

for doing that which he admitted the government were bound to do under the penalty of indelible disgrace. It has been said that Gordon was destroyed by treachery, and that treachery would have happened at any time when the British army came near Khartoum. What does that extraordinary theory mean?

It means that the Mahdi had agreed with Farag Bey that it was much more comfortable to go on besieging, and that until Lord Wolseley made it dangerous they would go on besieging. I think those who started that unreasonable theory could hardly have been aware of the straits to which the Mahdi had been put. His army was suffering from fever, from cholera, from smallpox; there was great danger of dealing with his men, who were constantly threatening mutiny and desertion. Never was a force more hardly put to it to maintain its position than was this; and depend upon it, if he could have shortened that period of trial by an hour he would certainly have done so. But, supposing it was true that treachery was certain to do its work, what does that prove? Does it not show that sending Gordon to Khartoum was an act of extreme folly?

I do not know any other instance in which a man has been sent to maintain such a position without a certain number of British troops. If the British troops had been there treachery would have been impossible, but sending Gordon by himself to rely on the fidelity of Africans and Egyptians was an act of extreme rashness, and if the government succeed in proving, which I do not think they can, that treachery was inevitable, they only pile up an additional reason for their condemnation. I confess it is very difficult to separate this question from the personal matters involved. It is very difficult to argue it on purely abstract grounds without turn-

ing for a moment to the character of the man who was engaged and the terrible position in which he was placed.

When we consider all that he underwent, all that he sacrificed in order to serve the government in a moment of extreme exigency, there is something infinitely pathetic in reflecting on his feelings, as day after day, week after week, month after month passed by — as he spared no exertions, no personal sacrifice, to perform the duties that were placed upon him — as he lengthened out the siege by inconceivable prodigies of ingenuity, of activity, of resource — and as, in spite of it all, in spite of the deep devotion to his country, which had prompted him to this great risk and undertaking, the conviction gradually grew upon him that his country had abandoned him.

It is terrible to think what he must have suffered when at last, as a desperate measure to save those he loved, he parted with the only two Englishmen with whom during those long months he had had any converse, and sent Stewart and Power down the river to escape from the fate which had become inevitable to himself. It is very painful to think of the reproaches to his country and to his country's government that must have passed through the mind of that devoted man during those months of unmerited desertion. In Gordon's letter of the 14th of December he said: "All is up. I expect a catastrophe in ten days' time; it would not have been so if our people had kept me better informed as to their intentions."

They had no intentions to inform him of. They were merely acting from hand to mouth to avert the parliamentary censure with which they were threatened. They had no plan, they had no intentions to carry out. If they could have known their intentions, a great hero would have been saved

to the British army, a great disgrace would not have fallen on the English government.

Now, by the light of this sad history, what are the prospects for the future? Was there ever a time when clearness of plan and distinctness of policy were more required than they are now? I am not going to say that the policy of the government is bad. It would be paying them an extravagant compliment if I said so. They have no policy. My right honorable friend Mr. Gibson epigrammatically described their policy when he said, "They were going to Khartoum to please the Whigs, and were going to abandon Khartoum to please the Radicals."

Is there not something strange that at such a crisis of our country's fate, in both Houses of Parliament, in the press, in society, and everywhere you hear people asking what is their policy, and can get no answer? Here and there you get a distant echo of policy, something vague and ill-defined, like a distant sound to which you can attach no definite meaning. You sometimes for a moment see the phantom of a policy, but if you try to grasp it, it escapes you.

We used to think the policy of the government was the evacuation of the Soudan as soon as the military operations were over — a very bad policy — but even that does not seem to be their policy. They do not know whether they are going to evacuate the Soudan or not. They don't know who is to hold the Soudan — it may be the Italians, it may be the Turks, or the Chinese.

On one point only do they put down their foot, and that is, the Egyptians shall not keep it. We were told that they were going to smash the Mahdi, but now we are to make peace with the smashed Mahdi. If you smash the Mahdi thoroughly he will be of no use to you, and if you do not

smash him thoroughly he may maintain at the bottom of his heart a certain resentment against the process of being smashed.

It is probable that the Mahdi, in fulfilment of the claims of the religious position he occupies, will decline to have any dealings with the infidel; and if you crush him so entirely by force of arms, he will have lost all his position in the minds of his countrymen; and you will in his assistance or support not find any solution of the terrible problem with which you have to deal.

In the same way with the railway. So far as I know, it is unprecedented to project a railway through an enemy's country, but it implies some views of policy. It appears that her Majesty's government are going to make a railway, and then leave it to the first comers to do what they like with it. Now, it appears to me that in this matter of our Egyptian policy, though I do not say we can lay down the precise steps by which our ends may be obtained — this must depend in a great measure on the judgment of the ministry — still, it is time when we should conceive to ourselves what the ends of our policy are to be, and clearly define it and follow it up with consistency and persistency.

Now, let us examine what are the interests of England in this matter. With Mediterranean politics as such we have no great interest to concern ourselves; but Egypt stands in a peculiar position. It is the road to India. The condition of Egypt can never be indifferent to us, and, more than that, we have a duty to insist — that our influence shall be predominant there. I do not care by what technical arrangements that result is to be obtained; but, with all due regard to the rights of the suzerain, the influence of England in Egypt must be supreme.

Now, the influence of England in Egypt is threatened from two sides. It is threatened from the north diplomatically. I do not think it is necessary that the powers should have taken up the position they have done, and I believe that with decent steering it might have been avoided; but, unfortunately, we have to face inchoate schemes which will demand the utmost jealousy and vigilance of Parliament. I do not know what arrangement the government has arrived at, but I greatly fear that it may include a multiple control, and to that I believe this country will be persistently and resolutely hostile.

But we have to face a danger of another kind. We have forces of fanatical barbarians let loose upon the south of Egypt, and owing to the blunders that have been committed this danger has reached a terrible height. Unless we intend to give over Egypt to barbarism and anarchy we must contrive to check this inroad of barbarian fanaticism, which is personified in the character and action of the Mahdi. General Gordon never said a truer thing than that you do this by simply drawing a military line. If the insurgent Mohammedans reach the north of Egypt it will not be so much by their military force, as by the moral power of their example. We have therefore to check this advance of the Mahdi's power.

Her Majesty's government in the glimpses of policy which they occasionally afford us have alluded to the possibility of setting up a good government in the Soudan. I quite agree that a good government is essential to us in the Soudan. It is the only dyke we can really erect to keep out this inundation of barbarism and fanatical forces.

But her Majesty's government speak as if a good government were a Christmas present, which you can give a country

and then take away. A good government, like any other organization, must pass through the stages of infancy to maturity. There must be a long stage of infancy, during which that government is unable to defend itself, and it requires during that period protection and security, which it can only derive from the action of an external power. It is that protection and security which England must give. She must not desert her task in the Soudan until there is that government there which can protect Egypt, in which the interests of this country are vital. I do not say whether it should be done from the Nile or from Suakim.

I see a noble lord, one of the greatest ornaments of this House, who has conducted an expedition, not of 250 miles, but of 400 miles, and that with success, over the same burning country, and his opinion, given last year, was that Suakim and Berber are the roads by which we should advance. In that opinion I do not say I concur — that would be impertinent — but it is an opinion to which I humbly subscribe. I believe that by the Suakim and Berber route we may obtain a hold over that portion of the Soudan which may enable us to perform our primary duty — namely, to repress the forces of barbarism and fanaticism, to encourage that civilization which, if protected, will find such abundant root in that fertile country, and, above all, to restrain, check, and ultimately to destroy the slave trade, which has been the curse of Africa.

All those advantages can be obtained if England will lay down a definite policy and will adhere to it, but consistency of policy is absolutely necessary. We have to assure our friends that we shall stand by them; we have to assure our enemies that we are permanently to be feared. The blunders of the last three years have placed us in the presence of ter-

rible problems and difficulties. We have great sacrifices to make. This railway will be an enormous benefit to Africa, but do not let us conceal from ourselves that it is a task of no small magnitude. If you are to carry this railway forward you will not only have to smash the Mahdi, but Osman Digma also.

All this will involve great sacrifices and the expenditure not only of much money, but of more of the English blood of which the noblest has already been poured forth. And we are not so strong as we were. At first all nations sympathized with us, but now they look on us coldly and even with hostility. Those who were our friends have become indifferent, those who were indifferent have become our adversaries; and if our misfortunes and disasters go on much longer we shall have Europe saying that they cannot trust us, that we are too weak, that our prestige is too low to justify us in undertaking this task.

My lords, those great dangers can only be faced by a consistent policy, which can only be conducted by a ministry capable of unity of counsel and decision of purpose. I have shown you that from this ministry we can expect no such results. They can only produce after their kind. They will only do what they have already done. You cannot look for unity of counsel from an administration that is hopelessly divided. You cannot expect a resolute policy from those whose purpose is hopelessly halting.

It is for this reason, my lords, that I ask you to record your opinion that from a ministry in whom the first of all — the quality of decision of purpose — is wanting, you can hope no good in this crisis of our country's fate. And if you continue to trust them, if for any party reasons Parliament continues to abandon to their care the affairs which they have

hitherto so hopelessly mismanaged, you must expect to go on from bad to worse; you must expect to lose the little prestige which you retain; you must expect to find in other portions of the world the results of the lower consideration that you occupy in the eyes of mankind; you must expect to be drawn on, degree by degree, step by step, under the cover of plausible excuses, under the cover of highly philanthropic sentiments, to irreparable disasters, and to disgrace that it will be impossible to efface.