

importance to the meeting ; yet it may turn out that some very grave and weighty matters were settled at that conference. So far as England is concerned, the results may be very serious. Having already treated the stipulations of 1856 as waste paper, Russia proceeded upon her eastward march and took permanent possession of Khiva, notwithstanding her positive assurances to the contrary. Then followed her attempt to entrap England, at the Brussels Conference, into adopting rules of warfare which would place small Powers like Belgium, Denmark, and Switzerland entirely at the mercy of the autocrats. The next step was the dispute regarding the commercial treaty with Roumania, in which Austria was the active agent, backed by Russia and Germany. The advice of England was adopted by the Porte, and that *casus belli* disappeared. Now it is Montenegro, whose inhabitants, being of Slavonic origin, are regarded by Russia as peculiarly her *protégés*. The facts are briefly these. Last year a trading party of Montenegrins was set upon in the Turkish Province of Albania, and some of them were killed. Reparation was demanded, and given by the Porte promptly in the shape of a wholesale execution of twenty—all the murderers he could get hold of. This might have been considered satisfactory by the mountaineers, but Russia and Austria, both of whom managed to interpose, urged the Montenegrins to make demands it was not likely Turkey would comply with. What will come of this new *imbroglio* is uncertain ; but, for the present, it appears as if the mountain snows were the only obstacle to active hostilities. Almost simultaneously with this assault on "the sick man," comes the intelligence that Russia has made another advance eastward from Khiva—another step towards our Indian frontier. In any case, the atmosphere of Europe is surcharged with clouds which may at any moment break into whirlwind and storm.

The fitful attendance of Mr. Gladstone during the last Session of Parliament should have prepared his party for the announcement that he has definitively withdrawn from active political life. "This retirement," he writes to Lord Granville, "is dictated by personal views regarding the method of spending the closing years of my life." The few touching words which have reached us seem to find a fitting parallel in the lines put by the great master into the mouth of Lear :—

"'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburdened crawl toward death."

The time has not yet come for a satisfactory review of Mr. Gladstone's public life and work. Contemporaries have been too close to that finely-textured nature to judge of it aright, either in its strength or its weaknesses. They have been often puzzled by the subtle workings of his intellect, and more than once annoyed, not to say exasperated, by sudden and inconvenient displays of moral earnestness, which sober politicians regard, perhaps rightly, as a perturbing element in public affairs. For the present it is scarcely possible to form a calm and adequate judgment of Mr. Gladstone as a statesman ; but, when distance shall have softened the angularities of that rarely gifted and delicately organized mind, and cast a mellowing glow over the struggles of the hour, his true worth and essential nobility of nature will be ungrudgingly acknowledged. Even as it is, the Liberal party, torn by dissensions, has learned his value, now that it has lost him. Achilles retires to his tent, not perhaps in the best of humours, and there is no Patroclus capable of filling out the armour of the great chief. Even Mr. Gladstone's formal abdication does not content either those who sought to keep him back or those who strove to urge him on. They are haunted with the fear of his sudden apparition in the field, to dis-