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EGYPT AND THE SOUDAN.

S P E E C H

DELIVERED BY THE

RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.,

IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

ON

The Vote of Censure moved by Sir Stafford Northcote, M.P.,

ON TUESDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY, 1884

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EGYPT AND THE SOUDAN.

SIR STAFFORD NORTHCOTE moved his Resolution:—"That this House, having read and considered the correspondence relating to Egypt, laid upon the table by Her Majesty's command, is of opinion that the recent lamentable events in the Soudan are due, in great measure, to the vacillating and inconsistent policy pursued by Her Majesty's Government."

On the conclusion of Sir S. Northcote's speech, MR. GLADSTONE said—Mr. Speaker, we have lost, but we have also gained, by the unfortunate collapse of the debate last week. The Government lost an opportunity—when a contention had been made of the failure of its efforts in Lower Egypt—of showing that they had not failed. But the House have had this advantage, that the right hon. gentleman [Sir S. Northcote] has been able to make his motion on the basis of authentic papers instead of on newspaper reports. Moreover, they have had this greater advantage, that, after the calamities which have recently happened in Egypt, he has felt that those calamities warrant him doing what last week he did not venture to do—namely, to submit a direct issue to the House. Why, what did he submit last week? He submitted that we could not adequately perform our part in Egypt unless we acknowledged our obligations. We have been doing nothing but acknowledging our obligations in the most solemn form. They have been defined and described three times over in the Speeches from the Throne. There was not a word in the debate of last week to tell us what these Obligations were. Everything positive, everything binding was carefully avoided, and

the House was invited in the name of a vote of censure to discuss a truism and a platitude. But the right hon. gentleman has now, as I say, plucked up his courage and has submitted to us a direct issue of adequate force, for in the terms of his motion he calls on us to allege that "the recent lamentable events in the Soudan are due, in great measure, to the vacillating and inconsistent policy pursued by Her Majesty's Government." (Cheers from the Opposition.) Yes, you are ready to cheer those words or any words, it matters not what, provided only they are sufficiently condemnatory of Her Majesty's Ministry. (Renewed Opposition cheers.) I am delighted with the frank and truly English response which that affirming cheer gives to the sentiment I have indicated. I was not sanguine enough to hope for it. I admit that it was in the nature of a decoy offered to hon. gentlemen, and they took it and cheered it to the echo when I said it did not matter whether the proposal was this or that, provided it was condemnatory. Now, Sir, I put it to the House that there is but one mode in which Her Majesty's Government can meet the motion. I move no amendment; I meet it with a direct negative. I say, in the first place, there has been no vacillation; there has been no inconsistency in the policy of Her Majesty's Government; and, Sir, I say more, that no part of the ingenious argument of the right hon. gentleman has for a moment gone to show that there was either vacillation or inconsistency. I admit that he has condemned our conduct; but he has not attempted to show that one part of our conduct was inconsistent with another part. He has not shown that we hesitated in the adoption of resolutions when the circumstances were laid before us; and the propositions in his motion do not derive the smallest support from any argument in his speech. The right hon. gentleman has used arguments in his speech, I admit, but his argument is this, not that we vacillated or flinched—I mean from our own view of the case—not that we were different at one time from what we were at another, but that we adopted a wrong policy; that we refused to strengthen the Egyptian army for the conquest of the Soudan, that we refused to counsel the Egyptian General in the Soudan, and that we refused to over-ride the Egyptian Government with respect to the Soudan.

Sir, these are very serious charges, with which I shall deal, but they have nothing to do with vacillation or inconsistency.

What the right hon. gentleman calls upon the House to vote is, not that we have had a false policy, but that we have been vacillating and inconsistent in the pursuance of our policy; and, Sir, do you suppose for one moment that these strange inconsistencies between the speech and the motion of the right hon. gentleman are due to some accident—that they are due to a want of perception or want of acuteness on the part of the right hon. gentleman? No, Sir, nothing of the kind; they are due to this—that if the right hon. gentleman, instead of charging us with vacillation and inconsistency, had plucked up his courage to a higher point, and called upon the House to condemn any particular portion of our policy by a motion, he would himself have been obliged to declare a policy. But while he, forsooth, charges us with flinching from responsibility, he does not dare to put his objections in a form in which they could receive the judgment of the House, because he knows that, if he did, he might bind himself to something, whereas the essence of the whole affair is that he shall bind himself to nothing. I must say that the right hon. gentleman, considering the nature of the case that he had to lay before us, has been very far from extravagant. I have risen somewhat in contravention of my own statement of Parliamentary usage in a case which is a very broad one, at a time, when I am afraid I shall be a loser in a competition which will presently arise in this House between continuing in this House to hear my argument and the fulfilment of a very much more necessary, if not more legitimate purpose. Whether I am justified in the charge I have just made (and I have made a very distinct charge) that the speech of the right hon. gentleman had nothing whatever to do with his motion, and that he did not venture to put the upshot of his speech into a motion because it would have bound him to a policy, and he was determined not to bind himself to any policy—whether this be so or not, I say that this debate has a wider interest than the mere issue raised between the two parties. I shall not scruple, as far as my strength permits me,

to say to the House all that appears to me of vital importance, in order to redeem the pledges I have given, to practise no reserve, and to state minutely and particularly those facts that are material to enable the House to judge of our conduct. But I must go beyond that, and say that this debate will have the character of a historical debate. Now for the first time is raised a great issue between parties in this House, but that great issue involves in it something much more important than the victories of Oppositions or the continuance of Ministries; it involves the development of great and useful lessons with regard to rash and unwise interventions. I will at least take care that I shall be sufficiently explicit in what I have got to say. It is absolutely necessary to go further back than the right hon. gentleman has done, and to present, in what I conceive to be its completeness, the case of the Government.

Sir, the situation in Egypt, with or without the aggravation of the Soudan and the increase of the responsibilities which it has brought, is one of the utmost degree of anomaly and inconvenience, and, in some points of view, perhaps even of political danger. How has this situation come about? Where is the root of the mischief? It is the business of the House to censure the Government if they have gone wrong; but it is the business of the House, as the Guardians of the public weal, to search to the very bottom into the causes and origins of great public disaster or of great and serious public inconvenience. Sir, I affirm, and I will show, that the situation in Egypt was not one which we made but one that we found. I shall show that we have never had an option. (Cries of "Oh! Oh!") I am not prematurely claiming your assent, I am stating what I will show, not what I have shown. I will show that we do not claim those laudations for vigorous initiatives, and the like which have been sweet perhaps to the ears of others.

We are content to administer the affairs of an empire of 300 millions, and as far as we can to keep the enormous interests of that fifth or fourth part of the population of this globe within the limits, already wide enough, which history, Providence, and the genius of the country have assigned to them. But, Sir, it would not have

been in keeping with the propriety of things to reverse the attitude which we found occupied by the British Government in Egypt. We inherited from our predecessors certain engagements ("Oh! Oh!" from the Opposition)—see whether I make good my words or not; from those engagements it has never been in our power honourably to escape. Sir, what the country knows is perhaps not much of this case. They know that there was established in Egypt what was termed the Dual Control. But what was the Dual Control? It was the establishment in the heart and centre of Egyptian Government of two great functionaries, the representatives of two of the greatest nations in the world, who held their office in Egypt, and for Egypt, by a tenure independent of the will of Egypt, and dependent altogether upon the will of the two Governments they represented. For what did these two nations go there? The right hon. gentleman can contradict me if I am inaccurate. I say they went there pledged to each other for certain purposes. It was not merely to manage the revenues in the interests of the bondholders; it was general control, general advice, general support to the Government of Egypt. The late ruler of Egypt had been displaced, a new ruler had been put upon the throne, by the agency mainly of the British Government—at any rate, with an essential and at least equal share in the operation. The two Governments had undertaken obligations towards that ruler, and in my opinion those obligations were, when they had once established this extraordinary system, matters strictly and essentially consequential. They could not possibly have put Tewfik on the throne and have declined to support him; and they bound themselves to one another to support him, and to support him earnestly. They bound themselves, likewise, to one another, while those were their obligations to him, to maintain the peculiar and, in a certain sense, exclusive political influence that these two Powers, and these alone, were to exercise in Egypt. Under these circumstances, it was obvious that we were bound to counsel the Khedive to the best of our ability. I do not speak now of the action of the hon. member for Ripon. The right hon. gentleman knows that my remarks have nothing to do with his proceedings in Egypt. They have nothing to

do with any of the proceedings of the late Government in the earlier part of its existence. They have to do with the Dual Control established under Lord Salisbury, and my contention is that when we placed independent officers representative of England and France to hold office in Egypt by a tenure in no way dependent on Egypt, we were bound—indeed, Lord Salisbury has always admitted this—to counsel the Khedive to the best of our ability

The next contention is, that if we counselled the Khedive to the best of our ability, we were bound by every sentiment of honour to support our counsels by our acts. (Cheers and counter-cheers.) It is a singular pleasure to me when I find myself in concurrence, as has happened already once or twice, with hon. gentlemen opposite. It has been admitted that, when difficulties arose in the country—such as the difficulties of the year before last—we were bound to give, by the position we occupied, our advice to the Khedive upon all those difficulties; and having given that advice, we were bound to support it by consequent action to such an extent as circumstances might appear to demand, subject, of course, to the judgment of Parliament. I am not in the habit of going back upon statements of my own, but I must say that all these obligations and all the difficulties they involved ought to have been foreseen. I must say that the late Government, when they built up this curious system, did it with their eyes open. They were not unwarned of what would happen. They were not unwarned that the establishment of financial control by a Government must mean political control, and must involve political responsibilities. I hope it will not be an unpardonable breach of manners if, happening to recollect what I myself said upon the subject, I read an extract reported in "Hansard" on the 6th of March, 1876, not corrected by me, but expressing with substantial accuracy what I said. This was at the very first beginning of this intervention; and no control such as I now speak of was established for some considerable time, I think three years afterwards. This was the warning I ventured to give:—

"I should, therefore, wish to know whether, if the proposition for the appointment of such a Commissioner be entertained, the right hon. gentleman" (that was, Lord Beaconsfield) "means the

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appointment of a Commissioner who would really have such an effective control over all arrangements and the mode of accounting for these revenues that he could guarantee to us the receipt of the whole, that it might be applied to the purpose in view? If this is what it does mean, it appears to me that we are only shifting the difficulty one step further; because in that case our Commissioner is to take into his hands the administration of a very important portion of the government of Egypt; so that the measures which we may think necessary as a matter of prudence to cover the proposal which we are to consider may entail upon us still greater difficulties and mix us up still further with a heavier responsibility for a portion of the internal government of Egypt. When we have begun with one portion of the internal government of Egypt, we may pass on to another. We may come to occupy the entire ground by a series of degrees not difficult to contemplate; and possibly this may have been in the mind of the right hon. gentleman the other night, when he said that, while the people of this country would view the diminution of the Empire with horror, they would see it increased without dissatisfaction."

Thus, I ventured to point out what I do not think I deserve the smallest credit for pointing out—namely, that these arrangements, then in partial contemplation, afterwards greatly developed and rigidly enforced, did advance from financial to political, and from political to probably territorial responsibilities. I have no charge of ill-motives to make against the late Government. In my opinion they committed a great error, of which we are now from day to day bearing the burden. I give them every credit for honourable and upright motives. Though I then disapproved of the means, and now, I do not need to say, still more deeply lament these means were resorted to; yet I am fully persuaded that the object which the late Government had in view was to secure a better Government for Egypt. Further, I admit that very considerable practical and administrative advantages were secured for the fellaheen by the administration of the revenue; although I am afraid those advantages were far more than counterbalanced in their political importance by our having imported into the country that fatal and most dangerous

idea that it was doomed to be placed under foreign domination, and that Egypt was to be governed and maintained for the benefit of persons beyond its borders. ("Hear, hear," from Lord R. CHURCHILL.) The noble lord cheers me, and there is very great truth in what I take to be the meaning of that cheer. He probably thinks that Arabi was one who fought against that foreign domination. That is not my view. I think I could give conclusive proof to the contrary; but of this I do not entertain a doubt, that Arabi was able to give vigour and extension to his motives by appealing to that hatred of foreign domination; and so long as foreign domination continues in Egypt, the danger will recur from time to time. So far, I have said something to show that I do not use idle words, when I allege that the situation which we have now in Egypt was, in its root and origin, far beyond the power of such prosaic people as the present Ministers to conceive. It was due to higher and more venturesome geniuses, such as those who preceded us. There has been no moment at which it was possible for us, consistently with our honour, to retrace our course. And we must look back as well as forward if we want to place before the English people—the people of the three Kingdoms—all the lessons of this great question, which is far greater than the hon. gentleman would lead us to believe.

I have spoken thus far of the situation in Egypt down to the close of the military operations, and I will adopt divisions of time in what I have to say, for the purpose of being more intelligible to the House, and depriving myself of the power of using subterfuge, even if I were, (which I trust is not the case,) inclined to resort to it. The close of the military operations was, I think, on the 21st of September, 1882—the time of the surrender of Damietta, the battle of Tel-el-Kebir having been eight days or something like that before. The right hon. gentleman has placed the pith of his charge during the thirteen months between the surrender of Damietta and the defeat of Hicks Pacha in November, 1883. He is extremely angry with us because in our cowardice—our timidity about responsibility—we did not take enough of responsibility for the Soudan. Well, we had to begin with taking a good deal of responsibility upon us:

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We had taken the responsibility of military operations. The army was entirely broken up. The institutions of the country were gone. We had before us the work of reconstitution. Our obligation in honour to support the Khedive bound us in our opinion to supply him with the means of defence, and with some primary means of good government. In those thirteen months what was the course we took? We sent to Egypt the very best men of every class and stamp that we could find. From Dufferin to Gordon—from the first to the last, though I might go back to Sir E. Malet, but it would be too long to enumerate the list of able, upright, patriotic men who have been serving the interests of Egypt with our concurrence and authority—but from Dufferin to Gordon, they were men as remarkable for their ability and fitness for their work as any men that have ever been in the political service of the British Crown. I am not going to say, because they were able men they were responsible for what was done, but I am going to say that, at least, by choosing men of that vigour and masculine force of character, and that consummate skill in affairs, we did not take the course which might be taken by those who were undoubtedly anxious to shirk their proper responsibility. We endeavoured to go to the root of the matter, and to put into action all those reforms which it was clearly necessary we should endeavour to make. If we were bound to support the Khedive, we were bound to support him earnestly—and I am sorry to say that the right hon. gentleman has been extremely reticent on that subject—and, if we were bound to support the Khedive earnestly, we were bound to have some regard also for his people; and, if we endeavoured to give security to his throne by the constitution of something like an adequate military force, we were bound also to do what we could in seconding what we not only believed, but what we knew, to be his own good, upright, and patriotic intentions for the government of Egypt and the good of his people. Was nothing done in that period? New tribunals for natives were organised and I believe I may say that they are at work—at any rate the codes have been for some time completed, and the judges have been appointed. Legislative institutions, hardly, I admit, worthy of that name—they

would perhaps be more accurately called consultative institutions—but intended to give some moderate expression to the national life, have been framed, and the scheme has been carried into execution. Elections have taken place, and the Legislative Council met last November at the very epoch of the disaster to General Hicks' force. It will be remembered what grievances there were with regard to the undue employment of foreigners and the non-taxation of foreigners. With respect to the undue employment of foreigners, great efforts have been made, which it may be possible to exhibit more fully in the shape of numerical results at a future stage, largely to cut them down. The non-taxation of foreigners is no easy matter to deal with. It is liable to be met by jealousies in every quarter. However, the actual state of the case is this, that that exceptional and odious practice has been given up of course by us, and not by us alone, but by France, Italy, Germany, and Austria; in truth, I believe I may say by nearly every Power in any way concerned. The land survey, which the right hon. gentleman I think referred to the other night, has been economised, and what is thought a new and better system for conducting it has been introduced. I do not know whether the right hon. gentleman thinks that in our thirteen months of occupation we ought to have completed our land survey; but when I reflect that in the half-century during which I have been a member of this House, I have been accustomed to hear of successive votes for the completion of our national cadastral survey, it does not seem to me that an excessive term has been occupied in this matter in Egypt. A valuable report has been made upon irrigation by Mr. Moncrieff, and I trust great benefit is to be expected from it. With regard to the constabulary and police, the constabulary was organised in what appeared to be an effective form for its purposes under Baker Pacha. The police is certainly under the most efficient handling we could give it, being in the hands of Mr. Clifford Lloyd. I believe, and have been informed, that the prisons have undergone considerable, at all events initial, reforms. I will not refer to sanitary departments and other matters. But there are several very important matters, such as the debts of the fellaheen, which have not escaped attention, and a Commission

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has been appointed for the consideration of that question. The slave traffic to which the right hon. gentleman refers has not been forgotten, and the charge of all measures relating to it has been transferred to what I believe to be the best and most efficient department—namely, the department of the Inspector-General of Constabulary, with an increase of means, and a better system for including the principal routes now under reformation. The only other point I will mention, that is vital to the whole, is, that the army has been organised under the able auspices of Sir Evelyn Wood. All the reports of officers show that its discipline is as high as, indeed higher than, it was possible or reasonable for us to expect. I have only now to say that instead of having failed in carrying forward these institutions, we were justified in advising Her Majesty to declare in the Speech from the Throne that, down to the month of November last, in the execution of this exceedingly heavy and responsible work, she had ample reason to be satisfied with the progress which had been made.

I wish to say two or three words, however, upon the exact position which we hold in Egypt, for it is material that it should be accurately understood. At one moment the right hon. gentleman cast upon us great responsibility for having shattered the Government of Egypt, which he said it may be impossible to replace with dignity and credit before the people; but not many sentences before in his speech, he had reproached us with at least equal vigour for not shattering that Government long before. It will be in the recollection of the House, when I affirm that, again and again, he stated how it was our business to have forced upon the Egyptian Government, much earlier than we did, the adoption of principles and methods of action, to which we have been unhappily compelled to resort. In my opinion, this shattering of the Egyptian Government is a very serious matter indeed. It is an essential portion of our policy to uphold the Egyptian Government with all the credit and dignity we can. We bound ourselves to that, and therefore we do not wish to make any demand upon the Egyptian Government except that which necessity requires. But, Sir, as the Power in military occupation of the country, we are after all primarily responsible in

those matters which we deem vital to the purpose for which we went there. It is a great mistake to suppose that we have taken out of the hands of the Egyptian Government the whole important administration of the country. We have done nothing of the sort. We have only conveyed to the Egyptian Government at a serious crisis the clear knowledge of this fact, that our military occupation entails upon us the obligation and duty, (where we have no doubt as to the right and propriety of the thing to be done or as to its importance) of seeing that, if we are to remain in the country, the course which we recommend shall be adopted. It is true that upon all these vital points we have taken and shall continue to take all the power necessary for our purpose. We do not seek more; we should think it wrong to take it. We are under engagements earnestly to support the Khedive. We think it would be a most unfortunate policy, were we to show indifference in the matter. We cannot concur with those gentlemen who say we should sweep the Egyptian Government away, and govern the country by English functionaries. I am not willing to undertake a thing which would result in setting up any sentiment adverse to foreign domination; and, though we will firmly and resolutely go up to the point when necessity calls us, we will not willingly go beyond that point. I must remind the House that the difficult, onerous, and inconvenient—some may think it the almost hopeless—task which we have undertaken, is that, first, of putting down disorder in Egypt, and then of establishing at least some beginnings of tolerable government. That task is also one of considerable delicacy. It is one which we are executing not alone on our own behalf, but on behalf, I may say, of civilised mankind. We undertook it with the approval of the Powers of Europe, the highest and most authentic organ of modern Christian civilisation; but having undertaken it at their invitation or with their concurrence, we must fulfil it as we received it from them. I know sometimes the word protectorate is spoken of; if it is not spoken of in its technical sense, and it is only meant by that that we must have full and plenary power to do what our purpose requires in Egypt, I agree with it. But it is a dangerous word, because it has a technical and a legal meaning. I may remind

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the House that we have ourselves held a protectorate. We had a protectorate over the Ionian Islands, but that protectorate was imposed upon us by the united voice of the Powers of Europe; and even now Austria in Bosnia, having taken over the administration of that province and Herzegovina, has done so by the united voice and invitation of the Powers of Europe. The point is a sufficiency of control, and it is to that, therefore, that we shall look. We conclude it to be absolutely included in the purpose of our mission, and we should go beyond what the purpose required were we to insist on more than that. I may remind the House of an analogy I think worthy of their notice—I mean the analogy of the Indian Protected States. Now, Sir, in the case of these States, our power is, I may say, absolute. We are under no restraint of European law. Those States are *enclavis* within our own dominions. Our intervention becomes a matter of absolute practical necessity, but what do we do? We send an agent there and take care that he shall have all the power necessary for efficiency. But we take care also that he shall have no more. We leave in its native vigour and its dignity before the people of those countries the native Administration, which, depend upon it, they love far more than foreign domination. Few, indeed, are the peoples so degraded and so lost to every noble sentiment that it shall be a matter of indifference to them whether they are governed by persons who belong to the same political constitution with themselves, or whether they are governed by those who come from a remote quarter, with foreign instincts, foreign sympathies, and foreign objects. Such was our case in Egypt until we came to the month of November last year.

Now I pass to the Soudan. And there I will take three periods—first, the period before the defeat of Hicks; next the period between the defeat of Hicks and the defeat of Baker; and then the period which I admit the House has the right to scrutinise most narrowly, namely, that between the 5th of February last week and the 12th of February, on which I have the honour of addressing the House. Now I directly traverse the assertion of the right hon. gentleman with regard to the period before the defeat of Hicks Pacha. I have already observed there was not a word of his accusations that

bore upon the question of vacillation or inconsistency at all, and I am not now going to discuss his motion at all. I hope, Sir, I shall not be called to order, because if I am discussing a matter not contained in the motion before the House, I am bound to say the same objection may be taken to every word of the speech of the right hon. gentleman. Sir, what the right hon. gentleman charged upon us was false policy. I told you why he does not venture to put it into his motion. If he did, he would be bound to show a true policy. What true policy has he shown to-night? What approach to it?—what sketch, what shadow, what outline, what shred or patch to one? It is all very well to say that what we have done is wrong. But notwithstanding the ingenious efforts of the right hon. gentleman to shirk pointing out to us anything like a policy, there are certain indications which it is difficult for him to efface from critical remark. He says we are greatly responsible for these disasters, that we cannot (and in this I quite concur) escape responsibility by saying we are not responsible, and then came in his simile of the pistol. He never pointed out to us what the pistol was. He did not explain his own parallel, and I suspect it would rather puzzle him to do so. What the right hon. gentleman contended was virtually this—that we ought to have taken into our own hands the business of advising Egypt upon the war. He began with saying that we ought to have seen that Egypt was supplied with such an army of her own as would have carried on the war with effect.

Sir S. NORTHCOTE—I did not say that we ought to have supplied an army.

Mr. GLADSTONE—I am speaking now, not of a British army, but that in our reformatory operations in Egypt we ought to have included the provision of such an army—of such Egyptian army. Now, I affirm most distinctly that we ought not, and that if we had done so we should have undertaken what was impossible, what was unreasonable, what was beyond our position of competency, and what was probably unjust. It is all very well for the right hon. gentleman to point to the smallness of Sir E. Wood's army and to say that a larger army would have been

requisite in order to send to General Hicks the supplies which, when unhappily he got into difficulties, he came to want. How were these men to be supplied, Sir? Where were the funds to supply them? Is Egypt so rich a country? Egypt is in financial difficulties. (Sir S. NORTHCOTE: Now.) Egypt was long ago—when the right hon. gentleman had to do with it himself—in financial difficulties. The financial difficulties were then the excuse for our most unfortunate intervention. But I say that this was impossible, for Egypt had no means to constitute such an army.

Mr. BOURKE—They were obliged.

Mr. GLADSTONE—They found the means of constituting Hicks' army, but that is not the charge, and I hope when the right hon. gentleman interrupts me he will not do so for a purpose of forcing me to circumlocution. The charge is, that it ought to have been a better and more considerable army, able to meet the wants of Hicks when he had undertaken this charge. That is the charge which I traverse by a direct denial, and by saying, in the first place, it was impossible to constitute such an army. Even had it been possible to constitute such an army, when we received from the Powers of Europe our commission with regard to Egypt, we received no such commission with regard to the Soudan.

Sir S. NORTHCOTE—Where is the commission?

Mr. GLADSTONE—The commission is in the records of the Conference at Constantinople, immediately before the operations in Egypt; and I may also say that it was quite sufficiently recited in the speech of the right hon. gentleman to-night, when he spoke of the relations which the Powers of Europe had assumed towards the work we had in Egypt. In that work, in their view, there was no question of conducting the conquest or re-conquest of the Soudan. But has the right hon. gentleman made up his mind with regard to the relations between Egypt and the Soudan? Has he ever considered what the Egyptian people think of the Soudan? Is he aware that, if there is one thing that the Egyptian has in horror more than another, it is being called upon to carry on the war in the Soudan? Is he aware that the army of Sir E. Wood was organised expressly

without the obligation to serve in the Soudan? And if he is aware of these things, what does he mean by saying that it was our business to constitute a sufficient Egyptian army to supply the demands of Hicks Pacha as these might grow under the necessities of the time, and to enable Egypt to re-conquer the Soudan? But what is the case of the Soudan? The other night, when I was referring to a paragraph in which something had been said about the Mahdi, I entirely declined to give any opinion about the Mahdi. I know this, and now I am speaking in conformity with the opinions of the man whom I look upon as by far the highest authority on the subject—I mean the opinions of General Gordon—the Soudan is a vast country equal in size to France, Germany, and Spain, a desert country, as he states, with a deadly climate, inhabited thinly by sparse and warlike tribes, but still it is the country of those tribes. They love it as their country. The right hon. gentleman seems to me to have made up his mind—his whole speech shows it—that Egypt is in the right in subjecting that country, and in sending Turks, Circassians, and Anatolians to govern it. Sir, I have not made up my mind to any such thing. I decline to enter into that controversy. We have refused—and I believe the House will approve our refusing—to have anything to do with the re-conquest of the Soudan. During all my political life, I am thankful to say that I have never opened my lips in favour of a domination such as that which has been exercised by certain countries upon certain other countries, and I am not going now to begin. I look upon the possession of the Soudan—I won't say as a crime—that would be going a great deal too far—but I look upon it as the calamity of Egypt. It has been a drain on her treasury, it has been a drain on her men. I believe it is estimated that a hundred thousand Egyptians have laid down their lives in endeavouring to maintain that barren conquest, and at this moment, when your sympathies have been justly excited on behalf of 500 men in Tokar and in behalf of 500 men who were in Sincat, there are nine and twenty thousand Egyptian soldiers, or soldiers in the service of the Khedive, scattered over that enormous region. In those circumstances I utterly repudiate and repel the doctrine of the right hon. gentleman that it was our duty to construct a military system for Egypt

by which—I am supposing now that she had the means which she had not—she would have been able to re-establish in its fulness the re-conquest of the Soudan. The right hon. gentleman has challenged me to-night. I challenge him. He asks us to pronounce on vacillation and inconsistency, and we are ready to pronounce upon it. I ask him to put into a motion that which was the pith and essence of his speech to-night—namely, that the Egyptian military system ought to have been constituted for the full support of Hicks and the re-conquest of the Soudan—and to take the judgment of the House upon it.

Sir S. NORTHCOTE—I never said anything of the sort.

Mr. GLADSTONE—The right hon. gentleman does not seem very fond of responsibility as to the meaning of what he says. What were his touching pictures of the inhuman conduct of Sir E. Malet, who would not give a little advice to General Hicks? Does the right hon. gentleman think that it was in our power to advise General Hicks as to the conduct of the war without becoming responsible for the war? I say that responsibility for the war directly followed upon our undertaking to advise as to the conduct of it. (Sir S. NORTHCOTE: Oh no.) The right hon. gentleman thinks not. That is the very dignified course he would take. To say, “Hicks, you should march here and, Hicks, you should march there.” Yes; to say here to go and there to advance, and if he advanced and succeeded we should have the credit; if he advanced and failed—oh “No, no,” says the noble lord [Lord R. Churchill] opposite—we are not at all responsible. We could not advise without becoming responsible. Well, I do not stand alone upon that, because the House will recollect that in the most distinct manner the right hon. gentleman constructed the first division of his speech upon the insufficiency of the Egyptian army, which we had created, or which it was our duty to create, in order to enable this war to be carried on.

Sir S. NORTHCOTE—Or to limit the purpose to which it was to be applied.

Mr. GLADSTONE—I will follow the right hon. gentleman—“ or

to limit the purpose to which it was to be applied." I examine his words. What do they mean? They mean the shattering of the Egyptian Government. The Egyptian Government was determined to adhere to the whole of the Soudan, and I cannot much blame them. They had been for sixty years in possession of it. They had struggled to hold it. The success of Hicks was remarkable. On almost every occasion he had defeated the Mahdi, and I believe the Egyptian Government would have laughed in our faces if we had attempted to force upon them the abandonment of the Soudan. We had no business to enforce our counsels upon the Egyptian Government, except in cases which we knew to be essential for our purposes in Egypt. How did the right hon. gentleman know, or how did we know, when the Mahdi was driven back at every point, that the Egyptian Government would not be able to hold its own? He says we ought to have restricted the limits of the shattered Egyptian Government, because it did not conform to our views in giving up what was no essential part of the Egypt in which we interfered. Well, we should have again become responsible for the retention of that part, as we should have given Egypt her charter to that part, and that part would have been just as liable to the fear of foreign domination as the rest. I decline—and let the right hon. gentleman get the House to censure us for it if he likes—to become a party to maintain that foreign domination. Well, I think I have shown that it was not our mission to deal with the Soudan at all, and, if we had advised upon the conduct of the war, we should have inevitably become responsible for a war, when Egypt was perfectly impotent to do more than she did, which was to create the army which Hicks Pacha thought sufficient. ("No" from Mr. BOURKE.) But the right hon. gentleman read it out, and now a right hon. gentleman sitting by his side contradicts him. We have every reason to believe that the people of Egypt—not the ruling classes, but the people—detest this war, while we have very great reason to doubt whether this war is based on those considerations of honour and interest, and just necessity and regard for the welfare of the governed, which alone can render any war tolerable or endurable for a moment in the sight of a Christian.

I think I have pretty well gone through what the right hon. gentleman has said upon the subject. He referred to Lord Dufferin's opinion about the limits to which the Soudan ought to be restricted, and I refer to that opinion because it is a matter of great weight. I am sorry it did not weigh with the Egyptian Government. It was the opinion of an intelligent friend, though not of a responsible Government, for Lord Dufferin did not speak on our behalf. But the rejection of that opinion, combined with the high estimation in which the Egyptian Government held Lord Dufferin, is a clear proof of the importance which they attached to the holding of the Soudan and that it was not possible for us to interfere with them, until it had been irresistibly shown that for them to attempt to hold the Soudan would be an insane sacrifice of the best interests of Egypt.

Sir, I am very much obliged to the House for the patience with which they have heard me thus far, and I am glad to say that I am making progress. After the defeat of Hicks—this is the second period—our position was entirely changed. We deemed that that defeat—especially when it was followed up by a second defeat—the knowledge of which reached us about three weeks later—was a distinct proof that it was impossible to hold the Soudan in any manner tolerably satisfactory; and that consequently it was our duty to speak frankly and boldly upon the matter, because the Soudan had assumed a question not of £100,000 a year, as was the old story, but it had assumed a character such as to make it evident that, if the struggle were to be continued, it would suck the life-blood from the heart of Egypt.

I will now give the House very rapidly and succinctly the course of events simply by dates. On the 19th of November came the first report of the defeat of Hicks. On the 20th of November we thought that, supposing that news to be true, we were at once justified in saying to our agent "If consulted, recommend the abandonment of the Soudan within certain limits." On the 21st we came to know the defeat of Hicks. There were subsequently rumours casting doubt upon it, but we believed it on the 21st. The Government then had to consider it, and consider the very grave measure of interrupting

the course of the withdrawal of our troops, which had down to that time in all its stages proceeded with perfect satisfaction. On the 25th we suspended the evacuation of Cairo. On the 26th we found we were unfortunately at issue with the Egyptian Government. They were, in the first place, not so certain of the news as we were. In the second place, they were contemplating assistance from the Turkish Government, and that also was a very serious question. It was very difficult to deny their right to contemplate assistance from Turkey, and very difficult under certain circumstances to deny the right of Turkey to give that assistance. But those were the reasons why we could not proceed peremptorily in the matter. We found they were disposed, if they could, to hold the Soudan, and at any rate to wait a while for fuller ascertainment of the facts before they took a positive course. That was on the 26th of November. They determined to wait, and take in hand in some manner this communication with Turkey of which I am not sure that we are directly cognisant with the particulars. On the 8th of December came the second defeat. That was a heavy blow succeeding a frightful blow; and on the 12th of December the Egyptian Government at length stated that they were ready to be guided by us in respect to the Soudan. Did we vacillate or hesitate? On the 13th of December, the very next day, we telegraphed our deliberate decision that the Egyptian Government should withdraw from the Soudan, and should confine its efforts to maintaining the valley of the Nile as far as Assuan, which is the limit, I think, of Egypt proper, or at all events, if there were strong military reasons for their going further, as far as Wadi Hafit, which is farther up the valley. Well, I am not going to censure Cherif Pacha and his colleagues. Their difficulties were enormous. We know the self-love of a class holding dominions of this kind. But while making every allowance, we found with deep regret that on the 22nd of December the Egyptian Government were again hesitating. That created a very serious state of affairs. This shattering of the Egyptian Government was the only alternative left. Naturally, we desired to turn to every other alternative rather than resort to it, but we found it impossible to avoid something that an unfriendly critic

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would describe by that term. On the 4th of January our demand was made peremptorily ; on the 7th Cherif Pacha resigned, and on the 8th Nubar Pacha was appointed. He was in complete accord with us, and on that day it was perfectly competent to the garrison of Khartoum to retire in safety, and, so far as we know it is the case now.

Here I have the pleasure of contradicting the statement made by the right hon. gentleman the member for King's Lynn, that the abandonment of the Soudan was contrary to the deliberate judgment of the Khedive. If he has read the papers on the table of the House, he would have found that, on the contrary, whatever prior leanings the Khedive might have had, (and of course the prior leaning of a sovereign is to keep his territory,) the deliberate judgment of the Khedive was in complete accord with the policy of Her Majesty's Government. Now, my contention is, that we interfered to require the abandonment of the Soudan, as soon as we were justified in carrying up to that point what must be considered as a high-handed proceeding with regard to the interior administration of Egypt. But it may have occurred to many that a long time had elapsed after we had heard of the defeat of Hicks, and the time I am now speaking of ; and that all this time was lost. That would be an entire and absolute misconception as I will point out. It was perfectly true, that in the region of political right principle, we were separated during that interval from the Egyptian Government. We at once adopted the policy of withdrawal. We had pressed it first as friendly advice, we pressed it at last as an imperative injunction ; but during the whole interval between the first and last stage there were practical measures in progress upon which we are perfectly agreed, and which must have gone on precisely in the same manner, had Nubar Pacha been in office from the first day, instead of Cherif Pacha. We were all agreed that measures should be taken for the extrication of the garrisons. The force of Baker Pacha, which has unfortunately been defeated, was organised for that purpose. (Mr. ASHMEAD-BARTLETT : Oh !) The hon. member, with his supreme authority, scoffs at that statement ; and an impression has gone forth that Baker Pacha was sent

as a sort of forlorn hope. (Mr. BOURKE: Hear, hear.) The right hon. gentleman is not aware that my hon. friend, the Under-Secretary for India, happened to be in Egypt during the organisation of this force. (Mr. BOURKE: So was I.) Well, I will back my hon. friend, with some confidence in the match if it comes off. I am not going to make an extravagant assertion, but what I am going to say is this: that, when Baker Pacha set out, it will be obvious he was under no military obligation to undertake that business. He was not enlisted for that purpose, and was under no obligation or military service at all, unless he thought it a profitable and hopeful expedition. He was the head of the constabulary, and a constabulary is not organised—though the right hon. gentleman [Mr. Bourke] seems to think it is—for marching into foreign countries. I have no doubt he was entreated to go; I have no doubt the Egyptian Government greatly desired it; but what I say is, that he was under no military obligation to go, and I say, with the authority of my hon. friend, that Baker Pacha went with the belief, that the means at his command were adequate means for the immediate purpose he had in view. I am going to produce something else; but I produce in the first instance my hon. friend, who is not deficient in the faculty of expressing himself when he has occasion to address the House. Baker Pacha had very great doubts, as I understand, citing my hon. friend, whether it would be in his power to effect the whole operation of relief from Souakim to Berber, and from Berber to Khartoum; but he was very confident that his means were sufficient for the smaller operation of reaching Sincat. Here is a telegram of Sir Evelyn Baring's dated February 2nd, 1884, three days only before the calamity which overtook Baker Pacha: "Baker telegraphs that he will advance to the relief of Tokar to-morrow," 3rd, with 3,200 men, and that there is every chance of success." Perhaps the right hon. gentleman [Mr. Bourke] will likewise overthrow the authentic official information received from Sir E. Baring. I have shown, then, that, during the whole of this time, the expedition of Baker Pacha was in preparation and in progress, and that there was a reasonable expectation that that expedition would suffice, if not to get to Khartoum, at any rate to deal with cases

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like the case of Sincat and the case of Tokar. Well, that organisation removed a practical difficulty for the moment, and prevented its becoming necessary for us to shatter the Egyptian Government at the earlier period, which the right hon. gentleman [Sir S. Northcote] seems at once emphatically to desire, and resolutely and positively to condemn. That brings me to the 5th of February, and the failure of Baker's efforts.

I have gone through now, I think, all that relates to the speech of the right hon. gentleman; but I must say a few words on the remaining period of five days, on which I admit we are justly open to a careful scrutiny. And here I arrive at the case of General Gordon. General Gordon, in our estimation, is a very great feature in the case. What is General Gordon? He is no common man. I thank the right hon. gentleman for the manner in which he referred to him. I may also say that General Gordon is not alone. Other very able men are with him—one in particular, Colonel Stewart, his seconder and coadjutor—and, in fact, we have acted all along on the principle of obtaining for this difficult Egyptian problem the very best services we could possibly get. It is no exaggeration, in speaking of General Gordon, to say that he is a hero. It is no exaggeration to say that he is a Christian hero. It is no exaggeration to say that in his dealings with Oriental people he is also a genius—that he has a faculty of influence, or command, brought about by moral means, for no man in this House hates the unnecessary resort to blood more than General Gordon. He has that faculty which produces effects among those wild Eastern races almost unintelligible to us Western people. Perhaps it may be said: "If General Gordon has all these gifts, why did you not employ him sooner?" (Opposition cheers.) Again you have fallen into the decoy. You have not taken the least pains to ascertain whether it was possible or not. Now, the suggestion to employ General Gordon in the Soudan was made at a time so early, that it really is not within the limits of the direct responsibility of the present Government. As early as in the month of November, 1882, Sir Charles Wilson recommended the employment of General Gordon. But there were

difficulties on both sides. It is very difficult to marry two people when one is averse, but it is still more difficult to marry them when, unfortunately, there is an aversion on both sides—and that, I believe, was found to be the case at that period between the Khedive and General Gordon. However, when it came to the grave period and to the increased responsibility upon us for the affairs of the Soudan that followed Hicks' defeat, then it was again our duty to have regard to the possibility of what might be got through General Gordon.

Sir STAFFORD NORTHCOTE: Was there anything between these periods?

Mr. GLADSTONE: No, but the right hon. gentleman will see that I have been contending all along, that, down to the time of Hicks' defeat, we should not have been justified in interfering, to take into our own hands the management of the Soudan; and it was already known to us that the Egyptian Government objected to General Gordon. On the 1st of December Lord Granville had reason to believe he was in a condition to offer the services of General Gordon to the Egyptian Government. Unfortunately they were refused, but not entirely without reason. The reason given was one that did not satisfy us, but still it went far to silence us, as is often the case; and I think the right hon. gentleman will find that to be the case too. The objection made to us was this:—"The Soudan is a country of strong Mohammedan fanaticism. For us to send a Christian as our agent, with a view to govern it, might be a dangerous course, which might cause a still more serious outbreak." We were not satisfied with the reason, but it was difficult to thrust that objection rudely aside, and it caused further delay. That was the offer of Lord Granville on December 1st. But we became acquainted with the sentiments of General Gordon; and, as time went on, the aversion of the Egyptian Government became mitigated, and at last entirely removed. However, it was not till the 16th of January—that is to say, eight days after Nubar Pacha came into office—that they sent to us a request for a qualified officer to undertake the conduct of the evacuation of the Soudan. That was sent to us on the 16th of

January, and on the 18th General Gordon was on his way to Egypt. At Cairo General Gordon formed his plan. A paper will be laid on the table, I believe. We received General Gordon's plan first, in the shape of a valuable memorandum of his own, but we have had some doubts whether it was our duty to produce his plan. If we could have produced it to this House, or even to this country alone, it would have been another matter, but the promulgation of that plan through the telegraph in Egypt might have caused its failure. All I will say of it on this occasion—for I would rather not go into particulars about it—is that it was evidently a well-reasoned and considered plan; that it was entirely pacific in its basis; that it proceeded on the belief,—a belief, which would have been fanatical or presumptuous in my case, or in the case of most of those in this House, but which in the case of General Gordon, with his experience and gifts, was, I believe, neither the one nor the other—not that he certainly must, but that he fairly might hope to, exercise a strong pacific influence by going to the right persons in the Soudan; and it was his desire quite as much as ours that this should be done without any resort whatever to violent means. As I have said, General Gordon went not for the purpose of re-conquering the Soudan or of persuading the chiefs of the Soudan again to submit themselves to the Egyptian Government. He went for the double purpose of evacuating the country by the extrication of the Egyptian garrisons and reconstituting it by giving back to those chiefs their ancestral powers, which had been withdrawn or suspended during the period of the Egyptian Government. I have told the House already that General Gordon had in view the withdrawal from the country of no less than 29,000 persons paying the military service to Egypt. The House will see how vast was the trust placed in the hands of this remarkable person. We cannot exaggerate the importance we attach to it. We were resolved to do nothing which should interfere with this great pacific scheme, the only scheme which promised a satisfactory solution of the Soudanese difficulty by at once extricating the garrisons and reconstituting the country upon its own basis and its local privileges. It was our duty, whatever we might feel as to a particular portion of the garrisons, to

beware of interfering with Gordon's plans generally, and, before we adopted any scheme that should bear that aspect, to ask whether in his judgment there would or would not be such an interference.

I will now explain to the House what we have been doing during the last seven days. February 5th, when the disaster happened to Baker Pacha, unfortunately found us cut off for a moment from communication with Gordon. He had considered it his duty to take the shortest and swiftest means to convey himself to Khartoum, and that severed him from the telegraph, which runs up the course of the river. We resumed the telegraph on the 11th—on the morning of yesterday. We used our utmost endeavours to communicate with him at the earliest moment. We did not wait till we were coming near the time of his possibly reaching Berber, but we sent our messages from the very first moment when we thought there was a chance, being determined to anticipate the possibility of his arrival. We did that on Thursday or Friday of last week, and inquired from him what were his views after Baker Pacha's defeat. We had already taken certain measures. Our first duty was to recollect that the defeat of Baker Pacha altered the position of Suakim, and therefore we took measures, as rapidly as was in our power, to make Suakim safe. We further issued preliminary orders to the British ships that were going up and down the Red Sea, in order to have them in readiness if any action should be found possible and advisable. When Baker Pacha was defeated, the case of Sincat was hopeless as to military help. It was known for a long time that the garrison had been in extremity. I have read a telegram which acquaints us that Baker Pacha was on the way to its relief, and that he had every hope of succeeding in that relief. No means that we could possibly use could have availed in the slightest degree to bring aid to Sincat, before the time when unhappily it fell. That was not a question of difficulty, but of absolute impossibility. There was another mode, as to which I believe Admiral Hewett and Sir E. Baring have been in communication. Admiral Hewett has endeavoured to see what could be done by negotiations for the extrication of the garrison. He failed,

but this failure only became known to us about ten o'clock last night. I think it was reasonable and right that he should make the effort in the impossibility of any other effort that could be made. But we were bound to take into view this—would an attempt of relief in that quarter have the effect of endangering first of all the precious life of General Gordon, on which the whole hope of the solution of this question was depending? would it also have the effect of endangering the measures for the extrication of the 29,000 men, who, after all, must be regarded of more weight than the 500 in Sincat? We have at last heard by telegraph from General Gordon on that subject. Having reached Berber, he has received our messages, and we are satisfied from his replies that, although he does not like the use of military means, yet such an effort as might be made for the relief of Tokar would not in his view interfere with his safety or the likelihood of his success. He does not speak with enthusiasm of anything of that kind, but he leaves upon us the entire responsibility of such a proceeding. In these circumstances we have not hesitated for a moment. Having been put in possession partly by evidence that reached us through Colonel Stewart, and now again since the House met by telegraph from General Gordon, we have come to the resolution to gather immediately, with absolutely the utmost promptitude, a force—a British force—at Suakim, with the view if possible to the relief of Tokar, with the computation of its being sufficient for that purpose, if the garrison should be able to hold out.

We have acted, therefore, without the smallest hesitation upon our own undivided responsibility for a purpose, which implies no departure whatever from our policy in regard to the re-conquest of the Soudan, but with the view of performing what I hope may be regarded as a simple service to humanity, which I am quite sure that this House and the country will not grudge. When I said yesterday that it was not a question of hours, my meaning was this: that our communications with ships would not have been in the slightest degree accelerated by having been made yesterday, and to-day, on the contrary, the position of the ships would enable us to do so. The House will therefore understand that our injunctions and

directions have, as I trust, by this time reached the authorities in Egypt, and that their first efforts to give effect to them have probably been by this time taken.

I think I have now stated distinctly what we have been about during the last week, and why we thought it wrong, without any reference to General Gordon, in his great and comprehensive plan, to pursue a purpose, which, although one of humanity, and one strongly appealing to the feeling of this country, yet concerned, after all, but a very limited portion of a very difficult and formidable undertaking. I stated that we took preliminary measures with a view to the increase of the force at Suakim. We have moved up troops from Malta in order to be in a condition to put them forward for any purpose of this kind.

Sir M. H. BEACH—How many ?

Mr. GLADSTONE—I think it would be very much better that I should not enter upon that. We have had from Admiral Hewett, the best authority on the spot—no doubt he had consulted with others—a very distinct account of what he considered necessary for the relief of Tokar.

Sir M. H. BEACH—I should not have put the question had it not been told that the number was stated in another place.

Mr. GLADSTONE—I do not know whether the right hon. gentleman means the final or the initial number. I have been speaking of initial measures. If he means the final number, it will be a number somewhat in excess of the number considered by Admiral Hewett to be sufficient for the purpose. I believe it will be 4,000 men. I do not enter into the constituent parts, but I believe that will not be inexact in round numbers.

Now, I have endeavoured to give the reasons why we have acted and why we did not act before. I revert to the motion of the right hon. gentleman. I hope it will be thought that I have not shrunk from grappling with it. If the House will vote for it—which I own I do not expect—it would be a singular case of voting for a motion, on behalf of which not a single word has been said by the mover. The right hon. gentleman made imputations.

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These imputations, if they imply anything at all—and the right hon. gentleman seems to say that they do not imply anything at all—imply that he desires and recommends a policy which we think alike opposed to prudence, to humanity, and to justice. I have thus stated the case of the Government. I make in few words my final appeal to the House of Commons, and I ask, from your indulgence it may be, but also from your justice, that acquittal which we feel we are entitled to claim.

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