1876

Monday 22 May (London)

A Cabinet

Disraeli brought before us the state of our Naval force in the Mediterranean at the present junction and stated the combined strength of French, Russian, Italian, Austrian ships – exclusive of 4 German ships ordered there – to be 19 ironclads, 215 guns and 9,380 men. Our force on the other hand stands at 7 ships, 72 guns, 2,774 men. He said probably this storm will not blow over, and that the allies will solve the problem forcibly. He proposed at once to increase our force, suggested the substitution of a stronger man for Elliot[568] at Constantinople and hinted at our seizing the Turkish fleet which is strong and consists of 27 ships and even Constantinople *if necessary*. The Cabinet were rather startled at these large proposals, and some discussion of a curious kind ensued. Finally we agreed to increase the Squadron by 3 more powerful ironclads (and to push on the commissioning of the *Thunderer* and some others).[569]

After Cabinet I went home to consider my speech on the Vivisection bill which I brought on in the evening. The House went with me and the Second Reading was safe enough.[570]

I returned home and dined at 10.30.

[568]Sir Henry Elliot (1817–1907), ambassador at Constantinople (1867–1876), British representative at the Constantinople Conference (1876), ambassador at Vienna (1877–1884).

[569]Disraeli had so far been reluctant to allocate funds to increasing the strength of the Navy. In November 1875, two outstanding naval men, Sir Alexander Milne and Sir Phipps Geoffrey Hornby, warned the Government of the need for a shipbuilding programme to provide 'the bare necessities of war'. Ward Hunt agreed. In the Cabinet debate on the estimates, Northcote, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, turned down the request for six more cruisers without even informing the Admiralty Board. See N.A.M. Rodger, 'The Dark Ages of the Admiralty: pt. II, change and decay, 1874–1880', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 62 (1976), pp. 36–37.

[570]*Hansard*, CCXXIX, 22 May 1876, cols 1001–1013.

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Tuesday 30 May (London)

Incessant work all day. I never left off except to eat and to go for half an hour to the dentists. In the afternoon I had an hour and a quarter again with President Brand,[571] Malcolm present. I doubt if we made much way; the man is so incurably obstinate, narrow and dull, but we did not come to a break down of the negotiations as at one moment seemed likely.[572]

Later in the evening came the startling news that the Sultan is deposed and his nephew Mourad proclaimed. This is the 4th Sultan in my time – three of whom I may say I have seen – old Mahmoud, Abdul Medjid, Abdul Aziz and Mourad.[573]

[571]Jan Hendrik Brand (1823–1888), President of the Orange Free State (1864–1888).

[572]Carnarvon had met Brand a fortnight previously to discuss the Griqualand West question. The annexing of this territory by Britain in 1871 was badly received by the Boers. Carnarvon wished to know if Brand would welcome handing over the territory to the Orange Free State (Carnarvon, 'Memorandum of conversations with President Brand, 8 May 1876': CP, TNA, PRO 30/6/23, fos 95–99). The matter was settled on 13 July, when it was agreed that Britain would retain the diamond fields while the Orange Free State received financial compensation and minor redefinition of its frontiers.

[573]Mahmud II (ruled 1808–1839); his eldest son, Abdul Majid (ruled 1839–1861); his younger son, Abdul Aziz (ruled 1861–1876); and Murad, son of Abdul Majid, who was appointed Sultan of Turkey on the deposing of his uncle on 30 May and was deposed himself in August of the same year.

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