

LORD SALISBURY'S speech at the
Lord Salisbury at the Guildhall. waited for with intense public anxiety. The occasion is momentous. Home and foreign affairs are alike concerned. More than once the Guildhall banquet at such a time has been made the opportunity of an important declaration from a Prime Minister. At all events we are entitled to expect a suggestive forecast of Ministerial policy, or a clear exposition of Ministerial ideas. We are in face of a crisis in foreign affairs. The Eastern question is coming up again; has, indeed, actually come up again. It now appears in its acutest form. What are we going to do? That is what the Prime Minister must teach us—to paraphrase the words of Hamlet. The time has come when the country must no longer be left in doubt as to the course of policy along which the Government intend to move. It may well be that we are on the eve of a final settlement—or at least a settlement for a long time—of that entangled and perplexed Eastern question. Lord Salisbury can hardly profess, as the Duke of Devonshire did in his recalling mood, to "know nothing about the whole business. If anybody knows anything the Prime Minister must know something. Therefore we must fairly expect that the Prime Minister will tell us something. He can hardly suppose that the country will give him that "blank cheque" which has become a recognised impossibility in English politics. The reports from Turkey grow worse and worse. Our Correspondent at Constantinople telegraphs to us that the news from the interior of the country "continues to be simply awful." Fresh and enormous massacres are reported. The mere numbers of the murders may perhaps be exaggerated, but the general facts seem, on the testimony of French Consuls as well as English officials, to be out of the range of doubt or question. The unfortunate Ottoman Empire has got into the condition which Junius described in memorable words as "that worst of punishments, that most intolerable of all tyrannies, a government of insolence without spirit, violence without vigour, ambition without dignity, obstinacy without resolution, and ignorance without diffidence." The words were not meant for a Turkish Government; they were intended at the time to apply nearer home. But we do not know that the Ottoman Government of to-day could be more effectively and more correctly described.

It will be Lord Salisbury's duty to tell us all to-night what the Government intend to do in the face of such a crisis. Her Majesty's Ministers must have already formed some idea as to the policy which they propose to adopt. Now, at all events, there is no question of partizanship. There are no two opinions in the country as to the hopeless condition of the Turkish Empire. At least we are entitled to say that if there be any second opinion that second opinion has not taken shape and put itself into words. But we are all of us anxious for guidance from the Government as to the course which England ought to take in endeavouring to put things to rights in Turkey. On that subject there may naturally be differences of opinion, and therefore we look for some light and leading from the Prime Minister on such an occasion as that of to-night. We are surely not to be allowed to drift in our policy while events are going on in Turkey such as our correspondent in Constantinople describes, and as every day's correspondences describe. Lord Salisbury has a great opportunity, and we can say with all sincerity that we hope he will make good use of it. We all know that he is not a devoted friend of the Ottoman system. There are no devoted friends of the Ottoman system in the England of our times. The English populations are no longer content to go about,

"every man," as it was once happily said, "with a Turk on his back." We are cured alike of our faith in the Turk and in the balance of power. The Prime Minister will therefore find a country perfectly willing to help him, without thought of partisan prejudice, if he only tells us of a clear policy and a right way. Would it be asking too much to invite him, if he has no clear policy, just to tell us so, and let us know the worst? We hear of a resolve on the part of the Government to strengthen materially both the Channel and the Mediterranean fleets. Lord Salisbury might surely tell us something on that subject.

Then of course there are home affairs. Are her Majesty's Ministers going in for a policy of protection? They probably are not. We all, as the classic poet says, go mad one time or another, but somehow we can hardly believe that Lord Salisbury and his colleagues have all gone mad together, just at present, on that one particular craze. Yet there certainly were words of Lord Salisbury's the other day which would seem to indicate that that way madness lies, and the country would be very glad to be reassured on the subject of Ministerial sanity. What is to be done about Ireland? Some of us would be glad to know whether the mind of the Government is really filled with the conviction that the whole Irish difficulty is to be removed by a tinkered-up Land Bill and an extension of light railways and something called a Local Government measure. Mr. Chamberlain, at the time when he was outgrowing his old Radical days, used to profess great faith in the permanent and final efficacy of a sort of plan of local government to charm the Irish people out of any desire for Home Rule. But some Irish member, adopting words of Mr. Disraeli's, spoke slightly of the scheme as "Popkin's plan," and Mr. Chamberlain became huffy, and, like Macbeth, declared that "we will proceed no further with this business." Still, the public would be glad to know whether the Government have or have not any settled ideas as to the manner of dealing with the Irish difficulties, or whether they are under the impression that those difficulties may be safely left to deal with themselves. There are other subjects belonging to the domain of home politics on which Lord Salisbury might well say a word in season and in reason. He is not usually much given to mere rhetorical declamation. All the more, therefore, are we entitled to expect that on an occasion like that of to-night he will speak to the point.
