

THE SIEGE OF LONDON

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OF LONDON**



THE
SIEGE OF LONDON.

BY
"POSTERITAS."



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THE SIEGE OF LONDON.

CHAPTER I.

ENGLAND'S POLITICAL MISTAKES.—THE EGYPTIAN MUDDLE.—
ALARMING SIGNS IN THE FOREIGN POLITICAL SKY.

IT is not our purpose here to enter fully into the series of extraordinary events which led up to the gigantic disaster, whereby the English nation was crushed into the dust, and the power and might of England all but utterly destroyed. A brief recapitulation is, however, necessary, in order that the reader may be able to fully comprehend the nature of the stupendous changes that were wrought in an astonishingly brief period. The events with which we have to deal lie too near our own time for one to write dispassionately or altogether impartially. We shall, nevertheless, endeavour to confine ourselves to truthfully recording the circumstances, and to disassociate that record from any display of bias.

As is well known, the Conservatives had been swept from power by an outburst of popular feeling, due, in a very large measure, to the fervid declamation of the Opposition leader, Mr. Gladstone, during his Midlothian campaign,—a campaign that is now historically known as "a Pilgrimage of Passion." The marvellous powers of oratory possessed by Mr. Gladstone had often been used with telling effect against his opponents; but he excelled himself on this occasion, with the result that, utterly indifferent to the logic of facts and blind to sophistry, the

country went with him, and he was returned to power with a large majority.

The Liberals came into office pledged to "Retrenchment and Reform." It was a false cry, as time has now proved, but it answered its purpose. Their very first acts were marked by a fatuity that seems difficult to understand, even at this distance of time. It is clear that much of it was due to party rancour, and to an unworthy jealousy of that remarkable statesman the Earl of Beaconsfield.

Events in Afghanistan had led to a war between the Ameer of that country and England; and, by a series of brilliant military exploits worthy of England's best days, the British power had not only been maintained, but the seizure of Candahar and other important strategical points ensured the safety of the Indian Empire so long as they were adequately held. The reversal of the Beaconsfield policy, however, had been a Radical trump card, and it had gone a long way towards giving them the political game. One of the first acts, therefore, of the new Government was to give up Candahar, and to retire from that "Scientific Frontier," which had cost so many gallant lives and so much blood to delimit. The fatal error made by the Liberals in this matter is now too well known, and needs no further comment here; but, as was subsequently proved, it was only the beginning of a series of startling mistakes which have hardly any parallel in history.

The affairs in South Africa now began to engage attention, and caused some anxiety. The Boers, no doubt deriving encouragement from remarks made during the "Pilgrimage of Passion," began to clamour for independence, although two-thirds of them at least had consented to annexation by the preceding English Government. Their daring and defiance increased to such an extent, and the outrages they committed became such a crying scandal, that the British Government was forced to send an expedition against them, which ultimately culminated in a crushing defeat of the British arms on Majuba Hill. After this defeat the English Government, to the astonishment of the world, entered into negotiations with the victorious Boers, and their independence was given back to them, under the suzerainty, however, of Great Britain. In a

very short time, it became evident that the treaty entered into by the Boers was not likely to be long respected, and, chafing under the power, although nominal, which the new conditions imposed, a deputation was sent to London to confer with the Secretary for Colonial Affairs, who was then Lord Derby. His lordship had recently seceded from the Conservative ranks, and had taken office under the Liberal Government but his whole policy was marked by astonishing weakness, and an absence of that firmness and power to grasp the true situation which had hitherto been characteristic of English statesmen. The consequence was, the Boer delegates succeeded in obtaining a new Convention, which provided for their complete independence, on condition that they respected certain reserves in the Transvaal which were under British protection. Thoughtful and far-seeing men said at the time that this Convention would never be respected. The history of the Boers proved that their promises were not to be relied upon, and that their arrogant, domineering spirit would brook no authority that sought to restrain them from depredation or acquiring by force that which they had no right to possess. These views unhappily proved too true, and the Convention was torn up. But events in Egypt diverted public attention for a time from South Africa. A False Prophet, calling himself the Mahdi, had raised the Soudan in revolt, and Egypt was threatened. The extraordinary policy pursued by the British Government, who, having bombarded Alexandria, crushed the power of the arch-mutineer Arabi Pacha, in a brilliant feat of arms at Tel-el-Kebir, and propped the Khedive on his throne by means of British bayonets, talked of retiring, and practically leaving the country to govern itself. It was a "would and I would not" policy; a policy of letting "I would" wait upon "I dare not"; a policy, in short, of vacillation, procrastination, of weakness and stupidity, if not of absolute cowardice. Mr. Gladstone had never liked Egypt, and displayed a morbid nervousness to get out of the country. But Fate, like a Nemesis, said "No" to this. The "Mahdi's mission" was rallying a host to his standard, and as long as that was so, Egypt could not be considered safe. But the most extraordinary thing is, that the English Government,