

In March, 1880, Lord Beaconsfield dissolved his parliament, which was now nearing its legal term of seven years. The general election was fought with more than usual acrimony, for the Liberals were stirred to great energy by Gladstone's "Midlothian speeches," in which he taunted the Conservatives as the advocates of unjust aggression all over the world, and the special friends of the Turk. His eloquence had no mean effect on the contest, and the Liberals came to the new Parliament with a splendid majority of one hundred. It boded ill for them, however, that the Home Rulers had swept all Ireland save Ulster, and appeared with nearly eighty members when the House met in the summer of 1880.

Fall of Lord
Beacons-
field's
ministry.

The second Gladstone ministry was destined to last just five years (June, 1880, to June, 1885). It was inaugurated with promises of the old Liberal panaceas, "Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform," but it turned out to be a period of wars and rumours of wars, of disaster abroad and venomous civil strife at home. Its opening incident showed that Gladstone's external policy might perhaps be righteous, but was certainly neither dignified nor successful. The Government was hardly in office before it was confronted with the revolt of the Boers of the Transvaal, a Dutch state which Lord Beaconsfield had annexed in 1877, to save its population from being overwhelmed by its Zulu neighbours. In 1880, the Zulus having been long crushed, the Boers rose in rebellion, destroyed several small detachments, and finally inflicted a disgraceful defeat on the British forces at Majuba Hill. The Government had at first refused to treat with the insurgents, but after the first checks Mr. Gladstone came to the conclusion that they were patriots rightly struggling for independence, and, though large reinforcements were just reaching Natal, granted the Boers independence under the vaguest terms of suzerainty (March, 1881). Since then South Africa has never ceased to give trouble.

Gladstone's
second
ministry—
The Boer
war.