyptian issue.⁵ Both a conference and the use of force being ruled out, no policy was possible but that of

¹ Seymour (Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet) to Currie, Private, 21 June; Private, 29 June 1895 (enclosed respectively in Currie to Salisbury, Private, 30 June; Private, 4 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers).

² Salisbury to Currie, Private Telegram, 5 Aug. 1895, Bound Volume, No. 138, Salisbury Papers.

³ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 6), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

⁴ See above, pp. 47-48.

⁵ Salisbury to Currie, Private Telegram, 5 Aug. 1895, Bound Volume No. 138, Salisbury Papers.

continuing co-operation with France and Russia, and of abiding by the 'many limiting conditions' attached to their support.¹ In these circumstances there could be no hope that the reforms to which Rosebery and Kimberley had committed the country would be carried through. The situation that confronted Salisbury in June 1895 was one in which British influence on the Bosphorus, which Currie believed he had done something towards restoring,² was doomed to inevitable extinction. By no means which he dared employ could the incoming Prime Minister enforce compliance with the Liberals' demands, nor could he repudiate those demands without arousing a storm of public protest. Yet if they were maintained in principle without compliance being enforced, Great Britain would appear to Abdul Hamid and his entourage to be a Power as toothless as her hostility was inveterate.

In the summer of 1895, however, the prospect of a total collapse of British influence at Constantinople was far less disturbing to a statesman at London than it would have been during Salisbury's second administration, in the days of Sir William White. When White and Ford had served in Turkey, and when Currie had been sent there, the underlying assumption of British policy had been that Ottoman integrity and independence should be protected as a means of containing Russia. Thus the proper task of a British ambassador, working as much as possible in collaboration with the representatives of the Triple Alliance, had been to resist the growth of Franco-Russian influence, and to thwart Franco-Russian de-

¹ Salisbury to Canon MacColl, 1 Aug. 1895 (printed in G.W.E. Russell, Malcolm MacColl: Memoirs and Correspondence, p. 145).

² Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 1), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

signs. But British public opinion, since the outbreak of the Armenian massacres, had become more profoundly impressed than before with the iniquities of Abdul Hamid's independent rule. Although Armenians were not always guiltless of plots and provocations, the tendency of the British press was to condemn the Turks and their government without using careful qualifying phrases,¹ and sympathy for the old policy of upholding the Sultan's rights had been undermined.² Nor should Salisbury's deepening conviction that Turkey was the 'wrong horse' be regarded merely as a product or reflection of popular sentiment. His conviction arose not only from the knowledge that Abdul Hamid and his minions were brutal and were hated in Great Britain, but also from evidence that the Hamidian régime was no longer viable. The venality, intrigue and pervasive espionage which characterized the Imperial despotism had been bad enough in 1892-'93,³ and by June 1895 the state of Turkey's political health appeared to be desperate. Currie, though he had been on the Bosphorus less than a year and a half, observed that there had been 'decided progress on the downward track' since his arrival. A feeling was increasingly apparent among educated Turks that the autocrat's spying and oppression, which rendered miserable the lives of Moslems as well as of Christians, were reaching an intolerable level, and that the country was be-

¹ S. Whitman, Turkish Memories, pp. 10-14; W.L. Langer, The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902, i. 322, 324-325.

² Cf. Lillian M. Penson, 'The New Course in British Foreign Policy, 1892-1902', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th ser., xxv. 134.

³ Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 12 Feb.; Private, 24 Apr.; Private, 8 May 1893, Villiers Papers; Calice to Kálnoky, No. 52C Secret, 20 Nov. 1893, W.S.A., P.A. viii/174.

ing led to disaster.¹ Just at the time of the Liberals' fall, moreover, a report was being prepared at the Constantinople embassy which indicated the likelihood of an imminent financial collapse in the Ottoman Empire. Unless reforms were to be introduced on a sweeping scale, it was argued, there could be no hope for the Sultan's continued solvency:

I have pointed out [wrote one of Currie's subordinates] the possibility of averting a crash, but I cannot anticipate that the Turkish Government will recognize in time the extreme gravity of the situation, or frankly accept such serious and radical measures as handing over one-half of its revenues to the independent control of a foreign administration. Failing however prompt recognition of the danger, and frank acceptance of radical reform, I do not think that the financial crisis can possibly be delayed over two years, and I should expect the crash to come at an earlier date.²

To try and contain Russia through maintenance of Turkey's independence and integrity seemed to be becoming a policy as politically futile as it was morally repugnant. The status quo in the Near East was showing distinct signs of being about to fall to pieces from internal decay, without Russia's having to overthrow it. Even apart from this consideration, the status quo no longer offered such great advantages, from the standpoint of British interests, as it had earlier in the decade. It will be recalled that because of the inadequacy of the defences of Constantinople, the Russian Black

¹ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June (Document No. 1); Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 2: encloses Whittall (President of the British Chamber of Commerce at Constantinople) to Currie, 27 June), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

² 'Notes on the Financial Position, Turkey, June 1895', by E. Law, Confidential, dated 26 June 1895 (enclosed in Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 4), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers).

Sea fleet was in a position, should it be ordered to attack the British, to reach the Mediterranean with only minor risk of damage at the hands of the Turks; and that therefore, in the view of the British Admiralty, not even a military occupation of the Straits fortifications by Russia could substantially increase her offensive capability.¹ As far as the balance of naval power in the Mediterranean was concerned, the value of the existing state of affairs in the Straits Question had lain largely in the fact that the Russians could not use the waterway unless they violated an international agreement, introduced a new element into the Near Eastern political situation, and so risked war with Austria and her Triple Alliance partners as well as with Great Britain.² Thus disunity in the Triple Alliance, and estrangement between Berlin and London, did not merely make it more difficult for Great Britain to oppose any attempt by St. Petersburg to gain a formal right of free passage. They also made it safer for the Tsar to send his fleet through the waterway without possessing such a formal right, and in this way rendered maintenance of the legal status quo in the Straits issue less useful to the British. The very factors which made it harder for Great Britain to uphold the established rule of the Straits also made it less important for her to do so.

At the time of the Liberals' departure from office in 1895, the Triple Alliance - in disarray since 1893 - seemed to have tottered closer than ever to total uselessness. Italy was generally considered in the diplomatic world to be altogether untrustworthy: the ageing Crispi was apparently leaving a free hand to Baron Blanc in most questions of

¹ Above, pp. 10-11.

² Above, p. 11.

foreign policy,¹ and although Blanc's unorthodox attitude regarding the Straits had ceased to be rank heresy in Rosebery's eyes by the end of 1894,² both London and Vienna continued to find the Italian minister baffling and somewhat disturbing. Rosebery complained of the 'usual mystery' which characterized his statements,³ and Kimberley shared the opinion of Kálnoky that his conduct was 'eccentric'.⁴ Writing to Salisbury in June, Currie commented that Blanc had almost put Italy 'out of the pale of respectable European society'.⁵ By then Austria too had a foreign minister who failed to command confidence. Kálnoky, long one of the most familiar figures on the international scene, had resigned his post in May as a consequence of the Hungarian civil marriage controversy⁶ - supplemented, or so Sir Edmund Monson suspected, by German machinations at the Austrian Court.⁷ Whatever the truth with respect to the German rôle, Kaiser Wilhelm's ambassador at Vienna certainly made no

¹ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 1), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

² See above, pp. 280-281, 311, 318-320.

³ Ford to Kimberley, No. 244 Confidential, 23 Nov. 1894 (with minutes by Kimberley and Rosebery), F.O. 45/718.

⁴ Monson to Kimberley, No. 83 Most Confidential, 5 Mar. 1895 (with minutes by Sanderson and Kimberley), F.O. 7/1225.

⁵ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 1), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

⁶ A.J. May, The Hapsburg Monarchy, 1867-1914, pp. 343-346; Sir H. Rumbold, The Austrian Court in the Nineteenth Century, p. 357.

⁷ Monson to Kimberley, No. 178 Most Confidential, 31 May 1895, F.O. 7/1226; Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 1), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

secret of his pleasure at Kálnoky's eclipse. He was less pleased, however, when Francis Joseph found a replacement for his fallen minister in the person of a Pole, Count Goluchowski.¹ The latter soon made an unfavourable impression on all the foreign representatives in the Austrian capital. Nobody, reported Monson at the end of June, was able to prevail upon him to discuss politics. He displayed an extraordinary talent for maintaining a flow of chatter about trivialities while avoiding subjects of importance, and the Italian ambassador voiced doubt that it would ever be easy to induce him to treat serious matters seriously.² Just as it was difficult for other governments to have faith in the good sense and straightforwardness of Italy as personified by the enigmatical Blanc, so it was hard for them to feel sure that Austrian policy would be guided with wisdom and ability by the loquaciously evasive Goluchowski.

The Austrians, for their part, did not have a great deal more confidence in Germany's policy than in Italy's. Caprivi was no longer Chancellor, and the appointment of Hohenlohe as his successor, in the autumn of 1894, had been greeted at the Ballplatz with a conspicuous lack of enthusiasm.³ In the months that followed Austria remained thoroughly dissatisfied with her ally - repeatedly she complained of confusion and muddle at the Wilhelmstrasse, and of the absence (resulting from Marschall's neglect) of a sufficiently

¹ Monson to Kimberley, No. 178 Most Confidential, 31 May 1895, F.O. 7/1226.

² Monson to Kimberley, No. 210 Most Confidential, 28 June 1895, F.O. 7/1227.

³ Monson to Kimberley, Tel. No. 59 Confidential, 31 Oct. 1894, F.O. 7/1216; No. 263 Most Confidential, 2 Nov. 1894, F.O. 7/1215.

'authoritative control' over its actions by any 'responsible official'.¹ It was German proceedings more than anything else which reduced the Triple Alliance to the battered condition in which it found itself in the summer of 1895. Germany being by far its strongest member, the combination could mean little unless Rome and Vienna had some reason to believe in the value and steadfastness of German friendship; but the diplomacy of Berlin not only neglected Austrian and Italian interests, but was being conducted in an uncertain, erratic fashion characteristic of the personality behind it. When Salisbury had lost power in 1892, the Dreibund had still been a significant force even on the Bosphorus. With respect to Near Eastern affairs it had virtually perished at Germany's hands in 1893;² and by June 1895 Currie could write without exaggeration that not merely had the coalition long been non-existent at Constantinople, but that in the world at large it had now been 'pretty well killed' by the 'vagaries' of the Kaiser.³

So much for the internal troubles of the Triple Alliance. Anglo-German relations on Salisbury's return to office were not for the moment acutely strained, and there seemed even to be grounds for hope that they might improve. In their first letters to their incoming chief, both Currie and Sir Edward Malet emphasized the distrust and dislike which the Kaiser and his government had felt for the Liberal adminis-

¹ Monson to Kimberley, No. 76 Most Confidential, 4 Mar. 1895, F.O. 7/1225; cf. Tel. No. 68 Most Confidential, 4 Dec. 1894, F.O. 7/1216.

² Above, pp. 227-234. No. 263 Confidential, 14 Dec. 1894, F.O. 7/1226.

³ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 1), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers. 343/3.

tration. Wilhelm, remarked Currie, appeared to have 'hated Rosebery as bitterly as Bismarck hated Gladstone', and the ambassador predicted that he would try and make friends with the new ministry.¹ Malet, too, was convinced that nothing in Anglo-German relations had been fundamentally changed since 1892: colonial issues, he observed, continued 'as of yore' to prevent 'perfect' cordiality.² These comments were superficial, failing to reveal the drift of Germany towards a heightened interest in the world overseas, and thus towards hostility to Great Britain. The Kruger Telegram was not to be sent until several months later, but already South Africa was a source of friction. By the beginning of December 1894 the anti-British campaign waged throughout the autumn by the German press had been tapering off,³ and for a time, under Austrian and Italian pressure, Berlin adopted a more good-humoured and conciliatory tone.⁴ By the latter part of January, however, Kimberley was writing:

I hope we may look for better things now, but we hear of German coquetting with the Transvaal, which does not quite accord with the desire for cordial relations. . . . The Germans, if they are sincere in their professions of friendship, should abstain from intrigues with the Boers.⁵

¹ Ibid.

² Malet to Salisbury, Private, 6 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 120, Salisbury Papers.

³ Malet to Kimberley, No. 253 Confidential, 1 Dec. 1894, F.O. 64/1326.

⁴ Malet to Kimberley, No. 263 Confidential, 14 Dec.; No. 267, 15 Dec. 1894, F.O. 64/1326.

⁵ Kimberley to Malet, Private, 23 Jan. 1895, F.O. 343/3.

Subsequently Kimberley learned definitely that the Germans had indeed been 'coquetting' with the Boers, and he warned Berlin off in terms which amounted to a threat of war.¹ When Salisbury regained power, Malet - the observer in the best position to make sound predictions - failed altogether to realize how firmly rooted was the weed of Anglo-German estrangement; yet even he foresaw further difficulties, especially in view of renewed activity on the part of the chief of the German Colonial Department. 'During the winter', he told the Prime Minister, 'Dr. Kayser was fortunately ill to death's door. He has unluckily now recovered and has begun to rear his venomous little serpent head again, and will assuredly sooner or later give us trouble.'²

Anglo-German relations at the end of the Liberal interlude were basically less satisfactory than they had been in 1892. Despite his belief that Berlin would try and restore the wire to London to its previous condition, Currie had become so deeply disillusioned with Germany and the quality of her statecraft that he advised Salisbury to turn towards Russia.³ This, however, was more easily proposed than done. The Straits, it is true, were not now an issue on which British and Russian interests were in essential disharmony. The suggestion put forward by the Kaiser and Holstein in late 1894, that an agreement between London and St. Peters-

¹ Malet to Salisbury, Private, 6 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 120, Salisbury Papers; cf. Lillian M. Penson, 'The New Course in British Foreign Policy, 1892-1902', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th ser., xxv. 128.

² Malet to Salisbury, Private, 6 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 120, Salisbury Papers.

³ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 1), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

burg might be founded on the principle of free passage for all Powers,¹ would certainly not have proved feasible, as it rested on a mistaken assumption regarding Russian aspirations. The Tsar and his ministers would no doubt have been glad to win free passage for their own vessels, but it cannot be supposed that they coveted the privilege sufficiently to be prepared to share it with other maritime nations. In the prosecution of her Far Eastern imperialism, Russia's needs were less for a route to the Pacific through an opened Ottoman waterway - which she already used in practice even for the transport of troops² - than for a sense of security against British operations in the Black Sea. Since Whitehall knew, however, that such operations were out of the question, and also that Russia's control of Constantinople and the Straits would not significantly improve her offensive position,³ concessions capable of meeting Russian requirements could have been made by the British without the sacrifice of any vital national advantage. The damage which abandonment of the Turkish capital might possibly inflict on British prestige in Persia and India had of course

¹ Above, pp. 316-320.

² Admiralty Memorandum by L.A. Beaumont, dated 1 May 1895, Spencer Papers (envelope marked 'Mediterranean Station: Strategy, etc.').

³ The conclusion that Russia's military occupation of the Straits would not increase her offensive power had been recorded by the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office after consultation with General Chapman, the Director of Military Intelligence, as well as with the Director of Naval Intelligence, Admiral Bridge: Summary of Memorandum by Sir T. Sanderson (Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office) on Naval and Military Policy in the Mediterranean (enclosed in Kimberley to Spencer, 11 May 1894, Spencer Papers).

to be borne in mind,¹ but if the abandonment were to be part of a friendly arrangement including a reasonable quid pro quo from St. Petersburg, it could not readily be construed anywhere as a British confession of impotence. Thus in 1895 the main obstacles to an Anglo-Russian entente did not lie in the facts of the Near Eastern situation. They lay rather in unjustified Russian suspicions of British policy, and in friction arising from events in the Far East - now more than ever the focal point of Russian ambitions and attention.²

By the time of the change of government at London, the period in which the atmosphere had been most favourable for Anglo-Russian negotiations was already past. If the British ambassador at St. Petersburg and Consul at Moscow were not both in error, the general Russian attitude towards Great Britain in the latter months of 1894, especially after the visit of the Prince of Wales, was markedly warm and friendly.³ The relations of the two countries remained cordial in the winter of 1895,⁴ but by the spring the picture was different. Giers, Russia's foreign minister since the

¹ See above, p. 12.

² Confidential Memorandum by Colonel Swaine (military attaché at Berlin), dated 30 Jan. (enclosed in Malet to Kimberley, No. 30 Secret, 2 Feb. 1895, F.O. 64/1350); Monson to Kimberley, No. 119 Most Confidential, 18 Apr. 1895, F.O. 7/1226; C.A. Buss, The Far East, pp. 103-104; F.H. Michael and G.E. Taylor, The Far East in the Modern World, p. 320.

³ Lascelles to Kimberley, No. 275 Confidential, 29 Nov.; No. 279, 5 Dec.; No. 291, 17 Dec. 1894 (encloses a despatch from the British Consul at Moscow), F.O. 65/1473.

⁴ Lascelles to Kimberley, No. 10, 14 Jan.; No. 45 Confidential, 26 Feb. 1895, F.O. 65/1490.

'eighties, had died in January, and in March the Tsar filled the vacant post by appointing Lobanow, whose suspicions of British intentions (particularly with respect to the Armenian Question) were far more profound.¹ Far Eastern developments made matters worse. When Japan imposed her terms on China, Great Britain's refusal to participate in the Franco-Russo-German intervention against the victor destroyed the goodwill which she had gained in Russia - goodwill which had probably never gone very deep. By May the Russian press was unanimously denouncing London for friendliness towards Tokyo,² and in the summer the ambassador at St. Petersburg had to tell Salisbury:

Things here are not in as satisfactory a state as might be wished. The excellent impression which was created here by the sympathy expressed in England on the death of Alexander III, and which was increased on the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales, has worn off, and our refusal to join with the three Powers in putting pressure on Japan has made us unpopular.³

Meanwhile the Siamese problem, which Rosebery had never succeeded in settling definitively, was again causing a disquieting degree of friction between Great Britain and France.⁴

What had happened between Salisbury's resignation in 1892 and his return to Downing Street in 1895 may thus be

¹ Langer, i. 197.

² Kimberley to Lascelles, Tel. No. 72, 4 May 1895, F.O. 65/1493.

³ Lascelles to Salisbury, Private, 3 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 129, Salisbury Papers.

⁴ Dufferin to Salisbury, Private, 9 July 1895, Bound Volume No. 114; Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 1), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

summarized as follows. Rosebery had avoided one major pitfall: that of forcing Austria, through British aloofness, into a reconstructed Dreikaiserbund. But since a secret treaty with Italy and full adherence to the Triple Alliance were, as he recognized, equally beyond the 'range of practical politics for a British Minister at this time', he had been unable to adopt either of the policies in which he saw theoretical remedies for the disarray of the Austro-Italo-German coalition.¹ First on the Bosphorus and then at all other points as well, the Dreibund lost its vitality and strength. As if it were not bad enough that Berlin withheld support from Rome and Vienna, the Germans proceeded to allow their growing interest in affairs overseas to lead them into quarrels with London. Rosebery turned to a policy of rapprochement with France and especially with Russia, and developed a new flexibility in his thinking on the problem of the Straits. Even in the case of Russia, however, his experiment was not carried through to any lasting success: by the time when the Liberal government fell, Anglo-French and Anglo-Russian relations had reverted to their normal unsatisfactory condition. Rosebery had failed, in short, either to arrest the decline of the Triple Alliance or to find a friend elsewhere. When Salisbury resumed control of the Foreign Office, the British position - tolerably good in 1892 - was distinctly weak and uncomfortable.² 'You have not come back an hour too soon. . .', wrote Currie from Constantinople. 'The transformation that has been tak-

¹ Rosebery to Malet, Private, 3 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/3; above, pp. 239-240.

² A.J. Marder, British Naval Policy, 1880-1905, pp. 230-231.

² Above, pp. 197-199.

ing place in European politics calls for the hand of a master.¹

It would be wrong, nevertheless, to assume that Salisbury inherited nothing but troubles from the Liberal administrations. As far as diplomacy was concerned, the Liberals' record was one of failure piled upon failure. They had not solved the problems confronting them in the Near East - the protection of Constantinople in 1892-'94, the enforcement of Armenian reforms in 1895. While unable to keep the friendlier of the two Continental groups vigorously alive, or to avoid repeated clashes with Berlin, they had not prevented the Franco-Russian entente from becoming an alliance. Yet it was the very perils arising from diplomatic failure that induced the Liberals to take a decision which, in the long run, compensated the country for the misfortunes of their brief period in power. The fact that Constantinople was vulnerable to Russia, and that Franco-Russian relations were apparently so close as to render a junction of the Black Sea and Toulon fleets politically possible, contributed greatly to the scare of 1893 that resulted in the Spencer Programme² - the Liberals' most important act relevant to foreign affairs. Observing the 'somewhat parlous condition' of the Dreibund as well as signs of impending co-operation between Paris and St. Petersburg, Rosebery saw a need not only for preparedness in itself, but also for convincing European nations, friendly and unfriendly alike, that Great Britain was determined to uphold her interests and prestige. It was with these objectives in mind that he

¹ Currie to Salisbury, Private, 27 June 1895 (Document No. 1), Bound Volume No. 135, Salisbury Papers.

² Above, pp. 197-199.

fought for the naval expansion which he knew to be his 'only sure policy'.¹ In June 1895 the British naval position remained precarious,² for the new warships were not completed; but construction had already made considerable progress.³ The fruits of the victory which Rosebery and the Admirals had won over Gladstone were to be enjoyed by Salisbury. To that victory, and to the unchallenged maritime supremacy which grew from it, the Conservative Prime Minister owed the success of his own external policy in the later 'nineties.

to obtain Turkish co-operation against Russia in the Straits by coming to an agreement with Abdul Hamid concerning Egypt.¹ The reader will recall that had it been for Great Britain to count on Turkish assistance, the ally would have been prepared to risk naval intervention against a soup de main on Constantinople without even on a guarantee of French neutrality.² Miller's contention nevertheless seems a curious one, and the documents which he cites contain no convincing evidence to support it.

In September 1893, when the danger of active French-Russian collaboration on Mediterranean issues appeared considerable, the Foreign Secretary did make Turkey and Egyptian offer rather similar to the one which had left so long unanswered in the spring.³ While the Sultan was to sanction a continued British occupation, London was in return to express willingness to withdraw after perhaps five years, the same and conditions of

¹ Rosebery to Malet, Private, 3 Jan. 1894, F.O. 343/3; above, pp. 202-204, 256-263.

² Marder, loc. cit.

³ Sir W.L. Clowes, The Royal Navy, vii. 33.

² Above, p. 16.

APPENDIX

A Critical Comment on T.B. Miller, 'The Egyptian Question and British Foreign Policy, 1892-1894', in the Journal of Modern History, xxxii (No. 1), March 1960.

Miller suggests that in 1893 Rosebery 'evidently' hoped to obtain Turkish co-operation against Russia at the Straits by coming to an agreement with Abdul Hamid regarding Egypt.¹ The reader will recall that had it been possible for Great Britain to count on Turkish assistance, the Admiralty would have been prepared to risk naval intervention against a coup de main on Constantinople without insisting on a guarantee of French neutrality.² Miller's contention nevertheless seems a curious one, and the documents which he cites contain no convincing evidence to support it.

In September 1893, when the danger of active Franco-Russian collaboration on Mediterranean issues appeared considerable, the Foreign Secretary did make Turkey another Egyptian offer rather similar to the one which Abdul Hamid had left so long unanswered in the spring.³ While the Sultan was to sanction a continued British occupation, London was in return to express willingness to discuss, after perhaps five years, the timing and conditions of a withdrawal. With respect to the terms which they might propose when the discussion took place, Rosebery obviously intended that the British should retain an entirely free

¹ Journal of Modern History, xxxii. 9.

² Above, p. 16.

³ See above, pp. 47-48.

hand; nor were they to be actually committed even to participate in such a discussion at any particular time; for the period of five years, though it was to be mentioned in the agreement, was not to be binding. The advantage of the suggested convention to the Sultan, as the Foreign Secretary pointed out to the Ottoman ambassador, would lie in the fact that his authority in Egypt would be more fully recognized, and that Great Britain would have given further proof of her readiness to withdraw when it was 'practicable' for her to do so.¹ In other words, Abdul Hamid was to be granted a face-saving formula - and such a formula he may well have desired more than evacuation itself.²

There is no reason to suppose, however, that the Foreign Secretary was so naive as to expect an Egyptian settlement to result in the adoption by Turkey of a pro-British policy. Sir Arthur Nicolson, whose abilities Rosebery held in high regard,³ had already warned the Foreign Office that the end of the Egyptian difficulty would probably not bring any lasting improvement of Anglo-Ottoman relations. Colonel Chermiside, the experienced military attaché at Constantinople, had made a similar forecast.⁴ To the present writer it seems unlikely that Rosebery ignored or discounted this advice. It is true that in conversation with the Turkish

¹ Rosebery to Nicolson (chargé d'affaires at Constantinople), No. 243 Very Confidential, 13 Sept.; No. 247 Secret, 15 Sept. 1893, F.O. 97/601.

² Above, pp. 23-29.

³ Rosebery to Gladstone, Secret, 26 Oct. 1893, Add. MS. 44290; cf. Nicolson to Villiers, Private, 23 July 1893, Villiers Papers.

⁴ Above, p. 23.

ambassador he advocated speedy conclusion of an Egyptian accord partly on the grounds that it would 'anticipate the possible course of events' to which the Franco-Russian 'demonstrations in the Mediterranean' might lead.¹ But to interpret these words as an allusion to the desirability of Anglo-Turkish co-operation in a battle at the Straits would appear to be somewhat far-fetched. What Rosebery hoped to gain was almost certainly not the sincere and reliable friendship of Abdul Hamid, but merely what he said he hoped to gain - the Sultan's sanction for the British occupation, a sanction which would place the existing state of affairs on what the Foreign Secretary called a 'legal and authoritative footing'.² The British plan, that is, was to deprive Paris and St. Petersburg of a legal basis for challenging Great Britain's position on the Lower Nile, and to prevent them from enlisting Ottoman support for any diplomatic initiative which they might be contemplating on the Egyptian issue.

At the very outset, no doubt recalling his experience of a few months earlier, Rosebery made his new offer conditional on an immediate reply from the Sultan. When none was forthcoming, he allowed the proposal to lapse with little apparent regret.³ The incident was one of far less importance than Miller imagines.

¹ Rosebery to Nicolson, No. 247 Secret, 15 Sept. 1893, F.O. 97/601.

² Rosebery to Nicolson, No. 243 Very Confidential, 13 Sept. 1893, F.O. 97/601.

³ Rosebery to Nicolson, No. 247 Secret, 15 Sept.; No. 247A, 20 Sept.; No. 247B, 21 Sept. 1893; Rosebery to Ford, No. 266 Confidential, 13 Oct. 1893, F.O. 97/601.

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Agatha Ramm of Somerville College, Oxford, who has
examined the Morier Papers.

Unfortunately Rosebery and Morier did not discuss
Near Eastern affairs in their exchanges of letters,
and there is no evidence that the ambassador was ever
taken into his chief's confidence regarding the
straits and Mediterranean 'crisis' of 1893. The ex-
planation presumably lies in the fact that Morier had
long belittled the importance of the Near East and of
the straits question, preferring to stress instead the
problems of Central Asia and Indian defence. While the
correspondence contains material relevant to the Anglo-
Russian dispute over the Pamirs, there proved to be
nothing of more than peripheral interest for purposes
of the present work.

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ABSTRACT

By August 1892, when Gladstone's fourth administration took office with the Earl of Rosebery as Foreign Secretary, the foundations of Great Britain's traditional Near Eastern policy had been undermined by the conviction of the Admiralty and War Office, expressed some months before, that the defence of Constantinople against Russian attack was no longer physically feasible. Whitehall had convincing evidence that the Tsar's commanders were making preparations for the dispatch of a sea-borne expeditionary force to seize the Bosphorus and the Turkish capital by coup de main. It was believed that without exposing the 'general naval position' of the country to unacceptable peril, the British fleet could not intervene to frustrate such a blow unless French neutrality were assured or Turkey were an ally. Should the latter condition be fulfilled, the Admiralty calculated, the squadron required at the straits would be so small that the risk of French action elsewhere would not be intolerable. Thus the state of Anglo-Ottoman relations was fundamental to the problem confronting London.

In the early 'nineties Anglo-Ottoman relations were so unsatisfactory that there seemed to be a genuine danger of

Turkey's opting in a crisis for submission to Russia, and turning the guns of her Dardanelles forts against her would-be rescuers. With the dismissal in 1891 of Kiamil Pasha, a relatively independent and pro-British Grand Vizier, Sultan Abdul Hamid II had rendered more complete than ever his personal control of Ottoman policy. For Great Britain Abdul Hamid felt both hatred and deep distrust. In arousing these sentiments and keeping them alive, many factors had played their part - among them the attitude of the Imperial entourage (which the British embassy, unlike its rivals, was unable to bribe), British loyalty to the ideals of liberal constitutionalism (which prevented the London government from banning publications critical of the Hamidian despotism), and also bitter memories of the British failure to go to war with Russia during the Russo-Turkish conflict of the 'seventies. As for the rôle of the British occupation of Egypt, it can easily be exaggerated; prior to 1882 the Sultan's Anglophobe tendencies had already been pronounced, and in 1893 it was expected at the British embassy that an end of the occupation would bring no lasting diminution of his hostility towards his country's former ally. Yet the Egyptian grievance unquestionably rankled in Abdul Hamid's mind. Although there is reason to think that he may not have sincerely desired a British withdrawal, he yearned at the very least for some formula

to safeguard his prestige as Caliph, which he knew to be menaced by the supremacy on the Nile of a Christian state. No such formula having been negotiated, he bore a grudge against Great Britain for the humiliation which was being inflicted upon him; and in January 1893, when a political crisis at Cairo led to reinforcement of the British garrison, his humiliation and his resentment were both increased.

The same year saw a serious aggravation of Anglo-Turkish friction arising from unjust treatment of Armenians. For a time in the summer, with a view to restraining Turkey from adopting a more actively anti-British policy in Egypt, Rosebery successfully exploited the Armenian issue in order to remind the Sultan that Great Britain had it in her power to cause him much trouble. On balance, nevertheless, the existence of the Armenian problem was a liability to the British, and contributed appreciably to the further decline of their influence on the Bosphorus during 1893. Their position was also weakened by the personal inadequacy of their ambassador, Sir Francis Clare Ford. Thus the real counterpoise to Great Britain's Franco-Russian antagonists was not her own embassy but that of Germany. Up to the spring of '93 the Germans held a considerable advantage over Russians and French, and their strength was made evident in a bitter struggle for control of railway concessions in Asia Minor - a struggle which formed

the chief problem facing diplomats at Constantinople during the Liberals' first winter in office.

In the late 'eighties, as a means of rendering a Russian advance on the straits through Asia Minor too dangerous diplomatically, Salisbury's ambassador Sir William White had favoured the growth of German investment in that region even when the interests of British financiers were prejudiced thereby. In 1892-'93, however, the threat of attack through Asia Minor seemed past, and Rosebery set out to protect British railway enterprise against a German syndicate desirous of constructing a line to Konia. The British embassy in Turkey now found itself acting along parallel lines with the French. Wrongly suspecting Anglo-French collusion, and believing mistakenly that London was trying to prevent the extension of German railways and German influence towards Baghdad, Berlin abruptly withdrew all support from Great Britain in the Egyptian question. Though some of the changes which Rosebery subsequently made in his railway policy were not dictated by German pressure alone, it was primarily the fear of offending once again his necessary friend in Egypt that led the Foreign Secretary to display henceforth a marked deference for Germany's wishes on railway matters. With British assistance, reluctantly accorded, the Germans proceeded to win a virtually complete victory in the scramble for concessions. They had

taken a major stride along the road to Baghdad, at the cost of creating durable resentment at the British Foreign Office. The French, defeated in Asia Minor, began concentrating their attention on Syria, where in the spring of 1893 they were able to obtain an important railway concession in spite of German opposition. Germany's prestige at Constantinople had by now declined, and Abdul Hamid was drifting on what the First Secretary of the British embassy called a 'Franco-Russian current'. St. Petersburg availed itself of this opportunity to renew a diplomatic campaign, which had failed in 1892, for a special privilege of free passage to be enjoyed in the straits by vessels carrying war materials for the Russian government. As before, however, Russian efforts came to nothing. The resistance offered by the British probably had less to do with the outcome than did an outbreak of cholera at the Turkish capital. Before mid-September the Sultan had become so thoroughly frightened by the epidemic that he was mentally in no condition to decide anything, and in consequence, as far as relations between Turkey and the Powers were concerned, the political atmosphere on the Bosphorus remained quiet through the autumn.

Rosebery, meanwhile, had been worrying about the possibility of imminent war. In July it had become known that Russia was about to establish a naval squadron in the Medi-

terranean - a decision which appeared to imply that she was actively aspiring to become a factor in those waters, and therefore that she had a strengthened motive for trying to obtain free passage of the straits not merely for war materials but for her Black Sea fleet as well. Anglo-French tension and improving relations between St. Petersburg and Paris seemed to afford a tempting diplomatic opportunity for a coup de main, followed perhaps by a junction of French and Russian naval forces. Fearing that by 1 November the situation in the Mediterranean might be 'more than serious', Rosebery urged the Service Departments to plan with haste for the eventuality of war against a Franco-Russian coalition. At the same time he advocated, as means of deterring the two Powers from risking hostilities, a reinforcement of the British Mediterranean fleet and a visit by British warships to Italian ports. Because of the inadequacy of available naval resources, particularly with respect to personnel, the Admiralty did not immediately act upon the former proposal. Rosebery was thus dependent for his deterrent on Italy, whose navy was known to be unreliable. For a combination of reasons, however, the scare ended in September, and was not revived by the rapturous welcome accorded a Russian squadron at Toulon in October. Anxiety for the future remained, and in late 1893 and early 1894 Rosebery ardently championed a policy of augmenting Brit-

ish maritime strength. Adoption of such a policy was also the object of a major agitation in the country and in Parliament - an agitation which arose in part from knowledge that the straits were vulnerable to Russia, and that her Black Sea fleet could break through into the Mediterranean with little difficulty whenever it wished.

The 'Spencer Programme' which resulted, designed to eliminate the weaknesses made evident during the crisis of the summer, provided for the training of sufficient personnel as well as for the construction of more warships. Rosebery believed that by indicating to the Russians the 'temper' of the British nation, the Programme would tend to restrain them from challenging British interests by an attack on Constantinople. Gladstone, moreover, had resigned rather than approve the increased naval expenditure, and Rosebery expected that his own elevation to the Premiership would further impress St. Petersburg with the danger of a strong British reaction to a Russian Near Eastern initiative. Also taking into consideration a decline of the Franco-Russian friendship during March, the new Prime Minister had concluded by April 1894 that a coup de main on the Ottoman capital was no longer probable.

Rosebery saw in naval augmentation not only a means of deterring foes, but also a way to reassure friends. Among

his diplomatic problems was that of ensuring that Austria-Hungary would not lose faith in the practical value of British sympathy, and turn in despair to a policy of rapprochement with Russia in Near Eastern affairs. In the spring of 1893, when the Tsar was blaming Vienna for what he regarded as provocative conduct on the part of Bulgaria, the British ambassador in Austria had stated publicly that there existed a 'natural alliance' between Great Britain and the Danubian Monarchy, and that the ideas which they held in common included the independence of the Balkan states. Although he realized that Russia contemplated no direct attack on Bulgarian autonomy, the Austrian foreign minister - Count Kálnoky - was convinced that she was intensely interested in gaining free passage of the straits, and that as a consequence of her so doing the peoples of the Eastern Balkans would soon fall under Russian influence. Holding such views, Kálnoky would naturally have been glad to see British talk of a 'natural alliance' translated into a more concrete and binding accord. Even in regard to the straits, however, he was not at this time alarmed; it is noteworthy that the scare which arose at London in the late summer had no counterpart at the Ballplatz. Thus Rosebery, who knew that his colleagues in the cabinet would object to any commitment, was able to fob the Austrians off with statements which in no way re-

stricted British liberty of action. It was only in the late autumn that the problem of allaying Austrian anxiety became serious. Germany had by then abandoned the Austrian cause in the Near East, there seemed to be some danger that Italy might detach herself from the Triple Alliance, and to make matters worse the Toulon festivities had led Kálnoky to fear that Russia, confident of French backing, might adopt a forward policy in the Straits Question. The Austrian minister therefore felt in need of more reliable British support on the Bosphorus, and he also advocated British promises to Italy as a means of preventing her from defecting to the Franco-Russian camp. Rosebery gave the Italians a modicum of reassurance, and raised Austria's hopes of British diplomatic vigour in the Near East by appointing Sir Philip Currie, the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, to the Constantinople embassy. Unless Germany could be persuaded to stand behind it, however, a formally defined Anglo-Austrian entente had no prospective advantages commensurate with the difficulties to be expected in the Liberal cabinet. The Foreign Secretary thought that Great Britain might be able to purchase German support for Vienna, Rome and London in Eastern and Mediterranean affairs by joining the Dreibund or by signing a secret alliance with Italy. Ruling out such steps as being beyond the 'range of practical politics for a Brit-

ish Minister at this time', he had perforce to pin his main hopes of reassuring Austria and Italy on the creation of a general impression that Great Britain was determined to uphold her world position. With this consideration in mind he urged that the decision in favour of naval expansion should be taken by the cabinet as soon as possible - but Gladstone succeeded in causing delay.

In January 1894 the Austrians showed themselves more alarmed than ever, and to keep them on a firmly anti-Russian course Rosebery felt it necessary to yield in some degree to their importunity. Acting behind the backs of his colleagues, he gave Vienna a personal assurance that he was resolved to resist a Russian initiative in the straits question even at the cost of war. The promise was conditional, however, on the willingness of Germany to browbeat France into neutrality, and this commitment Berlin refused. Yet within a few months Austrian fears were evaporating, with the result that during the summer and autumn, when Germany was making herself unpleasant on colonial issues, Rosebery was able to pursue a policy of improving Anglo-Russian (as well as Anglo-French) relations without running any significant risk of driving Vienna to desperation. In late 1894 and early '95 the attempt at an Anglo-Russian rapprochement enjoyed a certain superficial success. It was, moreover, encouraged by the German

Kaiser, by Baron Holstein and by Italy. Like the Kaiser, Holstein suggested a general Russo-British settlement on a basis including the opening of the straits to all powers. The resulting entente with St. Petersburg was to be a tripartite one, including Italy, so that it would be linked with the Triple Alliance; and its purpose was to be the isolation of France. Rosebery thought Holstein's ideas on diplomatic grand strategy to be 'sensible enough', but he did not take the plunge of raising the straits question. By the spring of 1895, shortly before the Liberals' fall, the Anglo-Russian rapprochement was fading away.

Meanwhile, late in 1894, massacres had been reported in Armenia. Great Britain would willingly have seen the burden of supervising an impartial investigation thrown upon the shoulders of the United States, but in the end she assumed it herself in co-operation with France and Russia. By the time when the Liberals left office, London had become committed to a scheme of reforms which Paris and St. Petersburg also supported nominally, but which they were not prepared to enforce by all necessary means. Being desirous of strengthening his influence at the Imperial Palace, Sir Philip Currie had always favoured the mildest possible policy towards the Sultan on the Armenian issue; but, once Great Britain was irrevocably pledged to a reform programme, he

realized that failure to secure its acceptance by the Turks would mean the final collapse of British prestige on the Bosphorus. When he returned to power, Salisbury could see no practicable way of obtaining compliance with the Liberals' demands, or of averting the consequence which Currie feared. The complete eclipse of British influence in Turkey, however, could not now be a disaster. For more than one reason it seemed to have become politically pointless for London to continue efforts to maintain Ottoman integrity and independence as a barrier to Russian ambitions. The Near Eastern status quo appeared likely to be short-lived, and the British stake in it was no longer a substantial one.

Apart altogether from the Armenian problem, Salisbury's inheritance in 1895 was far from being a happy one. Well-intentioned British advice had not sufficed to prevent growing Turco-Bulgarian tension over Macedonia, and the outlook for Balkan stability was uncertain. Except in a formal sense the Triple Alliance seemed almost dead, destroyed by Germany's erratic diplomacy and her neglect of Austrian and Italian interests. There had been sharp clashes, moreover, between Berlin and London; yet Rosebery had not found a friend in either Paris or St. Petersburg. The one great compensatory boon which he bequeathed to his successor was the good start already made on the expansion of the fleet.