

Fashoda Through French Eyes

By EDWARD JOHN FIELD*

La France a si souvent erré et elle retrouve ses voies! En marche dans la nuit la volageuse séculaire devine à l'ourlet lumineux de la montagne, l'aube qui va se lever. Elle reprend vie et force à l'heure qu'on croit qu'elle tombe. (G. Hanotaux)²

THE story of Fashoda, a tale of the drama and excitement of the race for the mastery of the Upper Nile and of the tensions and alarms of the bitter quarrel of October and November, could seem to be too well known to need retelling. This historical incident, or accident as some would maintain, has been analyzed frequently in books and articles. Its significance in the history of Egypt has been discussed and its importance in the creation of Delcassé's subsequent anti-German and pro-English policy has been emphasized. It showed a new and unexpected determination on Britain's part and it demonstrated decisively the superiority of the colonial power with the superior fleet.

The recent publication of the French documents pertinent to this period does, however, permit one to take a new look at the history of the Fashoda incident. While these documents reveal no new or startling facts, they do shed a great deal of light on almost every phase of the story. Basically they explode forever the myth that Fashoda was a great accident. In these pages French policy is displayed as a conscious effort to extract from England every concession possible and to force the British government into making some definite statement about Egypt. French policy was based on the doctrine of "the infinite squeezability of Great Britain". "Avec les Anglais," wrote Hanotaux, "il faut toujours traiter mais toujours agir."³ With this policy in mind the French pressed on vigorously into the Niger hinterland, exploring the territory of the Mossi and moving towards the important trading post of Ilo. Similarly in 1895 Madagascar was seized and was annexed formally in August of the following year. "The simplest thing was to present the powers with a fait accompli," wrote Hanotaux.⁴ England, the French colonial party thought, with her

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huge commitments and her policy of isolation was in no position to force a showdown against a power which enjoyed actual possession: She might attempt preventive measures if warned, she would hardly risk armed conflict if faced by occupation. Firmness therefore on France's part could be used to extract great rewards from England's policy of peace at any price.

It is against this general background that French policy in the Upper Nbangi and Upper Nile must be viewed. Ever since the "temporary" British occupation of Egypt the French had been pressing the English government to set a date to its occupation. In the early 1890's a natural English reluctance to leave was reinforced by the growing success of Cromer's financial and reform policy, by a desire not to leave Egypt smaller than when she had occupied it,⁵ and by the Anglo-German agreement of 1890 which guaranteed the Upper Nile as far as the Congo-Nile watershed. On the other hand France, after her disastrous Tonkin episode, realized that Africa was gradually disappearing under a sea of red. Already the major river exits were controlled by the English and soon the hinterlands would go too. In answer to the British Cape to Cairo Railway dream, Frenchmen began to speculate on an East-West Empire controlling the centre of the vast African continent.⁶ In March 1894 Monteil, one of the great French explorers of Central Africa wrote to Lebon explaining the importance of the Sudan to England and the need for France to prevent English occupation of the area. Egypt he claimed was vulnerable and valueless without the Sudan.

Il n'était donc logique d'admettre que l'Égypte n'étant, entre les main de l'Angleterre, qu'une couverture destinée à empêcher une autre puissance de se rendre maîtresse du Soudan par le nord, toute action sur le Nile supérieur ou moyen qui aurait eu pour effet de contrecarrer les projets de l'Angleterre sur le Soudan égyptien devrait avoir pour conséquence de la contraindre à évacuer la Basse Égypte.⁷

French policy should therefore be to capture Fashoda and make an alliance with Abyssinia. But not only was the Sudan strategically important, it was also, to some Frenchmen at least, commercially valuable. D'Estournelles wrote lyrically about this "marché fabuleux vaste réservoir de clients" with a potential as great as India itself.⁸ All this was given an added attraction by the theories of another Frenchman, Victor Prompt, who in 1893 lectured on the feasibility of controlling the water level of the Nile by means of barrages on its upper reaches. "From this time on," writes Pro-

fessor Langer, "the theory of the French engineer, which was sound in most respects, became a sort of nightmare to the English."⁹ Thus control of the Upper Nile would not only halt English expansion, it would also be a powerful lever for edging the English out of Egypt.

The history of the Fashoda expedition begins in 1893 when Monteil agreed to command a mission inspired by Delcassé, at that time Under Secretary of State for Colonies, which was to leave the Upper Ubangi and was to establish "le pavillon français aux environs de Fachoda".¹⁰ The following year in a letter written to André Lebon (now Under-Secretary of State for Colonies) and dated 7th March 1894 Monteil reported that his advance was checked by posts of the Congo Free State. On the 12th May 1894 an agreement was announced between the Congo Free State and Great Britain in which the former was granted the left bank of the Nile from Lado to Fashoda and the latter received a strip of territory from Lake Tanganyika to Lake Albert Edward. The English in other words were trying to cut the French off from the Upper Nile while at the same time guaranteeing their own North-South route. Hanotaux, now Minister of Foreign Affairs, protested vigorously as did Germany with the result that the Anglo-Congolese Agreement was dropped and France negotiated her own agreement (14th August 1894) with the Free State, by which the posts were withdrawn and France's way to the Upper Nile reopened. Already therefore the seeds of conflict were sown, especially, as on 29th June 1894 Lord Dufferin, the British Ambassador in Paris, had warned Hanotaux that "si vous faites dans ces parages une nouvelle mission Mizon, c'est le conflit le plus grave entre les deux pays." The problem was recognized by both countries and at the beginning of September the hint of possible negotiations, dropped by Lord Dufferin in May, was taken up. On 5th September 1894¹¹ Hanotaux and the English specialist Sir Eric Phipps met and reviewed outstanding Franco-British problems. As far as the Upper Nile was concerned the British were prepared to recognize the new Franco-Congolese Agreement if the French in their turn recognized the Anglo-German Agreement of 1890. On the 29th September¹² another meeting took place and on the 7th October¹³ Phipps proposed a "standstill" agreement as no progress was being made on the question of French recognition of the 1890 agreement. The standstill was to be on the basis of posts already occupied. Hanotaux seemed ready to accept this. But the negotiations now ran into trouble. On the 1st November 1894¹⁴ Hanotaux recorded

that Lord Dufferin had insisted absolutely on recognition of the 1890 agreement, while earlier¹⁵ Delcassé had said that Phipps' suggestion was unacceptable because the French mission would reach the Nile before the English expedition under Colville. To this end, Delcassé said, instructions have been given to Liotard and he is leaving for this post at once. Thus a major decision had been taken when Hanotaux wrote in a note dated 17th November 1894¹⁶ that the Council had decided to suspend negotiations and that the Minister of Colonies "devait prendre les précautions nécessaires pour que l'occupation par la France des régions dont il s'agit fût accomplie autant que possible avant la prise de possession par la mission Colville". He added that Delcassé stated that Liotard hoped the expedition would reach the Nile within a year. So Hanotaux, who in July, following Dufferin's war ring and prior to the Franco-Congolese Agreement, had tried to limit Monteil's objective, had now decided to enter the race for the Nile.

The situation, naturally enough, did not improve. English suspicion of French actions deepened and in a despatch dated 6th March 1895 Baron de Courcel reported Krinkerley as saying:

Nous avons ici un sentiment dont nous parlons jamais, dont vous ne recueillez pas l'expression publique, mais que vous découvrirez si vous savez pénétrer au fond de nos coeurs, c'est la crainte de votre hostilité qu'aucun bon procédé de notre part ne désarme, c'est la conviction que vous ne guettez qu'une occasion propice pour nous sauter à la gorge.¹⁷

This English fear and suspicion became evident when on the 28th March 1895 Sir Edward Grey made his sensational speech in the House of Commons in which he said:

The advance of a French expedition under secret instructions, right from the other side of Africa into a territory over which our claims have been known for so long would be not merely an inconsistent and unconsidered act, but it must be perfectly well known to the French government that it would be an unfriendly act and would be so viewed by England.¹⁸

Baron de Courcel told Lord Krinkerley that the English position was "infinitely perilous"¹⁹ and Hanotaux, more outspoken, called it a "déclaration hautaine" and an attempt to prevent French progress by erecting a diplomatic barrier.²⁰ While Hanotaux saw much "internal politics"²¹ in Grey's speech and de Courcel regarded it as the product of Lord Rosebery's nervousness—"c'est le résultat de ses méditations solitaires et de ses insomnies nocturnes"²²—both realized that it boded ill for the future. On the

30th March 1895 Hanotaux wrote of the difficulties this declaration would create and he said, "C'est en ceci que me paraît consister pour l'avenir, sinon pour le présent immédiat le danger de la politique dont Sir Edward Grey a été l'interprète."²³

On the 2nd April, however, de Courcel was able to report that Lord Krinkerley had been very conciliatory and had stated that Grey had only referred to English claims²⁴ and the next day de Courcel could add that Krinkerley had hinted at a possible partition of the Bahr el Ghazal region.²⁵ Hanotaux for his part tried to ward off possible future repercussions by writing to de Courcel that:

Je désirerais qu'il fût, en autre, bien entendu que dans la pensée des deux gouvernements, les missions dans les territoires contestés, si elles n'ont pas une caractère d'expéditions militaires, sont considérées, de part et d'autre, comme n'engageant pas la politique des deux pays. . . .²⁶

Perhaps here Hanotaux was trying to prepare the ground for the expected arrival of Liotard's mission on the banks of the Nile. But even though the statesmen of both countries made efforts to prevent a future crisis, neither could remain fully satisfied with the promises and evasions of the other. Krinkerley said to de Courcel on 6th April that England felt that the French did not seriously want an entente on the question of the Upper Nile.²⁷ This mood of suspicion on one hand and subtle exploitation on the other was to remain until the crisis of 1898 forced a solution. In the meantime as de Courcel said there was no immediate danger; Liotard was delayed by unforeseen difficulties and so one could therefore "let things follow their own course."

Sir Edward Grey's speech had as the baron de Courcel admitted²⁸ linked Egypt with the question of the Upper Nile. This made matters considerably more difficult as England had, several times in the past, simply refused to discuss the question of her occupation. The French thus were left with no alternative but to continue their policy of trying to provoke England into taking some action or making some statement. Their diplomatic posts continued to send in reports all of which showed that England's stubborn attitude had not changed. For example the Chargé d'Affaires at Cairo, Boutiron, reported²⁹ that Lord Cromer had stated that the time for evacuation had not yet come and that Boutros Pasha had declared that England's real aim was to gain control over the Sudan. So it is not surprising that with the seeming failure of

Liotard's mission, the French ministers should begin to consider the formation of another expedition.

Marchand himself maintained in a newspaper interview in 1905 that he had first mooted his project on the 14th June 1895. There is, however, no record of this in the documents and the earliest detailed outline of his plan is contained in a note of the 10th November 1895. It is evident, though, that Marchand had made his plan known earlier for a letter for Chantemps, the Minister for Colonies, bearing the date 21st September 1895³⁰ and addressed to Hanotaux notes Marchand's "interesting" report and asks for the minister's views on this question which goes beyond mere colonial affairs. He stresses at the same time the importance which he attaches "to the extension of our sphere of influence, in particular in the direction of the Nile." What then was Marchand's plan? As contained in the above mentioned note it envisaged expansion in two principal areas—in the M'Bornou region and in the area of the Upper Ubangi and Upper Nile. Marchand was well aware of the dangers of this latter course and he stressed the need for full support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for "la réalisation peut à up moment donné créer un incident de politique internationale." The object of this advance was to take pledges which could be used against England in case the latter went beyond her rights in the Sudan (i.e., tried to make it a protectorate instead of returning it to Egypt).³¹ The mission, however, was to be strictly non-military and was to be on friendly terms with the Dervishes. "C'est alors," he wrote, "une espèce de visite anonyme faite par une groupe de voyageurs européens, sans pavillion et mandat aux habitants des territoires limitrophes du Haut Oubangui avec lesquels ils désirent nouer des relations de commerce et de bon voisinage." In the last analysis the object was to force the English to discuss the future of the Sudan at a European Conference. This would not only be of great interest to France but could also lead to the evacuation of Egypt by England.³²

Hanotaux undoubtedly heard these views for he recorded an interview with Marchand in a note which unfortunately he left undated³³, but which obviously must have been subsequent to Chantemps' letter (21st September) and before he left the ministry (2nd November). Again unfortunately there is no indication of Hanotaux' reception of the plan and the government fell before a decision could be reached. The Bourgeois cabinet which succeeded, in which Guieysse was Minister of Colonies and Berthelot in

charge of Foreign Affairs, immediately took up this question and on the 30th November 1895 Berthelot wrote to Guieysse authorizing a mission as outlined by Captain Marchand. The mission, however, was not to occupy any territory nor was it to make any treaties, it was to permit France "d'intervenir utilement pour le règlement de la question du Soudan égyptien et pourrait avoir pour effet de hâter ce règlement."³⁴ So a third mission was approved. In 1893 Monteil had been sent, in 1894 Hanotaux had authorized Liotard's departure and now Berthelot had agreed to the sending of the mission planned and led by Captain Marchand.

On the 24th February 1896³⁵ Guieysse addressed a letter to Liotard now the chief French commissioner in the Upper Ubangi, in which he assigned him the overall control of the mission and in which he defined more closely Marchand's aims and objectives. He was to advance through the Bahr el Ghazal to the Nile at Fashoda. He was to maintain friendly relations with the Dervishes and he was above all to avoid any fighting.

"Tout conflit devant absolument être écarté" wrote Guieysse and then went on to say "je dois appeler tout spécialement votre attention sur le prix qu'attache le Gouvernement à voir se réaliser le programme de M. Marchand, sinon dans son intégralité, au moins dans ses grandes lignes; et il tient essentiellement ce que le "raid" qu'il avait l'intention de tenter soit exécuté. . . Il convient donc que tous vos efforts tendent à devancer nos compétiteurs."³⁶

On the 12th March 1896³⁷ a short note from de Courcel to Berthelot announced a new difficulty. In it de Courcel said that Lord Salisbury had told him confidentially of a British plan to attempt the reconquest of the Sudan, and to advance as far as Dongola. On the 15th³⁸ Lord Dufferin brought official confirmation of this news.³⁹ This new British venture was partly motivated by fear of French designs on the Upper Nile and partly by a desire to help the Italians who, at Adowa on the 1st March, had met with a crushing defeat at the hands of the Abyssinians. The British were prepared to see Italian influence predominant in Abyssinia, but they were not prepared to see anyone else there. Thus wary of French overtures to the Abyssinian Emperor they decided to back Italy and so fill a power vacuum that could otherwise have dangerous consequences for British supremacy in the Nile Valley. Some other statesmen saw it as part of an even broader policy. Herbertte reported from St. Petersburg⁴⁰ (20th March) that Lobanov considered that German support was all part of a Triple Alliance plan to help Italy, while Paul Cambon from Con-

stantinople considered that it was undertaken on German encouragement in order to shore up Italy's shaky monarchy.¹⁴ Be that as it may, the British announcement that the invasion was to be in Egypt's name and that the Sudan would be returned to Egypt put France in a delicate position. Up to this point one of her main objections to English pretensions had been on the grounds that the Sudan belonged to Egypt. So when Lord Salisbury asked the French to authorize the use of £500,000 from the surplus funds of the Caisse de la Dette for the expenses of the expedition Berthelot could not refuse the request by a simple denunciation of English imperialism. There followed as a result a long and complicated series of negotiations in which Berthelot maintained that 1) the Dette money was not to be used for military purposes, 2) the English "temporary" occupation of Egypt did not justify the assumption of such burdens, 3) there was no threat to Egyptian safety from the Dervishes, but 4) on the contrary these operations would stir them up, 5) that it will postpone England's evacuation, 6) that Egypt should be administered by her own citizens under a European guarantee, 7) that the expedition would not help Italy, and 8) that the country was peaceful at present. These arguments were expressed in a letter⁴¹ Berthelot wrote to Montebello, the Ambassador at St. Petersburg, and although they were not all made explicit to Great Britain in the course of the next few weeks, they formed the basis for Berthelot's rejection of the British demands.

Berthelot however realized that he was not going to stop the expedition simply by withholding the money, so he tried simultaneously to protect France from the most obvious danger which the advance posed. At every stage he tried to get from Lord Salisbury a definite commitment that the British would not go beyond Dongola. Salisbury, however, refused to tie himself and would not go further than saying that the expedition "would be strictly limited in its objective" and that "it would not alter in the least the political situation in Egypt nor England's disposition relative to evacuation."⁴³ Courcel therefore advised Berthelot to accept England's guarantee as it was obvious that no further progress was going to be made.⁴⁴ Paul Cambon on the other hand urged⁴⁵ vigorous action. The expedition, he maintained, was only "improvised" after the "fortuitous defeat of the Italians at Adowa." It was necessary, he went on, to prevent England from absorbing this huge area. France should take a definite stand and "throw off this negative attitude that we have observed for the last fourteen

years." But, he added, "I only consider a great demonstration useful if the Power against which it is directed feels that if need be this demonstration could turn into military action." The only factor which should hold France back now was the realization that Germany and Austria had unfortunately given their consent to the British plan.

Such was the opinion of one of France's leading Ambassadors, and it became obvious during the next few months that French policy had not been modified by the realization that now an eventual clash between the two countries on the Upper Nile was almost impossible to avoid. On the 18th April Bourgeois, now Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as Prime Minister, had an interview with Marchand in which he re-affirmed Marchand's eventual goal as being the Nile valley. On the 28th April the Bourgeois cabinet fell and Hanotaux came back as Minister for Foreign Affairs. No change was seen although Hanotaux later claimed that he had "attenuated" Marchand's instructions. André Lebon, now Minister of Colonies in the new cabinet, wrote to Liotard on the 23rd June 1896⁴⁶ saying that "notre action au nord du M'Bornou va désormais entrer dans une phase décisive." Above all France must strictly follow the policy laid down over the last two years which will see her established in the basin of the Nile. This will be "le couronnement" of all her efforts. At the same time, however, he warned Liotard that Marchand was to be conciliatory towards the Dervishes and was to make friends of the local tribes. These latter he thought he could arm as local police. Thus it would seem that the essential aim of Marchand's mission was to be kept. He was still to advance into the Nile valley and he was therefore to act as a bargaining counter in future negotiations with England over the division and ownership of the Sudan.

During the next year or so there was little change. Both sides pushed ahead with their plans and seemed to ignore the probable consequences of their actions. Reports from London and from Cairo confirmed French suspicions that England was aiming at a protectorate in the Sudan and permanent occupation in Egypt. In January 1897 de Courcel reported that Salisbury had made it clear that England would not be leaving for a while and a month later Noailles wrote from Berlin that "toute initiative égyptienne est écrasée, il n'y a plus de loi, d'Alexandrie à Dongola, que le sic volo, sic iubeo anglais."⁴⁸ In the following January Cogordan, the Chargé d'Affaires at Cairo, told Hanotaux that there was a possibility of a British protectorate over the Sudan⁴⁹ and on

the 9th February 1898 de Courcel said that the reason for British haste in the Sudan campaign was in order to forestall Marchand. Lord Salisbury had hinted that apart from the inadmissibility of allowing a barbarous state to exist on the borders of Egypt there were other reasons which rendered it indispensable that a power should show up soon in the Nile valley. British ambitions, concluded de Courcel, were vast.⁵⁰ French policy reflected governmental determination to oppose English aims. In a letter to Cogordan (10th January 1897) Hanotaux wrote that French policy was 1) resistance to England's financial requests, 2) persistent pressure on the Powers, 3) the establishment of good relations with Menelik, and 4) the march on the Bahr el Ghazal.⁵¹ At the end of the year he asserted that France was trying to safeguard the rights in Egypt of the other European powers.⁵² Hanotaux and Lebon, however, did not regard the other great powers as very reliable allies. They fully realized that if England were to be effectively checked it could only be by means of strong French pressure. Consequently on the 14th March 1897 Lebon wrote to Lagarde (head of the mission to Ethiopia) telling him to get Menelik to expand towards the right bank of the Nile⁵³ and then in January 1898 to Lamothe (Commissioner for the Congo) asking him to make sure that Marchand made treaties with the local chiefs as France would need proof of her activities.⁵⁴ Thus the French envisaged a dual advance in the Upper Nile area—from the south in the person of Marchand and from the east under the benevolent supervision of Menelik.⁵⁵

On the 24th January 1898⁵⁶ Lebon was able to tell Hanotaux that Marchand hoped to reach the Nile in July. Did this news affect French policy? The documents do not reveal that the French had any thoughts about modifying their plans. Trouillot (the new Minister of Colonies) wrote to Delcassé (the new Minister for Foreign Affairs) on the 4th July 1898⁵⁷ asking how he should explain French policy in the Upper Nile. Was the Marchand expedition undertaken to secure the French bases in the Upper Ubangi or was it to re-establish order and civilization in this barbarous region? If the latter, then would it not be a good idea to come to an agreement with Turkey and make it known that France was only trying to ensure "le développement normal de la civilisation". Trouillot finished by writing:

il est indispensable et de la plus grande urgence de faire parvenir des instructions précises à M. le Capitain Marchand. . . .

au cas où, dans quelques mois, il se trouverait en contact avec l'armée du Sirdar.

A few days later (18th July 1898)⁵⁸ Delcassé jotted down in a departmental note an outline of French policy and aims in that region. Egypt was to be independent and France was to get on the Upper Nile roughly that area which was allocated to the Free State by the Anglo-Congolese Agreement of 1894—in other words, the Nile as a boundary from Lado up to and including Fashoda and then westwards along the tenth parallel. England was to get the Red Sea coast from Ras Kasar to the twentieth parallel and also the provinces of Khartoum, Sennar, Kordofan and Darfou. Meanwhile Marchand was to occupy

solidement les points indiqués [i.e., Fashoda], éviter de disperser ses forces, se garder de toute initiative hasardeuse", so that "établis sur le cours du à Fachoda. . [et] maîtres par conséquent des grandes artères de la navigation de cette région, nous pourrions attendre, minuis d'un excellent gage, l'heure des pourparlers.

It seems therefore that even though Salisbury had on occasions indicated his willingness to try for an agreement on the Nile question⁵⁹ and even though the accord on Nigerian problems had been signed⁶⁰ the French had shown no desire to modify their policy and had appeared indifferent to the admittedly half-hearted overtures from the British side. Only in September, towards the end of the story, did French policy show any signs of hesitation. Already in July, as shown above, Trouillot had requested a definition of French policy. This, however, was not forthcoming, for Delcassé never sent the instructions outlined in his note of the 18th July. Instead Trouillot had to write again on the 19th August and the 4th September⁶¹ before finally Delcassé replied on the 7th September. This letter when it materialized betrayed a sensible modification of Delcassé's views.

"D'une part", he wrote, "la prise de Khartoum et d'autre part le rapprochement opéré, tant entre l'Allemagne et la Turquie qu'entre le premier de ces pays et l'Angleterre, ont profondément modifié la situation qui existait au moment du départ de la mission Marchand." Marchand was not to push on to Fashoda, but "s'installer de préférence dans une île à proximité du confluent du Sobut et du Nil" and to concentrate on strengthening his communications with the Upper Ubangi.⁶² Was the meeting at Fashoda then the result of Delcassé's idleness or indecision? It is tempting to think so and to range the Fashoda incident along with those

other great historical "ifs" which are the despair of historians and the regret of patriots. Unfortunately it is impossible to maintain this thesis for in the first place even had Delcassé replied promptly, his orders would not have reached Marchand before October, and in the second place the island chosen would have been equally unacceptable to the English. Nothing in fact would have been changed, except perhaps the drama of the situation would have been more ironical.

The story of the meeting of Kitchener and Marchand at Fashoda is exciting and bizarre, but it is also unfortunately too well known to need repeating here. Many historians have described brilliantly the details of Kitchener's advance, the defeat of the Dervishes, the unlikely, but extremely fortunate, politeness and restraint of both of the major characters and then the steps leading to the final detente. On all these points the documents throw no new light, except that perhaps they reveal more starkly the basic weakness of the French position. In the first place there is no evidence that Marchand could have held his own against the Anglo-Egyptian forces as Professor Langer maintains. In fact de Courcel seriously doubted whether Marchand could even retreat the way he had come.⁶³ In the second place, France's diplomatic isolation is clearly shown. The Russians were, in French eyes, cold bloodedly casual towards their ally's predicament, while the Germans, fresh from a prospective division of the Portuguese Empire, were in no mood to destroy their rather unstable entente with England. Noailles wrote to Delcassé (13th November 1898) that Germany would probably remain neutral in the event of a conflict over Egypt, while Russia would probably follow France but without enthusiasm for "elle n'est pas pressée."⁶⁴ Equally alarming for France, however, were the frequent reports about British military preparations. As early as the 20th February 1898 the Naval Attaché in London was informing Admiral Besnard (Minister of Naval Affairs) that the English were taking steps to mobilize the reserve. This, he concluded, was obviously aimed at France.⁶⁵ When the crisis reached its height, alarmist reports flooded in. A secret agent reported English fleet movements in the Mediterranean⁶⁶, Geoffroy (Chargé d'Affaires, London) said that many foresaw armed conflict⁶⁷ and the Naval Attaché stated that a naval and military council had been held at the War Office and that English authorities considered that France was unprepared for war.⁶⁸ So on the 1st November de Courcel wrote to Delcassé giving his opinion that England will give the order to

fight as soon as she feels war is inevitable and that it will only take a few hours to execute that order.⁶⁹ Indeed Delcassé had good cause to be alarmed, for the fleet movements reported by his agents were real, as Marder confirms, and, more significant still, this was the first time for many years that England had used a show of force in such a crisis. Furthermore, as Delcassé noted on a despatch of Geoffroy's arguing a strong policy and military preparations, "Ou' est-ce qu'on entend par là, étant donné qu'il s'agit de la première puissance maritime?"⁷⁰ One can hardly blame Delcassé for having fought a stubborn strategic retreat and for avoiding thereby an almost certain defeat.

What then have the documents shown? In the first place it is obvious that the French colonial party was stronger and more influential than its actual size would seem to suggest. In spite of the fact that there were six French Ministers in power during the period under review, the documents reveal a surprising consistency in French African policy. From 1893 onwards no one seems to have questioned the wisdom of sending expeditions into the Upper Nile valley and the objective of opening the Egyptian question was ceaselessly affirmed. The project was always firmly supported by the under secretaries—Delcassé and Lebon—and by the Ministers for Colonies—Delcassé Chautemps, Guieysse and Lebon. The Ministers for Foreign Affairs too seemed to have had no objections. Hanotaux, it is true, restrained Monteil in the summer of 1894, but that was largely because negotiations were then proceeding with the Congo Free State on the delicate question of annulling the Anglo-Congolese Agreement. Hanotaux anyway authorized Liotard's mission in 1894 and he seemingly put no obstacle in Marchand's path in 1895. The documents show that Berthelot issued instructions for Marchand's mission and Bourgeois, both as Prime Minister and as Minister for Foreign Affairs, approved of the plan. Again the papers show that Hanotaux' "toning down" of Marchand's instructions amounted to nothing more than a figment of his imagination, while Delcassé, when he finally became Minister for Foreign Affairs, showed great enthusiasm for the project he had done so much to further. Only at the very end can one detect any sign of weakening, but this is not serious enough to be taken as a retreat.

In the second place the documents by revealing the consistency of French policy also reveal its failure to appreciate the change in English opinion. Salisbury had lost face over his Far Eastern policy and he sought a coup to restore his prestige. Cham-

berlain, forever urging a strong colonial policy, had helped inaugurate the new look by insisting on a firm stand in Nigeria. Cromer, with his financial reorganization beginning to bear fruit, was unlikely to allow the government to withdraw from Egypt. These considerations plus the fact that France had chosen to squeeze England at her most sensitive spot should have warned Frenchmen to expect an usual and vigorous reaction. This she got and de Courcel's despatches reveal that he was under no illusions as to the lengths to which England was prepared to go. France had erred and as a result she stumbled, but at the critical moment, as Hanotaux noted, she regained strength and under Delcassé's guidance went on to effect a rapprochement with England and to turn the Dual Alliance into the Triple Entente.

1. Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1st Series, Vol. XI (1947), XII (1951), XIII (1953), XIV (1957).
2. G. Hanotaux, *Fachoda* (Paris, 1909).
3. G. Hanotaux, cited by James L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (London, 1932-1934), III, 87.
4. G. Hanotaux, *Fachoda* (Paris, 1909).
5. The Sudan formerly ruled by Egypt had been conquered by the Dervishes in 1885.
6. Lebon cited by Riker "Fashoda and British policy," *Pol. Science Quarterly*, Vol. 44.
7. *D. D. F.* Vol. XI, No. 65.
8. *D. D. F.*, Vol. XI, No. 303 (3rd March 1894)
9. W. L. Langer, *Diplomacy of Imperialism* (New York, 1935), I, 127.
10. Monteil, *Quelques Feuilles d'Histoire Coloniale*, p. 65-67.
11. *D. D. F.*, Vol. XI, No. 234.
12. *op. cit.*, No. 237.
13. *op. cit.*, No. 240.
14. *op. cit.*, No. 263.
15. *op. cit.*, No. 260 (Hanotaux' note 30th October 1894).
16. *op. cit.*, No. 285.
17. *op. cit.*, No. 396.
18. *op. cit.*, No. 404.
19. *op. cit.*, No. 419 (annexe I 29th March 1895).
20. *op. cit.*, No. 420, 429.
21. *op. cit.*, No. 416.
22. *op. cit.*, No. 432 (3rd April 1895).
23. *op. cit.*, No. 420 (30th March 1895).
24. *op. cit.*, No. 424.
25. *op. cit.*, No. 432.
26. *op. cit.*, No. 424.
27. *op. cit.*, No. 435.
28. *D. D. F.*, Vol. XII, No. 3 (11th May 1895).
29. *op. cit.*, No. 142 (27th August 1895).
30. *op. cit.*, No. 152.
31. Marchand too worked on the theory that Egypt without the Sudan was of little value.
32. *D. D. F.*, Vol. XII, No. 192.
33. *op. cit.*, No. 153.
34. *op. cit.*, No. 219.
35. *op. cit.*, No. 312.
36. A reference to Colville's mission which was advancing from Uganda.
37. *op. cit.*, No. 318.
38. *op. cit.*, No. 322.
39. Thus Marchand's mission was not a reply to the English advance as Hanotaux maintained. It was planned before.
40. *op. cit.*, No. 339.
41. *op. cit.*, No. 362 (31st March 1896).
42. *op. cit.*, No. 324 (16th March 1896).
43. *op. cit.*, No. 35, de Courcel to Berthelot, 20th March 1896.
44. *op. cit.*, No. 349.
45. *op. cit.*, No. 362.

46. *op. cit.*, No. 411.
47. *D. D. F.*, Vol. XIII, No. 77 (21st January 1897).
48. *op. cit.*, No. 90 (7th February 1897).
49. *D. D. F.*, Vol. XIV, No. 6 (9th January 1898).
50. *op. cit.*, No. 47 (9th February 1898).
51. *D. D. F.*, Vol. XIII, No. 61.
52. *op. cit.*, No. 360 (16th November 1897).
53. *op. cit.*, No. 141.
54. *D. D. F.*, Vol. XIV, No. 4 (8th January 1898).
55. Menelik was sympathetic towards France in order to counter Italian influence.
56. *op. cit.*, No. 28.
57. *op. cit.*, No. 246.
58. *op. cit.*, No. 258.
59. *D. D. F.*, Vol. XIII, No. 77, Vol. XIV, No. 32
60. 14th June 1898.
61. *D. D. F.*, Vol. XIV, Nos. 296, 324.
62. *op. cit.*, No. 329.
63. *op. cit.*, No. 476.
64. *op. cit.*, No. 517.
65. *op. cit.*, No. 58 (18th July 1898).
66. *op. cit.*, No. 430 (11th October 1898).
67. *op. cit.*, No. 443 (20th October 1898).
68. *op. cit.*, No. 467 (29th October 1898).
69. *op. cit.*, No. 476.
70. *op. cit.*, No. 523 (16th November 1898).