



## “The M.P. for Russia”: Olga Novikova, William Gladstone, and the Crisis of 1878

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*Abstract: In 1878, the United Kingdom and Russia stood on the brink of war, as they clashed over the Straits of Bosphorus, the balance of power in the Balkans, and the intersection of their empires on the Afghan frontier. Yet, the crisis was not just a matter of foreign policy; it inspired bitter debates about identity and loyalty at home. In Britain, public relationships with Russian citizens brought accusations of treason. British politicians conducted secret liaisons with the Russian ambassador. At the center of the scandals stood Olga Novikova, a well-connected aristocrat, nationalist activist, and friend of influential journalists and Liberal Party leaders.*

Imagine a Russian socialite embedded in London’s high society. A Russian nationalist oligarch who far preferred life in London to St. Petersburg. An activist who spoke occasionally with the tsar, but who exchanged weekly letters with the United Kingdom’s once and future prime minister. A key player in the rapprochement between Russia and Britain after decades of enmity. An example of the growing role of Russian monied elites in British politics. A sister of a Russian army officer who served undercover in a Pan-Slavic volunteer brigade in Eastern Europe, in a rebellion that threatened to bring all of Europe to the brink of war. Her critics called her a “Russian agent.”<sup>1</sup> Her admirers praised her role in overcoming traditional British Russophobia. Olga Novikova was the M.P. for Russia, quipped Tory Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, who feared Russian influence, opposed the tsar’s foreign policy, and thought that Novikova was spreading pro-Russian views across the British elite. Novikova’s biography, written by a British journalist and longtime ally, was titled *The M.P. for Russia*, which the author intended as a compliment, a recognition of the role she played in improving Anglo-Russian ties after decades of suspicion.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. T. Stead, *The M.P. for Russia* (London, 1909), v. 1, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> In nineteenth-century Britain, Novikova’s surname was rendered “Novikoff.” I will spell her name in modern transliteration throughout, except in quotations.



Photo of Olga Novikova from *The M.P. for Russia*.

Novikova was Russian by birth and by conviction. Her father and brother were Russian army officers. Her brother-in-law was Russia's ambassador to the Hapsburg court at Vienna. She was a reactionary and an anti-Semite. She was friends with the great reactionaries of late-nineteenth century Russian politics, including Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the ideologist of autocracy under Alexander III, as well as writers Ivan Aksakov and Mikhail Katkov, who wanted Russia to unite the Slavs of Eastern Europe under the tsar's rule. Autocracy and Russian nationalism were Novikova's two most closely held political principles. She, therefore, detested British democracy, which she described as a "tragedy" that "sometimes sinks into farce."<sup>3</sup> When Brits criticized Russia's repression of reformists, she retorted that British India was as autocratic as Russia.<sup>4</sup> She reacted furiously when foreign governments pressured Russia, involving themselves in "our affairs."<sup>5</sup> However, during the Balkan Crisis of the late 1870s, this paragon of Russian reactionary politics was very involved

<sup>3</sup> Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, v. 1, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, v. 1, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, v. 1, p. 64.

in British affairs—even scandalously involved. Some newspapers alleged in the affairs of Britain’s great liberal reformist Prime Minister, William Ewart Gladstone.

For decades, Britain and Russia had been rivals. Since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, British strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean was to support the decaying Ottoman Empire against Russian expansionism.<sup>6</sup> Russia, by contrast, sought to undermine the Ottomans and bolster its own influence in the Balkans, the Black Sea, and the Turkish Straits. This rivalry erupted into open conflict during the Crimean War (1853-1856), and continued to simmer in the decades thereafter. And the Eastern Mediterranean was not the only theater where Russia and Britain struggled for mastery. The 1870s were also the peak of the “Great Game” in Central Asia, as British and Russian imperial officials sought influence in far-off territories, such as Kashgaria and the Pamirs. Brits feared that the Russian bear was threatening their position in India, their traditional role in the Mediterranean, and their access to the Suez Canal. Russians thought the British were trying to hem them in, preventing Russia from playing its rightful role as a great power. Geopolitical rivalry was intensified by mutual claims of meddling in domestic politics, as the British criticized tsarist autocracy while Russia accused Britain of harboring revolutionaries. By the late 1870s, as an international crisis broke out over Bulgaria, Britain and Russia were again on the brink of war.

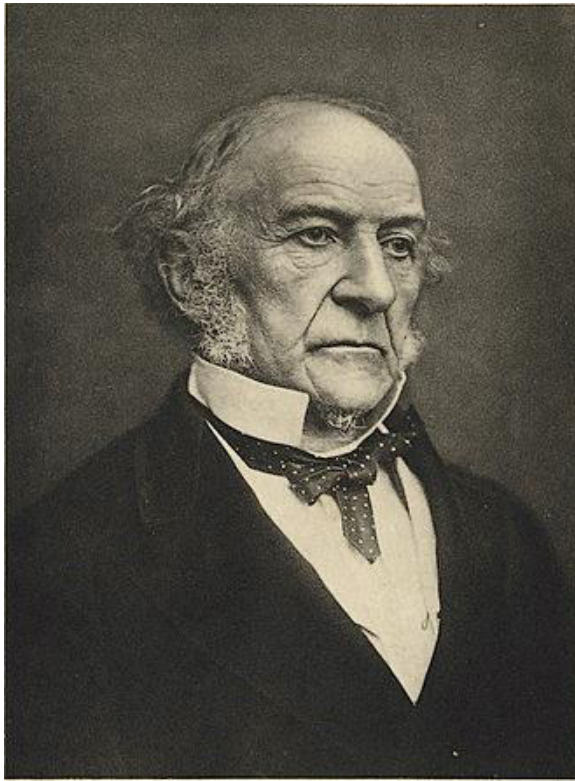
Olga Novikova set out to change this crisis. Some geopolitical rivals manage to improve relations by delineating spheres of influence.<sup>7</sup> Others defuse conflict by taking steps to prove that they do not threaten their rival. Novikova chose a different tactic: undermining the anti-Russia party in parliament and replacing it with one more congenial to Russia. Her allies in this effort were on the left-wing of British politics: reformist journalists, humanitarian activists, and former and future Prime Minister William Gladstone. During the final years of the 1870s, Gladstone’s liberal party was in opposition, and he was in semi-retirement. Yet, he thrust himself back into the center of political debate, furious at the Ottoman Empire’s violence against Christians in the Balkans, and by what he perceived as Britain’s complicity in the killings. He detested Prime Minister Disraeli, who had ousted Gladstone, for pursuing a relentlessly pro-Ottoman foreign policy despite the atrocities.

In dozens of meetings and letters, Novikova nurtured Gladstone’s disgust at the Ottoman Empire and his desire for a foreign policy less hostile to St. Petersburg, and more willing to work with the tsar to confront Ottoman abuses. She fed him information from the Russian embassy and other Russian sources. She encouraged him to doubt rumors of Russian atrocities in Central Asia. She helped shape the arguments of several influential articles that he published during his campaign against Disraeli. She introduced him to Russia’s ambassador in London and to Russian princesses in Paris.<sup>8</sup> According to Gladstone’s diaries, during the critical months of

<sup>6</sup> R. T. Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, 1876* (London, 1963), p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> For example, as Russia and Britain tried and eventually succeeded in doing in Central Asia; see, Evgeny Sergeev, *The Great Game, 1856-1907, Russo-British Relations in Central and East Asia* (Washington, 2014), ch. 6.

<sup>8</sup> On the introduction to Ambassador Petr Shuvalov, see, *Gladstone Diaries*, Dec. 8, 1876, fn. 8; on Princess Eliza Trubetskaia, see, Juliette Adam, *Après l'abandon de la revanche*, p. 418.



Prime Minister William Gladstone

crisis in Anglo-Russian relations during the late 1870s, there was no one with whom Gladstone corresponded more frequently.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, of all of Britain's prime ministers, Gladstone was the least in need of external guidance about what to think. He read widely and voraciously. On the "Eastern Question," as the debate over Ottoman atrocities became known, his diaries record him devouring books on Albania, on Cyprus, on Russia, and on Turkey, among other subjects relevant to the region. He corresponded with writers and politicians across the world. He held deep convictions and sacrificed much in fighting for them. However he left himself politically exposed by associating so closely—intimately, some whispered—with a Russian aristocrat, or a "Russian agent," as the Tory newspapers put it. Even Gladstone's allies admitted that she influenced them: "Madame Novikoff has not changed our convictions, but she enormously intensifies them," explained journalist W. T. Stead.<sup>10</sup> Far from being an agent of the Russian government, Novikova and her allies in Moscow and St. Petersburg were mobilizing against the Russian Foreign Ministry and what they saw as its spineless foreign policy and its willingness to surrender Russian gains. Even as Novikova "intensified" the pro-Russian inclination of British liberals, she was seeking to amplify the nationalism of

<sup>9</sup> See, *Gladstone Diaries*, 1876-1880.

<sup>10</sup> Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, v. 1, p. 295.

Russia’s own diplomats—even at the risk of undermining the Russian ambassador in London. For like Novikova, he, too, was cultivating the British opposition via secret meetings, though with a very different set of goals.

### “Long Live Freedom, Long Live the Slavic Idea”

“One must only understand that West is West, and East is East!” declared writer Mikhail Pogodin.<sup>11</sup> Like his fellow Pan-Slavists, Pogodin believed that Russia was culturally different from Europe and that it had a right and a duty to lead the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe. The Pan-Slavic faith grew increasingly prominent in 1860s and 1870s Russia, though writers who dreamt of Slavic unity found the principle more appealing than did the diplomats who realized it would be impossible to implement. Yet, this did not stop writers from dreaming, or from egging on the government. “Russia cannot assume a place in history worthy of itself and of Slavdom,” wrote Nikolai Danilevsky, “without placing itself at the head of a distinct independent political system of state and serving as a counterbalance to Europe.”<sup>12</sup> “The *only* policy for Russia with respect to the Western states,” another leading Panslavist wrote, “is not an alliance with this or that state, but disunion, a divorce from them.”<sup>13</sup>

The Pan-Slavists stewed in anger at the West over their country’s humiliation in the Crimean War, when Russia’s military backwardness allowed Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire to mount an amphibious landing in Crimea and seize the tsar’s great port of Sevastopol. But a “divorce” from the West was not the result. Indeed, as Pan-Slavist influence in Russia increased, especially during the 1870s, so too did interconnections between Western and Russian politics—with Pan-Slavists playing a critical role. The 1870s were a period of tectonic shift in European politics. Germany’s unification in 1871 under the leadership of Otto von Bismarck, backed by the force of the Prussian Army, forged a new great power. Bismarck’s defeat of Austria and France in quick succession proved that no European military could match Berlin’s without allies. The longstanding European political divide, which generally saw Britain and France opposing Russian aims, with Austria and Prussia forming tactical alliances depending on the issue, no longer looked sustainable.

Russia’s Pan-Slavists identified Germany as Russia’s key opponent and called for better ties with Britain and France to counterbalance Berlin. “West is West, and East is East” did not mean, they soon made clear, that Russia would be separated from Western Europe. Indeed, Russia could only assume its rightful role in Eastern Europe and the Balkans by cooperating with Britain and France. But, those countries had long opposed Russian foreign policy. The Russians concluded, logically enough, that British and French attitudes must be changed. Europe’s geopolitical reorientation in the late 1870s and 1880s—the rise of the Franco-Russian entente and the decline of Anglo-Russian enmity—was driven not only by shifts in the distribution of power or by

<sup>11</sup> Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan-Slavism, 1856-1870* (New York, 1956), p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan-Slavism*, p. 267.

<sup>13</sup> Fedor Tiutchev, quoted in Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan-Slavism*, p. 68.

contacts between emperors and ambassadors. It was also a matter of influence, intrigue, and interference in domestic politics.

The Pan-Slavists were fixated on the Balkans, where the Ottomans' hold on power was slipping. The Ottoman Empire had ruled the Balkan Peninsula for centuries, but the combination of Ottoman weakness and rising Russian and Austro-Hungarian influence gave local leaders in the Balkans a chance to seek help from foreign countries in their power struggles with Constantinople. Most of the peoples of the Balkans were either ethnically Slavic, religiously Orthodox, or both, and Pan-Slavists concluded that they had an obligation to defend their ethnic and religious brethren.

Nikolai Kireev was one such believer in Russia's vocation in the Balkans. A military officer and a friend of Pan-Slavic writers, such as Aksakov, Khomiakov, Samarin, and Katkov, Kireev was from an old aristocratic family and had served in the tsar's cavalry guard. He was one of Olga Novikova's two brothers. When war broke out between Slavic, Orthodox Serbia, and the Ottoman Empire, Kireev rallied to Serbia's call for help. Though the Russian Foreign Ministry sought to avoid entanglement in Serbia, believing the country in Austria-Hungary's sphere of influence, the Pan-Slavists would not be deterred. Pan-Slavist newspaper *Russkii Mir*, "Russian World,"—a phrase not coincidentally resurrected in 2014 as Russia annexed Crimea—called patriots to fight and condemned the Ottomans for abusing other Slavs, and Russia's diplomats—especially those of German ethnic background—for tolerating such insults to Slavdom.<sup>14</sup> "Our clear duty," declared *Russkii Mir*, "is to seek without ulterior motives the liberation of the South Slav peoples from the Muslim yoke."<sup>15</sup>

Russia's Pan-Slavists quickly mobilized, with clubs in Moscow and St. Petersburg collecting supplies and funds to support the Serbs. Kireev set off for Belgrade, where he was joined by 5,000 Russian volunteers. By the middle of 1876, there were, according to one account, more Russian officers than Serbian officers in Serbia.<sup>16</sup> Russia's rivals, unsure whether this influx of Russian officers was backed by St. Petersburg or if it presaged a more formal invasion, mobilized their forces. British Prime Minister Disraeli, fearing a Russian assault on the Ottoman Empire, sent the British fleet to Besika Bay, not far from the opening of the Turkish Straits. Yet, the Ottomans promptly crushed the Serbian army and its Russian volunteers. Kireev was killed in battle, "first by a shot passing through his left arm, then presently by another one which struck him in the neck . . . yet did not prevent him from uttering—although with great effort—the cry of 'Forward! Forward' [before] a fifth shot . . . fired low, passed through the fallen chief's heart and quenched his gallant spirit"—or so one British sympathizer described it.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> David MacKenzie, *The Lion of Tashkent: The Career of General M. G. Cherniaev* (Athens, 1974), p. 116.

<sup>15</sup> MacKenzie, *The Lion of Tashkent*, p. 119.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements 1806-1914* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 170; and R. W. Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question* (London, 1972), p. 95.

<sup>17</sup> Olga Novikoff [Novikova], *Russian Memories* (London, 1916), p. 35; and Mary Zirin, "Meeting the Challenge: Russian Women Reporters and the Balkan Crises of the Late 1870s,"

For Olga Novikova, these were “glorious but tragic days . . . a grand page of Russian history—years of a real crusade.”<sup>18</sup> As she mourned her brother’s death, she plotted a strategy to avenge it. “It is England who has killed my brother,” she remembered thinking. “It is England who [under Disraeli’s pro-Ottoman policy] prevents our Government [Russia] from helping our brethren in the Balkans.”<sup>19</sup> Russia was unable to send a proper military force to protect the Serbs because St. Petersburg feared that Disraeli would retaliate. Thus, the only Russians fighting in Serbia were volunteers, lacking the support of the Russian government. If only Britain had adopted a different policy in the Balkans, Novikova concluded, Russia could have intervened. Yet, Disraeli made that impossible. “If Mr. Gladstone had been in power, my brother would not have been sacrificed,” she told herself, dashing off a note to Gladstone, who she had come to know during her annual winter sojourns in London.<sup>20</sup> “Dear Mr. Gladstone,” Novikova’s letter began:

You always sympathized with what is noble and heroic. Allow me therefore to give you a little description of my brother’s death in Serbia. He died as every Russian ought to die . . . who really sacrificed himself for the sake of the poor and weak, and I dare not complain, however devoted I was to my brother. But tell me, how is it possible that Europe, who professes to be Christian, how can she not only remain perfectly indifferent to the atrocities committed against other Christians, but even support and sympathise with Mahometans? . . . All our professions of faith seem to be an impious humbug!”<sup>21</sup>

Yet, the Russian volunteers’ military defeat provided them a political victory: war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The Serbian revolt inspired other Slavic groups along the Ottoman Empire’s northern border to rise up. Bosnia and Bulgaria were soon rebelling against the Ottomans, who responded by sending irregular soldiers to put down the revolt. The Ottoman armies suppressed the rebellions with notable brutality. Russian Pan-Slavists were outraged. However, the Russian Foreign Ministry was unhappy, too. It had been willing to tolerate Ottoman victory over Serbia, a country that official circles in St. Petersburg considered in Austria’s sphere of influence. But Bulgaria, Russia believed, was different, and St. Petersburg demanded a series of concessions from the Ottomans to protect Bulgarians. Ottoman brutality, meanwhile, caught the attention of activists in Britain, who saw the Balkans not as an arena of geopolitics, but rather as a humanitarian crisis.

in Barbara Norton and Jehanne Gheith, eds., *An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, and Journalism in Late Imperial Russia* (Duke University Press, 2001), p. 162.

<sup>18</sup> Novikoff, *Russian Memories*, p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> Novikoff, *Russian Memories*, p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> Novikoff, *Russian Memories*, p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> Novikova to Gladstone, Aug 10, 1876, Gladstone Papers, ADD MS 4426.

### Gladstone and the *Bulgarian Horrors*

Novikova was not wrong to think that, had Gladstone rather than Disraeli been prime minister, British policy would have been different. Indeed, by the time Disraeli chose to send the British fleet toward the Turkish Straits in 1876, he was under increasing fire at home for ignoring Ottoman atrocities in the Balkans. Disraeli told the Queen that he deployed the fleet “not to protect Christians or Turks, but to uphold Your Majesty’s Empire.”<sup>22</sup> Yet, his indifference to the humanitarian ramifications of his foreign policy was a growing liability. At first, Disraeli had denied that Ottoman forces in Bulgaria were using disproportionate force in putting down the rebellion; reports to the contrary were fake news, nothing but “coffee-house babble brought by an anonymous Bulgarian.”<sup>23</sup> The aim of such false reports, he insisted, was “to create a cry against the Government.” Yet, as more accounts of Ottoman atrocities emerged, including from British and American missionaries, they became impossible to deny. Disraeli shifted course: now both sides were “terrible and atrocious.”<sup>24</sup>

Disraeli’s policy in the Balkans was standard stuff since the days of Foreign Minister Palmerston in the 1830s: oppose Russia; back the Porte; stay laser-focused on the British national interest, narrowly defined. As recently as the revolt in Crete in the late 1860s, such a policy had sparked little criticism at home, despite that the Foreign Office’s pro-Ottoman policy was accompanied by news of Ottoman massacres.<sup>25</sup> When the Serbian war and Bulgarian revolt broke out in the 1870s, the Foreign Office assumed it could follow a similar playbook. When dealing with reports of atrocities, British diplomats were ordered not to assess the Ottomans on an “impossible standard” and to remember that accusations of violence could be falsehoods spread by Russia and its Slavic brethren.<sup>26</sup>

Britain’s growing humanitarian movement found this stance impossible to stomach. By the summer of 1876, there were credible reports that anywhere from 18,000-30,000 Bulgarians had been killed.<sup>27</sup> Reports circulated of “dogs devouring human bodies.” A Bulgarian town’s “main street was a mass of human remains.” In one Bulgarian church, “The corpses lay so thick that one could hardly avoid treading on them”—all this roused Britain’s reformist left.<sup>28</sup> Activist networks, which had first mobilized around the anti-slavery campaign, sprung back into action. Left-wing media compared Turkish rule in Bulgaria to slavery.<sup>29</sup> The Eastern Question Association was so closely intertwined with the Aborigines Protection Society that they were headquartered in the same building.<sup>30</sup> Churches mobilized, too. Soon, it seemed that half the country was in revolt.

<sup>22</sup> Disraeli to Queen Victoria, May 24, 1876, quoted in in Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question*, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question*, p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question*, pp. 54, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*.

<sup>27</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question*, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 30.



Gladstone was in the political wilderness when news of the Bulgarian atrocities began to seep out. He had been ejected from office in 1874, after calling an election that his party lost. He remained one of his party’s most well-known leaders, but he was not seeking a path back to power. He was, he later wrote, overtaken by the fury of Britain’s reformist activists over the Bulgarian massacres, “astonished” as the anti-Ottoman movement swept the country.<sup>31</sup> Other liberal leaders were similarly inspired. In August 1876, just after Disraeli sent the fleet toward the Turkish Straits, former Prime Minister Lord Russell told the *Times* that the United Kingdom should use its fleet “to insist on instant termination to the atrocities. . . . Ultimately, if we cannot keep the Turks from being barbarous and cruel,” Russell continued, “we might ally ourselves with Russia and concert means to accomplish our objects.”<sup>32</sup> Gladstone had a similar thought, arguing in Parliament that Russia “is not where she stood in 1853,” at the outbreak of the Crimean War. Since then, Alexander II had emancipated the serfs and tried to modernize Russia. Meanwhile, Turkey suffered from “a moral blight.”<sup>33</sup>

In September 1876, Gladstone wrote *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, a 39-page pamphlet glistening with anger. His target was not only the Ottomans, for perpetrating the massacres, but also Disraeli, his archrival, for allowing them to continue. The result:

Heaps on heaps of dead; to the violated purity alike of matron, of maiden, and of child; to the civilization which has been affronted and shamed; to the laws of God or, if you like, of Allah; to the moral sense of mankind at large. There is not a criminal in an European jail, there is not a cannibal in the South Sea Islands, whose indignation would not rise and overboil at the recital of that which has been done, which has too late been examined, but which remains un-avenged.<sup>34</sup>

The solution, Gladstone argued, was to oust Disraeli. “I entreat my countrymen,” Gladstone continued:

To insist that our government, which has been working in one direction, shall work in the other, and shall apply all its vigor to concur with the other States of Europe in obtaining the extinction of the Turkish executive power in Bulgaria. Let the Turks now carry away their abuses. Their Zaptiehs and their Mudirs, their Bimbashis and their Yuzbachis, their Kaimakams and their Pashas, [all types of Ottoman officials] one and all, bag and baggage.”<sup>35</sup>

Such a policy meant halting support for the Ottomans. Yet, it also meant giving space for Russia in the Balkans. True, Gladstone noted, Russia was “the standing hobgoblin”

<sup>31</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 100.

<sup>32</sup> Lord Russell in *The Times*, Aug. 4, 1876, quoted in Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question*, p. 73.

<sup>33</sup> Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question*, p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors*, p. 38.

<sup>35</sup> Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors*, p. 38.

of the British press. But what other power could stop the Bulgarian killings? “I say the time has come for us to emulate Russia by sharing in her good deeds.”<sup>36</sup>

### Of News Fake and Foul

*Bulgarian Horrors* electrified British politics, selling 40,000 copies in its first four days, and 200,000 copies in a month.<sup>37</sup> It sold another 10,000 copies in Russia, where its message of Turkish iniquity and calls for Anglo-Russian alliance against the Porte were popular.<sup>38</sup> The publication of *Bulgarian Horrors* in early September 1876 corresponded with a more personal horror: the death of Nicholas Kireev, brother of Novikova. Kireev was killed on July 30, 1876. Novikova notified Gladstone on August 10. *Bulgarian Horrors* was finished and sent to the publisher on September 5.<sup>39</sup> Gladstone’s papers do not clarify whether he had already started work on *Bulgarian Horrors* before hearing of Kireev’s death, but it is easy to imagine that his anger was intensified by news that his friend’s brother was killed. She blamed Disraeli, and so did *Bulgarian Horrors*.

What we know with certainty is that during fall 1876, after Kireev’s death and the publication of *Bulgarian Horrors*, Gladstone and Novikova began working together in a campaign to discredit the Ottoman Empire and to promote a more positive British view of Russia. During the last three months of 1876, Gladstone wrote to Novikova at least 16 times, and saw her at least three times.<sup>40</sup> According to his diaries, there was no one with whom he corresponded more frequently during this period.

They conversed about Gladstone’s forthcoming review of U.S. diplomat Eugene Schuyler’s book *Turkistan*, an account of travels in the Central Asian lands that Russia was in the process of conquering. After departing Central Asia, Schuyler was posted to Constantinople, where his reports on Balkan atrocities whipped up opposition to the Ottomans. Yet, his book *Turkistan* also had accounts of “much cruelty” in Russian Central Asia.<sup>41</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, a pro-Ottoman newspaper, cited Schuyler’s account of Russian killings in Turkistan to assert equivalence between Russian and Ottoman forces.<sup>42</sup> Gladstone, whose critique of Ottoman atrocities in the Balkans relied in part on Schuyler’s account of the Bulgarian conflict, was asked to review *Turkistan* for the *Contemporary Review*. He could not simply assert Schuyler’s account of *Turkistan* false—because if so, Gladstone would have lesser grounds for believing Schuyler’s account of Bulgaria. But to accept that Schuyler’s account was true would open the door to the *Pall Mall Gazette*’s critique—that both powers were equally barbarous.

<sup>36</sup> Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors*, p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 109.

<sup>38</sup> B. H. Sumner, *Russia and the Balkans, 1870-1880* (Oxford, 1937), p. 187.

<sup>39</sup> *Gladstone Diaries*, Sept. 5, 1876.

<sup>40</sup> *Gladstone Diaries*, Oct.-Dec. 1876.

<sup>41</sup> Eugene Schuyler, *Turkistan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja* (New York, 1876), pp. 361-362.

<sup>42</sup> Gladstone, “Russian Policy and Deeds in Turkistan,” *Contemporary Review*, Nov. 1876, p. 883.

Gladstone’s response was clever but dishonest. He needed specific evidence to discredit Schuyler’s account of Turkistan, and he reached out to Novikova for help. “At this very moment,” he wrote Novikova, “my time is mainly spent in reading Schuyler’s *Turkistan*. His errors I have no means of correcting; but I wish to learn . . . whether, and how far, his evidence has been falsified. *If you can supply me at once with the means of correcting an errors into which he may have fallen, I shall be greatly obliged.*”<sup>43</sup> She, in turn, contacted the military attaché at the Russian embassy, General Gorloff, who met with Gladstone and promptly prepared a memo on Schuyler’s alleged errors.<sup>44</sup> Unsatisfied with the first draft, Gladstone requested specific edits. Novikova aimed to get the memo published in advance of Gladstone’s review of *Turkistan*, so that he could reference it as counter-evidence.<sup>45</sup> “Do help us, dear Mr. Gladstone,” she pleaded in a letter on October 19, requesting his aid in placing the memo in the *Daily News*. “You alone can do it.”<sup>46</sup> She followed up a week later. “How I am to induce the editor of the *Daily News*, or the *Spectator*, to publish it at once? I know neither of these gentlemen, and every day is so precious. Would it do you any harm,” she asked, “if you recommended it to either?”<sup>47</sup>

With Gladstone’s intercession, the *Daily News* published Gorloff’s memo. In his review of *Turkistan*, Gladstone cited the *Daily News* piece, contrasting the two analyses and questioning Schuyler’s account of Russian atrocities.<sup>48</sup> Anyway, Gladstone argued, Russia had abolished slavery in Central Asia.<sup>49</sup> The region’s population was difficult to govern, so “Russians have to carry the torch of civilization amidst barrels of gunpowder.”<sup>50</sup> But comparisons with Ottoman atrocities with Bulgaria were bogus, he argued—with the help of “evidence” that he and Novikova had concocted with the collusion of Russia’s military attaché. Novikova, in turn, cited Gladstone’s refutation of Schuyler in her own book *Russia and England*, advocating closer ties between the two countries.<sup>51</sup>

Gladstone’s dalliance with Novikova, however, was becoming dangerous. At a rally at St. James Hall on December 8, 1876, organized by the Eastern Question Association, Gladstone delivered a thunderous speech condemning the government’s willingness to risk war “on behalf of the present system of government in Turkey.”<sup>52</sup> Upon exiting the hall, Gladstone came upon Novikova in the crowd, “offering her his

<sup>43</sup> Gladstone to Novikova, Oct. 1, 1876, quoted in Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, v. 1, pp. 296-297.

<sup>44</sup> Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, v. 1, p. 298; *Gladstone Diaries*, Oct. 25, 1876.

<sup>45</sup> Gladstone to Novikova, Oct. 20, 1876, quoted in Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, v. 1, p. 298.

<sup>46</sup> Novikova to Gladstone, Oct. 19, 1876, Gladstone Papers ADD MS 44268, p. 44; cf. [no date] Novikova to Gladstone, pp. 46-48.

<sup>47</sup> Novikova to Gladstone, Oct. 25, 1876, Gladstone Papers ADD MS 44268, p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> Gladstone, “Russian Policy and Deeds in Turkistan,” *Contemporary Review*, Nov. 1876, pp. 884-890.

<sup>49</sup> Gladstone, “Russian Policy and Deeds in Turkistan,” p. 877.

<sup>50</sup> Gladstone, “Russian Policy and Deeds in Turkistan,” p. 879.

<sup>51</sup> Novikoff, *Russia and England from 1876-1880: A Protest and an Appeal* (London, 1880), p. 323.

<sup>52</sup> “Report of Proceedings of the National Conference at St. James Hall, London, December 8, 1876,” (London: Eastern Question Association, 1876), p. 93.

arm . . . insisted upon bringing Madame Novikoff back” to her hotel, before continuing on to a dinner party.<sup>53</sup> Or so, anyway, the press gleefully reported, speculating about the nature of their relationship.<sup>54</sup> Novikova, always keen to play up her close ties with Gladstone, told a similar story in her memoirs.<sup>55</sup> Gladstone’s son, still sensitive about allegations over Novikova’s and Gladstone’s relationship when he published reminiscences of his father in 1928, claimed that he and his father walked home alone together, though this seems unlikely.<sup>56</sup> What none of them mention—and what Gladstone’s diary definitively proves—is that after exiting St. James Hall (with or without Novikova), Gladstone dined that evening with a different Russian: Ambassador Peter Shuvalov.<sup>57</sup>

### The Liberal Opposition and the Russian Ambassador

As in England, Russia’s newspapers were playing a major role in foreign policy. Even as Gladstone toured Britain demanding London act against Ottoman abuses, Pan-Slavists pressured St. Petersburg to declare war on Constantinople. Russia’s media was heavily censored, of course, and the tsar’s ministers had no elections to fear. Nevertheless, the opinions of Russia’s elites mattered, driving intrigues at court and shaping the ministries’ responses to policy questions. Elite opinion was shaped, in turn, by writers and journalists. Pan-Slavist friends of Novikova’s, such as Ivan Aksakov and Mikhail Katkov, criticized the Russian Foreign Ministry—though not, of course, the tsar himself—for weakness in confronting the Ottomans.

Russia declared war on the Ottomans in April 1877, and quickly defeated Ottoman armies in both the Balkans and the Caucasus. For a tense moment, it appeared that the Russians might seize Constantinople, which would have prompted a British declaration of war in response. The Russian Ambassador in Constantinople, Nikolai Ignatiev, saw this as an excellent opportunity to grab land from the Ottomans. His colleague in London, Peter Shuvalov, disagreed. Shuvalov knew that Britain was ready to fight. Having just served as Minister for Internal Affairs, where he was charged with tracking Russia’s growing crop of dissidents and revolutionaries, Shuvalov also knew that Russia was woefully unprepared for war.

Walking the streets of London, Shuvalov met by coincidence William Harcourt, an M.P. and Liberal leader. They struck up a conversation about Shuvalov’s negotiations with Disraeli, which were near a point of breakdown. Both Shuvalov and Harcourt thought that Disraeli was leveling unreasonable demands—and both also believed the same of the Russian Ambassador to the Ottoman Porte, Nikolai Ignatiev. Harcourt stood with Gladstone and other Liberal leaders on the Eastern Question: The Turks were in the wrong in the Balkans, but the Russians should not be allowed to dismember the Ottoman Empire. Shuvalov broadly agreed: He also opposed

<sup>53</sup> Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, v. 1, p. 293.

<sup>54</sup> *Vanity Fair*, March 3, 1877, pp. 126-127.

<sup>55</sup> Novikova, *Russian Memories*, pp. 43-45. Novikova gets the date wrong in her (retrospective) account.

<sup>56</sup> H. J. G. Gladstone, *After Thirty Years* (London, 1928), pp. 35-37.

<sup>57</sup> *Gladstone Diaries*, Dec. 8, 1876.

hawkish Russians’ desire to break apart the Ottoman State. Disraeli had proposed that Britain mediate between the Sultan and the Tsar. Shuvalov told Harcourt that this was “altogether inadmissible”—though “if Mr. Gladstone’s Government had made such a proposal, it would have been another matter.”<sup>58</sup>

Shuvalov would have much preferred to be negotiating with the Liberals—and he wanted to make clear they knew this. Harcourt quickly wrote his colleague Lord Granville, who, in turn, wrote to Liberal grandee Lord Hartington, promising to do so “with a hint not to let it be known that any of us are in confidential communication with Schouvaloff.”<sup>59</sup> The stakes were high: Britain’s government seemed set to soon lose its majority, which would put Harcourt and Granville back in power. “I should not be in the least surprised if there was a break in the Cabinet today,” Granville wrote Harcourt the next day.<sup>60</sup> This outcome did not happen, but Granville was committed to keeping open his secret channel of communication with the Russian Ambassador while he waited for Disraeli’s ministry to fall. He again reiterated to his colleagues that news must not leak. “Of course, you will not let it be known that you have been in such close communication with Shuvalov and have suggested moves to Russia,” Granville wrote his colleague. “But the suggestions have been most judicious and the information you have extracted is most useful.”<sup>61</sup> Like other Liberal leaders, Granville disagreed with Disraeli’s demand that Britain mediate between the Ottomans and Russians, and proposed a broader European discussion. The Russians “know probably better than layman, and the majority of the army know, that we are utterly unprepared for war,” Granville wrote.<sup>62</sup> Thus, “the notion of our settling the Eastern Question without France and against Russia, Germany, and Austria,” he wrote to Harcourt, “seems to be absurd.”<sup>63</sup> This was exactly what Shuvalov was hoping to hear. In return, he funneled news to Britain’s opposition about Russia’s ongoing negotiations with the Ottoman Empire over the Treaty of San Stefano.<sup>64</sup>

It was nearly a month later, on January 28, when Shuvalov first notified Russia’s Foreign Minister about his contact with the opposition. He explained to Russia’s Foreign Minister that “it would have been injurious to our cause to keep them in ignorance of what is happening . . . and to expose them to possible surprise in the course of the parliamentary debates. . . . Consequently I have put myself into daily relations with the leaders of the Opposition and keep them confidentially informed with my different discussions with members of the Cabinet.”<sup>65</sup> Granville was not naïve about the benefit to Shuvalov of these contacts, writing Harcourt that “The Russians

<sup>58</sup> Granville to Harcourt, Jan. 7, 1878, Harcourt Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

<sup>59</sup> Granville to Harcourt, Jan. 1, 1878, Harcourt Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Granville to Harcourt, Jan. 2, 1878, Harcourt Papers.

<sup>61</sup> Granville to Harcourt, Harcourt Papers.

<sup>62</sup> Granville to Harcourt, Jan. 8, 1878, Harcourt Papers.

<sup>63</sup> Granville to Harcourt, Jan. 1, 1878, Harcourt Papers.

<sup>64</sup> Harcourt to Granville, March 1, 1878. See, also, Harcourt to Hartington, Jan. 8, 1878; March [no date] 1878; March 20, 1878, Harcourt Papers.

<sup>65</sup> Seton Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question*, pp. 259-260.

see that the [U.K.] Government is not heartily supported in a war policy—they know that Dizzy [Disraeli] is opposed in his own Cabinet, as well as by the leaders of the Opposition.”<sup>66</sup> Yet, though they were undermining their country’s Prime Minister, the Liberal leaders kept up contact regardless.

Disraeli was already struggling to hold his Cabinet together over his desire for a hard line on Russia. He was further undermined by the Liberal Party leaders, who secretly affirmed to Shuvalov—Disraeli’s counterpart in negotiations—their opposition to Disraeli’s policy. Discussions with Liberal leaders gave Shuvalov inside insight regarding the negotiating positions of Disraeli and his Cabinet, making it easier for Shuvalov to know where Disraeli was bluffing. Shuvalov, meanwhile, was fighting his own domestic struggle against Ignatiev and other war hawks in the Russian bureaucracy and the St. Petersburg and Moscow Press. Everyone kept these contacts secret, and they lied about them when asked. Upon the resignation of British Foreign Minister Lord Derby, Shuvalov arranged a final meeting, where he lied to Disraeli about never having “been in the habit of talking over official matters with members of the Opposition, especially with V. Harcourt,” or “having talked about any pending negotiations with except members of the Government.”<sup>67</sup> Disraeli, though, eventually compromised, accepting a pan-European conference along the lines that both Shuvalov and Harcourt advocated.

### Russian Agents at Home and Abroad

Ambassador Shuvalov’s secret meetings with Liberal leaders did not become public until the papers of the Russian embassy in London were opened to researchers after the 1917 revolution. News of Gladstone’s role in the Gorloff memorandum, by contrast, leaked immediately, accompanied by salacious rumors about Gladstone’s relationship with Novikova. *Vanity Fair*, after exposing Gladstone’s planting of the Gorloff memo, insinuated that Gladstone did not deny having an affair with Novikova (of which no evidence exists.)<sup>68</sup> *Vanity Fair* also noted that “Gladstone does not at all deny his cooperation and correspondence with a Russian agent at a time when he, an ex-premier, was, in the middle of a tremendous European crisis, making the Eastern Question the vehicle of an hysterically passionate party warfare against the head of the British government.”<sup>69</sup>

Gladstone’s cooperation with Novikova could not be denied. But was she a Russian agent? She may have arrived in London “as an amateur diplomatist,” *Vanity Fair* argued, “but no Russian, male or female . . . could play such a part in London for a single week without having to submit to the control and the orders of the Russian embassy—in a word, without becoming an unofficial agent of the Russian government.” Perhaps, the paper continued, “Mindful of her liberal friends at Moscow,” she “dispensed with the personal visits of the late chief of the Russian Secret

<sup>66</sup> Seton Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question*, p. 258.

<sup>67</sup> William Flaville Monypenny and George Earl Buckle, *Life of Disraeli*, (Macmillan, 1914) v. 6, p. 270.

<sup>68</sup> *Vanity Fair*, March 3, 1877, pp. 126-127.

<sup>69</sup> *Vanity Fair*, March 3, 1877, pp. 126-127.

Police, Count Shouvaloff,” who was now ambassador in London. But did her brother Alexander not hold a high rank in the Russian military? Was her brother-in-law not Russia’s ambassador to Vienna? “This is the person with whom our ex-Premier was admittedly in close alliance.”<sup>70</sup>

Russian government officials were in no way adverse to influencing British public opinion via means fair or foul. Ignatiev, the Russian Ambassador in Constantinople, encouraged the spread of news about Bulgarian atrocities by choosing a Bulgarian as his press secretary and feeding reports to journalists he knew would amplify the information.<sup>71</sup> Yet, this was hardly objectionable; every foreign ministry sought favorable media coverage. More salacious was a secret October 1875 proposal by the owner of the British newspaper *The Standard* to sell the paper to Russia’s government via a British intermediary who worked for two Russian Grand Dukes. A top Russian diplomat rejected the transaction on the grounds that the proposed price—£250,000—was too high. Russia’s diplomat proposed an annual subsidy rather than an outright purchase, which would have made *The Standard* far from the only European newspaper at the time being paid for favorable coverage by a government, foreign or domestic.<sup>72</sup>

Such efforts to meddle in the media, however, say nothing about Novikova’s status. Gladstone was sufficiently concerned about his relationship with her that he warned that he might halt correspondence until political storm passed. “Do write me, dear Mr. Gladstone,” she requested from Moscow in spring 1877, “if you can do so without exposing yourself to some danger.”<sup>73</sup> He responded cautiously: “Do not be surprised. . . . If, as I begged off from sending you registered or in any way affecting secrecy, so I asked to be excused from sending you documents with which I have no natural concern, and in sending which I should therefore seem to do the business of an agent.”<sup>74</sup> “In free England,” Novikova retorted, “there is a kind of slavery quite curious to Russians, and what they call ‘the free proceedings of the Press’ sometimes terribly low and vulgar.”<sup>75</sup>

Yet, though the proceedings of the Russian press were not free, Novikova’s close friends, Pan-Slavist writers such as Ivan Aksakov and Mikhail Katkov, were questioning the foreign policy of the tsarist government. First, fearing a broader European war, Russian armies stopped just outside the Turkish Straits, rather than taking Constantinople. From this position, Russia imposed the Treaty of San Stefano on the defeated Ottomans, which would have redrawn the map of the Balkans, vastly expanding Bulgaria and benefiting Russia at the Ottomans’ expense. The British

<sup>70</sup> *Vanity Fair*, March 3, 1877, pp. 126-127.

<sup>71</sup> Sumner, *Russia and the Balkans*, p. 186.

<sup>72</sup> Seton-Watson, pp. 24-25. The proposed intermediary was a Russian subject, though British born.

<sup>73</sup> Novikova to Gladstone, May 2, 1877, in Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, v. 1, p. 355.

<sup>74</sup> Gladstone to Novikova, May 8, 1877, in Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, v. 1, p. 356.

<sup>75</sup> Novikova to Gladstone, May 2, 1877, in Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, v. 1, p. 355.

prepared for war, with Disraeli ordering Indian troops to the Mediterranean, ready to fight.<sup>76</sup>

However, as Russia's Pan-Slavists geared up for war, the tsar himself got cold feet. The Pan-Slavists' calls for liberating Slavic brethren sounded appealing, but did the tsar want to risk replicating the disasters of the Crimean War? His top ministers—Foreign Minister Gorchakov, Finance Minister Reutern, War Minister Miliutin—all advised caution. To the Foreign Ministry's relief, the tsar stepped back from the brink. In London, Shuvalov was allowed to negotiate with the British to attend a conference that summer in Berlin, which all sides believed represented a path away from war.

Russia's secret police soon brought worrisome news. Not only were concessions over the Balkans unpopular, some rumors circulating around Russia alleged that the tsar himself was “a foreigner in the pay of the Germans.”<sup>77</sup> Claims that the Russian government was stocked full of ethnic Germans were a longstanding Pan-Slavist critique. But claims that the tsar himself was a traitor—this was new. Olga Novikova would never have agreed with such a claim. She was a committed monarchist, as were most of her Pan-Slavist friends. Yet, the steady drumbeat of war promoted by papers, such as *Moskovskie Vedomosti*, could not but undermine the tsarist government when it decided—as it almost certainly would—to give up some of its gains in the recent war. Despite the censorship regime, Katkov, the editor of *Moskovskie Vedomosti*, spent spring 1878 condemning tsarist diplomacy as Russian diplomats searched for compromise with Britain. There was no possibility, Katkov insisted, of revising the Treaty of San Stefano, which had given Russia such great gains over the Ottomans. It should be implemented as signed. Peace should be established not at a Congress but with Russian armies at the Turkish Straits. Russian diplomacy was “weak” and Ambassador Shuvalov was offering too many concessions.<sup>78</sup> Ultimately, Aksakov concluded, the result of the Congress of Berlin, which left the Bulgarians sundered from Russia, still under the Ottoman yoke, was “treason.”<sup>79</sup>

### The “True Sentiments” of Russia and England

“It is a common and profitable trick of party to assume the mask of nationality,” Gladstone wrote in an 1879 article, titled “Friends and Foes of Russia.”<sup>80</sup> He knew of what he spoke. Since the outbreak of the Bulgarian revolt, Gladstone had faced a slew of allegations from the press, largely false, that he was in bed with the Russians, or with one Russian in particular. True, he was guilty of fabricating evidence in the press in collaboration with the Russian military attaché. Of course, he wanted to work with Russia—the exact opposite policy of the country's duly elected Prime Minister. But he made this argument openly, and with reference not to the several-decades long pro-Ottoman policy that Disraeli championed, but what Gladstone declared was “an established tradition older, wider, nobler far—a tradition not which

<sup>76</sup> On April 17, 1878; Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question*, p. 395.

<sup>77</sup> Aksakov, p. 138.

<sup>78</sup> Nolde, *L'Alliance Franco-Russe*, pp. 203-204.

<sup>79</sup> Nolde, *L'Alliance Franco-Russe*, p. 202.

<sup>80</sup> Gladstone, “Friends and Foes of Russia,” *Nineteenth Century*, Jan. 1879, p. 168



disregards British interests, but which teaches you to seek the promotion of those interests in obeying the dictates of honor and justice.”<sup>81</sup>

The attacks on Gladstone were in many ways unfair, especially when alleging without basis that his relationship with Novikova was intimate rather than intellectual. Yet, when it came to conflating party and nationality, Gladstone was hardly innocent. “The West End of London,” he declared to Parliament in 1877—referring to the Tory elite—“does not express the true sentiments of England. Looking over all the great achievements that have made the last half century illustrious, not one of them would have been effected if the opinions of the West End of London had prevailed.”<sup>82</sup> Gladstone made the same argument in private, even to foreign leaders. In a memorandum prepared for the ultra-hawkish Russian Ambassador to Constantinople, Gladstone told Ambassador Ignatiev that he would speak only about the English people—“not about the government, nor the parliament, nor the rich, nor the army, nor the majority of the metropolitan press.”<sup>83</sup>

Gladstone was not the only person to differentiate “real England” from the other sort. So, too, did Novikova, arguing, “There is the England of St. James’s Hall, and the England of the Guildhall; and England with a soul and a heart, and an England which has only a pocket. In other words, there is the England of Mr. Gladstone and the England of Lord Beaconsfield [Disraeli.]”<sup>84</sup> Yet, it was not only England that faced an identity crisis: so, too, did Russia. “There is official Russia, and national Russia,” Novikova explained. “There is, in a word, the Russia of St. Petersburg, and the Russia of Moscow . . . but St. Petersburg, thank God, is not Russia, any more than the West-End of London is England.”<sup>85</sup>

As both Russia and England edged towards war in 1878, they stood on the precipice of domestic political crises. Whether they chose war or peace, the decision would transform domestic politics as much as it would reshape the Balkans or the Mediterranean. In Russia, the decision to back down under British pressure at the Congress of Berlin discredited the government and contributed to what Russian Historian Zaionchkovsky described as the “crisis of autocracy” in the late tsarist period. The tsar was assassinated just three years later, in 1881, sabotaging any chance of political revitalization in Russia and guaranteeing that the country would chug toward the twentieth century with politics that were unable to cope. In Britain, too, the domestic situation was raw. Gladstone had accused Disraeli of base immorality; and if he retook power, he planned expand the franchise, reform the economy, and undermine the social class that kept Disraeli in power.

Given such high stakes, is it any surprise that both the Russians and British questioned their identity? Or that they saw political opponents not only as sparring

<sup>81</sup> Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question*, p. 185.

<sup>82</sup> L. C. B. Seaman, *Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History, 1837-1901*, p. 212.

<sup>83</sup> It isn’t clear that Gladstone actually said these words to Ignatiev, though he certainly prepared notes indicating a desire to do so; Shannon, p. 269; cf. Gladstone Papers ADD MS 44763, March 21, 1877, pp. 85-86 ff.

<sup>84</sup> Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, v. 2, p. 78.

<sup>85</sup> Novikova, “Is Russia Wrong?” p. 3.

partners, but as traitors? Truth itself seemed open to question, and efforts to meddle in the media did not help. “You should never trust experts,” declared Lord Salisbury in summer 1877 amid a debate in the Cabinet about Russia. “If you believe the doctors, nothing is wholesome: if you believe the theologians, nothing is innocent: if you believe the soldiers nothing is safe.”<sup>86</sup> Yet, amid such confusion, what was safe? If the Russians took Constantinople, one British pamphlet argued, “India will be irretrievably lost,” and with it, Britain’s global role.<sup>87</sup>

Russia faced similarly dire consequences, Russians believed. The Congress of Berlin, which Russia’s Foreign Minister helped negotiate, was “nothing other than an open conspiracy against the Russian people . . . with the connivance of Russia’s own representatives,” declared Novikova’s friend Ivan Aksakov.<sup>88</sup> Spies were sighted around every corner. Gladstone was “working incessantly” in the Russian interest, the media reported.<sup>89</sup> Novikova was “an unofficial agent of the Russian government,” British columnist Karl Marx averred. It was difficult to ascertain the truth, if the truth even still existed. Only half a century later, after Marx’s disciples took power in Russia, and after the embassy archives were thrown open, did it become known that throughout the crisis, British Liberal party leaders were undermining their own government’s negotiating position in a series of secret meetings with the Russian ambassador. All the while they kept their colleague Gladstone, Russia’s strongest and most controversial ally in Britain, in the dark.



<sup>86</sup> Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question*, p. 219.

<sup>87</sup> Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question*, p. 278.

<sup>88</sup> Dietrich Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy, 1860-1914* (London, 1987), p. 82.

<sup>89</sup> Robert P. O’Kelly, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics*, p. 481.