

ment of our trouble was the height to which Arabi's rebellion was allowed to go. The government knew very well the danger of Arabi while he was yet a small man and had little influence. They were perfectly aware of the mischief he was brewing, but they not only declined to act themselves, but, unless they have been greatly maligned, they prevented the local authorities from acting. They also prevented Arabi from being removed, as he should have been, from the confines of Egypt, by which, had it been done, all the evil would have been averted.

While this enterprise was going on the government reposed in absolute security, and took no effective measure till the pressure of public opinion forced upon them the movement of the fleet into the harbor of Alexandria. That was a very fair illustration of the vice which characterized their policy. That movement was made suddenly, with no preparation, and forced us into what followed. The fleet was moved in; as a matter of course Arabi resisted, and the fleet, as was inevitable, suddenly replied; and then it was found that there were no forces to land and back up the action that was taken.

The result of that imprudence was that not only was the Khedive's throne shaken and the fidelity of his army utterly destroyed, but the town and fortifications of Alexandria were grievously injured, and that tremendous debt for the injury to Alexandria was incurred which still remains as a burden upon Egyptian finance, and a hindrance to all negotiations for the settlement of foreign claims. That was the first specimen of their period of slumber, followed by a sudden and unprepared rush.

Then came the question of the Soudan. It was no new question, for before the battle of Tel-el-Kebir the Mahdi

was already in arms. It was a matter with which anybody who undertook to deal with the destiny of Egypt ought to have been familiar and ready with a decision. But none was at hand, and matters were allowed to drift. The government, plunged in absolute torpor, seemed to have but one care — that they should escape the nominal responsibility, though real responsibility must inevitably attach to their action. Their despatches, one after another, during that period, merely repeated the old burden, that the government had no responsibility.

The result was that the unhappy Hicks went into the Soudan wretchedly equipped, with an army beneath the number he ought to have had, and composed of men turned out as worthless from the Egyptian army. The inevitable result followed — a result at which her Majesty's government had no reason to be surprised, for they were warned of the danger by their own confidential agents, yet absolutely declined to interfere. They hoped by disclaiming responsibility to escape the consequences of their own neglect.

Hicks's army was totally destroyed, and not a man escaped to tell the tale, and then the government awoke from the period of slumber, and the period of rush began. They adopted two measures, both of them as inadequate and inapplicable to the circumstances as it was possible to conceive, and both big with future trouble.

In the first place they announced suddenly to the world and to Egypt that Egypt must abandon the Soudan. It was impossible to have conceived a more stupendous political blunder. It was a proclamation to our enemies that they should enjoy impunity, and to our friends that they would be handed over without mercy to those who claimed to overcome them. But that announcement was made, and from



that moment the fate of the garrisons scattered over the Soudan was sealed. The fate of the garrison of Khartoum was brought home to them forcibly, but did they take any reasonable measures for its relief? Did they send any troops on which they could rely to defend the garrison?

No, they adopted the absurd and Quixotic plan of taking advantage of the chivalry and devotion of one of the noblest spirits our age has seen, by sending him forward on the impossible and hopeless errand of accomplishing by mere words and promises that which they had not the courage to do by force of arms. From that commencement, the abandonment of the Soudan to the mission of General Gordon, all our subsequent troubles arose.

But that was not all, for among those garrisons in the Soudan were those of Sinkat and Tokar, which, so far back as November, 1883, were severely pressed by the Mahdi's lieutenants, and their danger was announced to the government as extreme. But for three months they took no notice of that danger. They allowed the matter to be left to General Baker and a body of Egyptians, whose worthlessness was denounced in every page of the correspondence that was laid before them. Of course General Baker with such a force was inevitably defeated; but it was not until April or May — I think not till a vote of censure was announced — that the government determined on making an effort to do that which they ought to have done, and which, if they had not been asleep, they would have done, three months before — namely, to relieve the garrisons of Sinkat and Tokar. And when the resolution came at last — when the necessity dawned upon their minds — they plunged into it with their usual imprudence and want of plan. They sent men down to Suakim apparently with no idea as to what those men

were to do, and before they could take effective measures Sinkat had fallen and the garrison of Tokar, giving up in despair, had surrendered themselves.

Then the aimlessness of the government was revealed. Having landed their forces they would not expose themselves to the ridicule of taking them away without doing anything, so they slaughtered 6,000 Arabs, and then came away absolutely without any result for the blood of their friends and their enemies shed. They came away guilty of all this bloodshed, because they had plunged into the enterprise without any definite view or any fixed plan by which they proposed to guide themselves.

Now, my lords, these three things, the case of the bombardment of Alexandria, the abandonment of the Soudan, and the mission of General Graham's force — they are all on the same plan, and they all show that remarkable characteristic of torpor during the time that action was needed, and of impulsive, hasty, and ill-considered action when the moment for action had passed by.

Their future conduct was modelled on their conduct in the past. So far was it modelled that we were able to put it to the test which establishes a scientific law. The proof of scientific law is when you can prophesy from previous experience what will happen in the future. It is exactly what took place in the present instance. We had had these three instances of the mode of working of her Majesty's government before us. We knew the laws that guided their action, as astronomers, observing the motions of a comet, can discover by their observations the future path which that comet is to travel; and we prophesied what would happen in the case of General Gordon.

My right honorable friend Sir Stafford Northcote prophesied



sied it in the House of Commons, and was met by a burst of fury from the prime minister such as that assembly has seldom seen. He was told that Egypt was of much less importance than, I think, Sutherland or Caithness, that everything wrong was the result of deficits imputed to him in the finances of some ten years ago, and he was generally denounced because he interfered with the beneficent legislation on the subject of capable citizens, and so forth, by introducing the subject of Egypt as many as seventeen times. That did not prevent his prophecies being correct, and I ventured to repeat them in this House.

I do not like to quote my own words; it is egotistical; but as proof of what I call the accuracy of the scientific law, I should like to refer to what I said on the 4th of April, when we were discussing the prospect of the relief of General Gordon. The government were maintaining that he was perfectly safe, and that it was very unreasonable for us to raise the question in Parliament. What I said was this:

“Are these circumstances encouraging to us, when we are asked to trust to the inspiration of the moment, that when the danger comes the government will find some means of relieving General Gordon? I feel that the history of the past will be again repeated, and just again when it is too late the critical resolution will be taken. The same news will come that the position of Gordon is forlorn and helpless, and then some desperate resolution of sending an expedition will be formed too late to achieve its object.”

I quote these words to show that we had ascertained the orbits of those eccentric comets who sit on the Treasury Bench. Now, the terrible responsibility and blame which rests upon them does so because they were warned in March and April of the danger of General Gordon; they had received every intimation which men could reasonably look for that his

danger would be extreme, and delayed it from March and April right down to the 15th of August before they took a single measure.

What were they doing all that time? It is very difficult to conceive. Some people have said, but I think it is an unreasonable supposition, that the cause of the tardiness of her Majesty's government was the accession to the Cabinet of the noble earl the secretary for the colonies [Earl of Derby]. I have quoted, partly with the object of defending the noble lord from that charge, for I have quoted to show that the government were almost as bad before he joined them as they were after. What happened during these eventful months?

I suppose one day some memoirs will tell our grandchildren, but we shall never know. Some people think there were divisions in the Cabinet, and that, after division and division the decision was put off in order that the Cabinet should not be broken up. I am rather inclined to think that it was due to the peculiar position of the prime minister. He came in as the apostle of the Midlothian campaign, loaded with the doctrines and the follies of that pilgrimage. We have seen it on each occasion, after each one of these mishaps when the government has been forced by events and the common sense of the nation to take some more active steps. We have seen how his extreme supporters in that campaign have reproached him as he deserted their opinions and disappointed their ardent hopes. I think that he always felt the danger of that reproach, and the debt he had incurred to those supporters, and felt a dread lest they should break away and put off again and again till the last practical moment any action which might bring him into open conflict with the doctrines by which his present eminence was gained.



At all events, this is clear, that throughout those six months the government knew perfectly well the danger in which General Gordon was placed. It has been said that General Gordon did not ask for troops. Well, I am surprised at that defence. One of the characteristics of General Gordon was the extreme abnegation of his nature. It was not to be expected that he should send home a telegram to say, "I am in great danger, therefore send me troops." He would probably have cut off his right hand before he would have sent such a telegram. But he did send a telegram that the people of Khartoum were in danger, and that the Mahdi must win unless military succor was sent forward, and distinctly telling the government — and this is the main point — that unless they would consent to his views the supremacy of the Mahdi was assured.

This is what he said not later than the 29th of February, almost as soon as he first saw the nature of the problem with which he had been sent to deal. It is impossible that General Gordon could have spoken more clearly than he did, but Mr. Power, who was one of the three Englishmen in Khartoum, and who was sent down with Stewart on that ill-fated journey, on the 23rd of March sent a telegram saying, "We are daily expecting British troops; we cannot bring ourselves to believe that we are to be abandoned by the government. Our existence depends on England."

My lords, is it conceivable that after that — two months after that — in May, the prime minister should have said that the government were waiting to have reasonable proof that Gordon was in danger? By that time Khartoum was surrounded, and the governor of Berber had announced that his case was desperate, which was too surely proved by the massacre which took place in June.

And yet in May Mr. Gladstone was waiting for reasonable proof that they were in danger. Apparently he did not get that proof till August.

I may note in passing that I think the interpretation which the government have placed upon the language of their trusted officers has been exceedingly ungenerous. They told us that they did not think it necessary to send an expedition to relieve Sinkat and Tokar because they could quote some language of hope from the despatches of General Baker, and in the same way they could quote some language of hope from the despatches of General Gordon.

But a general sent forward on a dangerous expedition does not like to go whining for assistance, unless he is pressed by absolute peril. All those great qualities which go to make men heroes are such as are absolutely incompatible with such a course, and lead them to shrink as from a great disgrace from any unnecessary appeal for exertion for their protection. It was the business of the government not to interpret General Gordon's telegrams as if they had been statutory declarations, but to judge for themselves of the circumstances of the case, and to see that those who were surrounded, who were the only three Englishmen amongst this vast body of Mohammedans, who were already cut off from all communication with the civilized world by the occupation of every important town upon the river, were in real danger.

I cannot understand what blindness fell over the eyes of some members of the government. Lord Hartington, on the 13th of May, gave utterance to this expression: "I say it would be an indelible disgrace if we should neglect any means at the disposal of this country for saving General Gordon."

And after that announcement by the minister chiefly responsible, three months elapsed before any step was taken