

THE GREAT GAME.

CHAPTER I.

DARKNESS BEFORE DAWN.

"It is the wish of Her Majesty's Government to abstain from any territorial acquisitions and from contracting any new obligations."* It was sadly surprising to hear Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies repudiating the course of action which has made Her Majesty the greatest sovereign whom the world has ever seen. It was hardly possible to believe that he had become a pervert to the Manchester School of Radicals. When Cheap John comes forward to peddle his bits of Brammagem political economy, no one expects anything but nastiness puffed with "vehement shallowness." Mr. Gladstone's frenzied hatred of everything Imperial is well known as the last and worst infirmity of a noble mind. Familiarity ought, at this time of day, to have bred general contempt of the windy philanthropy and high-flying philosophy of Sir Charles Dilke and Sir Wilfrid Lawson. We all know how delightfully cheap and easy it is to be a dispassionate cosmopolitan, above the narrow prejudices of national ambition, delicately considerate of the "natural right" of "men and brethren" to abuse themselves and their neighbours, looking down with serene disdain on the childish pride of conquest and the vulgar lust of territory. "Stay at home and let things take their course," naturally seems the golden maxim of statesmanship to that pestilent brood of pretenders to wisdom, who look upon the political art as nothing but the art of keeping out of trouble

* House of Lords, M.y 12, 1874.