

carry out the Government's plan without further military aid. He was driven into Khartoum and there besieged by the Mahdists in February, 1884. At the head of his dispirited and ill-disciplined Egyptian troops he made a gallant defence, but his repeated demands for British bayonets were regularly refused till it was too late. In the autumn Gladstone at last determined to send an expedition to the Soudan; but by this time Khartoum was at its last gasp. Wolseley, the victor of Tel-el-Kebir, forced his way up the Nile and despatched a column across the desert to relieve the city. After a most perilous march the troops beat the dervishes at the desperate battle of Abu-Klea (January 22, 1885), and forced their way to within a hundred miles of Gordon's stronghold. But the time was past for succour. On January 26 the Mahdi stormed Khartoum, and massacred Gordon and the 11,000 men of his garrison. On receiving this disastrous news the expeditionary force retired on Egypt, abandoning the whole Soudan to the rebels, who slew off the greater part of the people, and turned the whole region into a desert.

Two half-hearted attempts were made, one before and one after the fall of Khartoum, to attack the insurgents from the side of the Red Sea. But the expeditionary forces which landed at Suakim, though they beat the dervishes at El-Teb and Tamai (1884), and Tofrek (1885), recoiled before the difficulties of the waterless desert which separates the coast plain from the Nile, and accomplished absolutely nothing.

The betrayal of Gordon—for so the tardy action of the Government was generally and not unnaturally styled—alienated from Gladstone many supporters whose faith had survived Majuba Hill and the Kilmainham Treaty. For the last year of its tenure of office the Liberal cabinet was profoundly unpopular. It had profited little from the one constructive measure of its later years, the Reform Bill of 1884. This was designed to level up the electoral body, by giving the franchise

The Reform  
Bill and Re-  
distribution  
Bill.