

MR. DISRAELI AT AYLESBURY.

Mr. Disraeli dined on Saturday at the farmers' ordinary, held at the George Hotel, Aylesbury. Mr. Rhodes presided, and there was a numerous gathering to welcome the right hon. gentleman. A crowded meeting of Mr. Disraeli's supporters was subsequently held in the Corn Exchange. Between two and three thousand were present, and the galleries were filled with ladies, most of whom wore blue favours. Mr. Disraeli entered the hall at twenty minutes past three o'clock, and was warmly cheered on taking his seat upon the platform. Lieut.-Colonel Pratt occupied the chair.

Mr. Disraeli, on rising, was greeted with enthusiastic cheering. He said: Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, you are aware Parliament has been dissolved. What the reason

With respect to our relations with the Dutch in the Straits of Malacca, Mr. Gladstone seems to think very little of the Straits of Malacca, and speaks as if he never heard of them before. He said the Straits of Malacca were a great way off, and, in fact, he put them in the same category as the Kingdom of Brobdingnag. I do not know whether Mr. Gladstone's knowledge of geography will recommend him to the merchants of London, or Manchester, or Liverpool, or Glasgow. It so happens that all these important persons have heard a great deal of the Straits of Malacca, and a great proportion of English commercial capital is invested in the countries connected with these Straits. I will put the question before you very simply. It is a very important one, as you will see before I have concluded, and you will hear of it hereafter. The Straits of Malacca are the great high road between two oceans, by means of which the products of India and Europe are exchanged for those of China, Japan, and other countries. The Straits of Malacca, though Mr. Gladstone spoke of them as if they were the Bosphorus or the Straits of Gibraltar, are nearly 600 miles long—certainly much more than 500. One side of the Straits of Malacca is joined by the Malay Peninsula, which is in possession of and under the control of England; the other side is joined by the large Island of Sumatra, which is partially but considerably in the possession of the Dutch. The Dutch are under a contract with us that they never will increase their possessions in the Island of Sumatra, our object in that policy being, of course, to secure the freedom of the Straits, so important to our commerce. It appears that her Majesty's Government have released the Dutch from this condition, and the Dutch may now, as they have commenced, obtain by conquest the whole of the Island of Sumatra, and possess the whole coast of one side of the Straits. That is a policy opposed to the Imperial policy of England, one hostile, in my opinion, to our highest commercial interests; but, I suppose her Majesty's Government, assuming that they made a great concession, which, no doubt, they did, to the Dutch, made terms on their part, and obtained as an equivalent the settlements of the Dutch on the Gold Coast and of the undertakings of the Dutch with the native powers in respect of those settlements—engagements which Mr. Gladstone now describes as equivocal and entangling. The consequence of those equivocal and entangling engagements was, that before we were three months in possession we had a war with the Ashantees, so that you will see there is a very near connection between the Straits of Malacca and the Ashantee war. The Ashantee war has cost this country already a large sum of money; the bill has not yet been laid before Parliament, but he must be, I think, a very simple person who will not calculate that amount by hundreds of thousands. The sum will probably be much greater, and it is an indefinite sum; and the struggle has cost us in addition some excellent and valuable lives. (Cheers.) Now, the charge I made against her Majesty's Government is that they have shown great neglect and great ignorance, or worse—that they have relinquished an important position, which secured the freedom of the Straits of Malacca to this country, and which all Governments had observed, and, at the same time, they have so managed our affairs that they have taken as an equivalent negotiations which have

involved us, I will not say in a disastrous, but certainly a distressing, war with a foreign Power. This seems very much to have nettled Mr. Gladstone, and he took considerable notice of it in his speech a few days ago—on Wednesday—to the electors of Greenwich. (A Voice: "What have you done?" and cheers.) Now, I am prepared to make great allowance for a Prime Minister who addresses his constituents on a rainy day from the top of a wagon on Blackheath—(laughter)—and therefore I am going to make no remarks on his observations with regard to those Straits, further than to say this—that they are entirely incorrect. (Laughter and cheers.) These statements have nothing to do with the merits of the case, and I should weary you upon so technical, though important a topic, to dwell on them now. But there are two points on which it is of the highest importance that I should distinctly speak to you. In the first place, Mr. Gladstone sets out by saying, "This is a matter of no importance, for the Conservative party cannot really conceive it of any importance, because I observe in the year 1852, when there was a Conservative Ministry, the Dutch Government had a treaty with the King of Syak, and that treaty was communicated by the Dutch Government to Lord Malmesbury by a colleague of the member for Bucks—(now a candidate for the representation of Buckinghamshire)—and Lord Malmesbury only thanked the Dutch Government for its communication." Now, when I heard this I felt it was the old story of the red herring drawn across the chase to change the scent. We had no more right to prevent the treaty between the Dutch Government and the King of Syak than we have to prevent the transit of Venus. (Cheers.) The Dutch Government, remembering always their engagements to England, communicated the treaty to Lord Malmesbury so that we might see that their Government was not infringing the treaties, and Lord Malmesbury thanked the Dutch Government like a gentleman. (Laughter.) Mr. Gladstone seemed to disapprove of that. Therefore I pass from this subject of Lord Malmesbury, which was only put forward to throw the people of England on the wrong scent. But I now come to a matter of a much more serious nature. Mr. Gladstone made a charge against the old Government, and a charge of a serious kind. He said, in distinct language, that we had made this treaty with the Dutch, by which we relinquished all security over the Straits of Malacca, and which indirectly led to the Ashantee war. It was the work of Lord Derby. The draft was found in Downing Street, and he absolutely stated that the treaty by which all this mischief was occasioned was prepared by Lord Derby. Now I agree—to use the solemn language of silly newspapers—that that would be a crushing reply on the part of Mr. Gladstone, if only it were true. (Laughter.) It had its effect for twenty-four hours, and permitted all the newspapers which are attendant on his course to denounce my inaccuracy when I spoke of foreign affairs. Now, I have to give that statement of Mr. Gladstone's an absolute and unequivocal denial. But that is not all: something did take place upon the subject of the Straits when we were in office, and the conduct of the Government over which I presided was exactly the reverse of that which Mr. Gladstone alleges against us. The Dutch did appeal to our Government to release them from what they called those vexatious and injurious conditions that prevented them from increasing their territories in Sumatra, and especially with relation to the Sultan of Achcen, whose dependency being opposite our own dependence of Penang, has always been held as necessary to the security of our navigation. And what did our Government do? Lord Derby, with all that spirit of impartial justice and conciliation to allies he always shows, went into the whole question of our treaties and engagements in the Straits. He offered to the Dutch Government many modifications in exchange for what I admit were commercial advantages. There was a *quid pro quo*; but he offered to deal with them in a liberal spirit. At the same time he announced to the Dutch Government that the independence of Achcen was a part of our policy, and he would never consent to release them from their engagements, even were they to attack our power. I am rather surprised, therefore, at what has taken place, and I want to know how Mr. Gladstone can reconcile it to himself that he made that statement. I would say to himself, not only in his eminent position as First Minister of the Crown, but I cannot understand how he can reconcile it to himself as one possessing the feelings of a gentleman. To come down with a premeditated statement in answer to a charge that had been made for several days—to come down, and with all the authority of a First Minister of the Crown make such charges against the Government of which I was the chief, absolutely in the very teeth of my address to my constituents, and declaring that we ourselves were the authors of that treaty, is something so monstrous and unprecedented in the whole course of my political life that it fills me with amazement more than with indignation. ("Hear," and cheers.) Mr. Gladstone is a religious man. (Laughter.) I think when he said his prayers on Wednesday night he must have felt that there had been a strain that day upon his candour and his conscience. (Laughter.)