

This Evening's News.

THE GENERAL ELECTION.

MR. GLADSTONE AT BLACKHEATH.

Notwithstanding the bad weather, Mr. Gladstone delivered his promised address on Blackheath yesterday afternoon. The right hon. gentleman was accompanied by Mrs. and Miss Gladstone. A complete report of the speech appeared in our latest edition last evening. Mr. Gladstone defended himself for dissolving in January on the ground that Mr. Disraeli, having been offered the Government last year, "ran away." He proceeded to reply to some of the statements in Mr. Disraeli's address to his constituents. Answering the charge that his Government had been too neglectful of foreign affairs and too energetic in their home policy, he said :—

We are ready for an examination of foreign policy or any other policy, but beware of those who endeavour to depreciate in your minds the importance of your home concerns, and draw off your attention from those domestic and vital interests pressing upon you every day to the less important and far more remote subjects of foreign policy. There is no more convenient method of handling the politics of the day when you feel you have a bad case upon the domestic concerns of the country than to invite attention to foreign policy. In being called away from domestic affairs to foreign policy you are called to run away from what you have the power of discussing and comprehending to discuss that which is extremely difficult adequately to study and comprehend. You are called away from daylight into the dark, and when it is proposed to abandon the policy of economy and propose estimates unscrupulously high, and lay burdens on the country unnecessarily great, there is no such easy mode of giving effect to those designs as exciting the country with vague alarms and imaginary apprehensions on the subject of foreign policy.

Still continuing his criticism on Mr. Disraeli, the right hon. gentleman proceeded :—

He carries you all the way to the Straits of Malacca. He says we have committed a most astonishing act of ignorance or folly in the Straits of Malacca, and have compromised the freedom of passage for our trade with China and Japan. Well, the transaction which Mr. Disraeli blames on our part was a transaction in the year 1871, and he has sat in the House of Commons during the sessions of 1872 and 1873, and has entirely forgotten his duty to the Straits of Malacca. And now what has happened to rouse him from his insensibility? An article has been published in *Fraser's Magazine*, written by a gentleman of the name of Bowles, and I am greatly mistaken if Mr. Disraeli does not find on this occasion that those who play at bowls must expect to meet with rubbers. Let me give you a short statement of the case. Mr. Disraeli says that we had a treaty securing the freedom of the Straits of Malacca for our trade to China and Japan. We had no such treaty. We had a treaty with Holland, which gave to England the exclusive jurisdiction on the Malay continent, and which gave to Holland a similarly exclusive title to frame treaties and make arrangements in the Island of Sumatra, which forms the other side of the Straits of Malacca, and in all the neighbouring islands; but that gave no security whatever for the free navigation of the Straits of Malacca. That treaty was dated in 1834, and I am not now going to discuss it. But if there is danger to the Straits of Malacca of stopping the freedom of navigation, you will agree with me that that danger accrues where the Strait is narrowest, because it is there evidently that interruption will be offered to navigation. The Strait is narrowest at the port of Sumatra, which is occupied by the kingdom of Siak. The Dutch made a treaty some years ago, by which they acquired almost the sovereignty, the virtual supremacy, in the kingdom of Siak. Well, then was the time of danger, if any. But when was the treaty made? It was made in 1858, when Mr. Disraeli was in office. It was forwarded by the Dutch Minister to Lord Malmesbury, as Foreign Secretary, on the 21st of September. Lord Malmesbury acknowledged its receipt, and returned his thanks for the treaty.