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PHARAOH TO FAROUK

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**LET THE GREAT STORY BE TOLD**

(The Truth about British Expansion)

# PHARAOH TO FAROUK

BY

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*with assistance from*

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LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.1

*First published August 1955  
Reprinted October 1955*

Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London  
and published by John Murray (Publishers) Ltd.

THIS BOOK  
IS  
DEDICATED  
IN GRATITUDE  
TO

MR. RODNEY MAINGOT, F.R.C.S.

but for whose skill and care  
it could never have been completed



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## NOTE

Authors differ as to the spelling of ancient Egyptian and Arabic words. The writer of this book, using his discretion, has whenever possible spelt them in the way they seem likely to be familiar to the layman. When, however, quotations have been made from other books, the spelling used by their authors has necessarily been adopted.

CHAPTER I

## THE BACKGROUND

'**T**HE key to a nation's future is in her past. The nation that loses it has no future . . . We cannot recreate the past, but *we cannot escape it . . .*'<sup>1</sup>

Three thousand years or so before the dawn of the Christian era, when Pharaoh ruled the land of Egypt with an iron hand, a hundred thousand men, we are told by Herodotus, toiled beneath the scorching rays of the Egyptian sun to raise those incomparable monuments, the Pyramids of Ghizeh, which in due course came to take their inevitable place among the World's Seven Wonders. Twenty-five centuries then went by, during which Pharaoh succeeded Pharaoh until the then reigning monarch, hard pressed by Persian invaders, gathered together as much of his Treasure as he could, and fled for his life to Ethiopia. In such humiliating collapse ended the reign of Egypt's last native king—three hundred and fifty years before Christ was born.

During the next twenty-three centuries Egypt lay torpid and dormant under a succession of alien rulers—a period that was ended by the decision taken by the British Government in 1946 to withdraw all British troops from the Nile Valley and to evacuate the naval base at Alexandria. So, at long last, Egypt became once again—except for treaty obligations such as those which limit the freedom of every civilized country—a sovereign and independent State.

Those Five Thousand Years had seen the successive stages of a brilliant pageant—the Foundation and the Fall of Thebes ; the Oppression and Exodus from Egypt of the Chosen Race ; the fatal fascination of the irresistible Cleopatra ; the intellectual zenith of Euclidian Alexandria ; the defeat of the cohorts of Imperial Rome by invincible Caliphate Cavalry ; the glittering resplendence and inhuman massacre of those picturesque tyrants, the Manelukes ; the construction and completion of the world's most revolutionizing Canal ; the titanic rivalry of France and England ; the crowning victory in Egyptian waters of the immortal Nelson ; the Egyptian

<sup>1</sup> Sir Arthur Bryant in the Preface to his *English Saga*. (My italics.)

#### THE BACKGROUND

darkness into which leapt the light that shone 'in the sudden making of splendid names'—Saladin, Napoleon, de Lesseps, Gordon, Watson, Cromer, Kitchener, Wingate, Allenby, Wavell, Montgomery.

\* \* \*

If, in spite of all this, the reader finds that at the present moment of unparalleled gravity in human affairs he is asked to concentrate his attention—even though for only a few pages—upon the calamities and crises of a period so remote from our own days as ancient Egypt, it is only because the story of Egypt, from Pharaoh to Farouk, is an indivisible unit. The Egypt of the British Occupation is the foreground and that of the Pyramid Kings is the background of one and the same clamantly human picture.

\* \* \*

The Great Pyramid casts its imperturbable Pharaonic shadow across the entire story. Described by Sir Flinders Petrie as a milestone on the long road marking man's progress from barbarism to civilization, it proclaims for all who have eyes to see, and minds to comprehend, the almost superhuman power of a line of Rulers who, in concentrating all human and material resources on their vast enterprises, have left us moderns an impression which has been well summed up in words attributed to one of the Pharaohs by a modern poet : 'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair.'<sup>1</sup> Picture this Great Pyramid to yourself—a mountain of stone rising a hundred feet and more above the dome and cross of St. Paul's in London ; its four sides each measuring over two hundred feet beyond the utmost length of that great cathedral ; its base covering thirteen acres ; a system of construction involving the employment of two million three hundred thousand blocks of an average weight of two and a half tons each, all of them shaped and fitted to an all but unbelievable nicety, some reaching to an overall length of thirty feet with a breadth and height of five feet and weighing fifteen tons apiece ; making a total volume of eighty-five million cubic feet and said to weigh more than six million eight hundred and forty thousand tons.

This stone mountain was the cultural outcome of the Pharaonic idea, and speaks in forthright language that is far more forcible than

<sup>1</sup> Rameses II, the Osymandias (Egn. Usrmaatre) of Shelley's sonnet. Usr-maat-Re (Powerful-is-the-Truth-of-Re) is what may be called the *Divine title* of Rameses the Great.

## A HIGHLY CIVILIZED KINGDOM

any mere utterance of the power of a monarch who reigned omnipotent, godlike, with unfettered control over the bodies and souls of the human beings who built at his bidding. It was indeed as no human monarch but as an accepted god on earth that Pharaoh ruled, for had not the hierarchy of Heliopolis—the priests of the On of our Old Testament—proclaimed him the begotten of Ra, the greatest of all the gods of Egypt? And it was as such that, in his magnificent palace at Memphis (a few miles south of modern Cairo) he reigned and was revered by a united and devoted populace.

It was the unbridled might of Pharaoh that first brought the dis-united, rival warring chiefs throughout the whole prodigious length of the Nile Valley under the control of a strong, centralized government, obedient to the will of a single master mind, so that from the seemingly endless chaos of earlier aeons there at length emerged the beginnings of organized society—the first step towards civilization.<sup>1</sup>

From such beginnings, the art of ordered government developed in Egypt step by step. As the power of the priesthood and nobles increased, the autocracy of the Pharaoh became to that extent weakened, and the more powerful provincial governors were able to establish hereditary rights, becoming, so to speak, landed barons, who governed their provinces with the title of Great Lord, though still in the name of the Pharaoh.

A critical moment now came in the story of civilized man. Social and business life in the Egyptian cities was by this time highly organized ; books and accounts were kept on sound business principles ; wills, deeds, contracts were drawn up with lawyer-like precision ; buildings were enriched and embellished with pillars and colonnades ; schools had been established, art was flourishing ; Egyptian sculptors of the period have earned permanent recognition as among the greatest of any age.

Piercing the misty curtain of this remote antiquity—as the Egyptologist has enabled us to do—our eyes now encounter a scene of unexpected splendour. Pharaoh, seated upon his Memphite throne, rules a highly civilized kingdom in an age of intensely alert commercial, social, artistic, political, and religious activity. Still continuing to be the mainspring of the administration of the entire country,

<sup>1</sup> There had been fusions of the provinces before the dynastic period ; but, (as Monsieur Drioton has said) they were 'kingdoms lost in the darkness of time, of which we know only one thing—that they were fugitive and passed'.

#### THE BACKGROUND

his regal power is nevertheless shared by an educated priesthood, hereditary baronage, and efficient bureaucracy—the embryonic Crown, Church, Lords, and Civil Service of between four and five thousand years ago.

If it is true that the key to a nation's future is in her past, should we at this stage be justified in expecting evidence of progress on the long road towards civilization of which Petrie speaks—or of retrogression?

There is no evidence of progress. On the contrary, it is now that we cross the threshold of the first of Egypt's 'Dark Ages'. The brilliance of the Egyptian scene, gradually darkening, at length becomes veiled in the most baffling obscurity, and very little is discernible beyond the fact that a thousand years of progress came to a catastrophic end. How and by whom the sinister forces were unleashed that at this period ravished the country has not yet with any complete certainty been determined, but the agents of evil, whoever they were, proceeded to glut their insane lust for destruction upon everything beautiful, precious, or in any way praiseworthy that challenged their barbaric instincts. From one end of the country to the other chaos replaced the dynamic force of Pharaonic rule; the illustrious Old Kingdom vanished; and the glory departed from Egypt to return no more for centuries.

The horrors of this age were graphically depicted in a manuscript known as the 'Ipuwer Papyrus'. 'The Palace has been overthrown', wrote Ipuwer. 'Princes are starving, the masses triumphant; noble ladies go hungry; owners of fine clothes are in rags. Plunder and squalor are universal. Great and small say: "I wish I were dead,"' The harvester is robbed of his possessions. The storehouses are empty and their keepers lie dead upon the ground. There have been terrible scenes. The peasant goes out to plough weapon in hand. Men are forced to eat food that used to be given to poultry and pigs. No skilled labourers are working, for these enemies of their country have ruined their crafts. People's faces are blanched with terror for the criminals are at large. Laughter has died out of the land. The songs of the musicians have turned to a dirge. All is in ruins.'<sup>1</sup>

The ever-revolving cycle which, as some believe, is allegorically suggested by Wagner in the *Nibelungen Ring*, had thus reached the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Professor A. M. Blackman: *Literature of the Ancient Egyptians* (Methuen, London).

‘Twilight of the Gods’, and it was as if Valhalla itself, the home of the gods, had gone up in flames. Year after year dawned and died, but nothing beyond an occasional random gleam shines through the mist enshrouding the life of that far-distant period. Yet, at last, after so long and intense an eclipse, the wheel of history is seen again to revolve, and, however slowly and painfully, civilization begins once more to emerge from the bottomless hell of complete frustration.

It was now that the obscure little township of Thebes, some four hundred miles southward from Memphis, became the seat of a great and noble family—that of the Intefs. This was the little town whose continuous growth ended in its becoming the Hundred-gated-Thebes of Homer. To-day the visitor can wander over mile upon mile of its unrivalled ruins, the very vastness of which overwhelms the mind with a feeling of awe—the more impressive by reason of their constant warning of the fate that menaces all mortal institutions.

Although at this remote date the greatest of Egypt’s capitals-to-be was no more than an ordinary small town, the Intefs were by no means an ordinary family. They produced men of outstanding character and of the rarer type of genius that has not seldom changed the destiny of man. By degrees they extended their influence farther and farther from Thebes, so that at last the day returned when a single Master Mind could command unchallenged obedience throughout the entire length of the Nile Valley.

The dynasty founded by the first of the Intefs endured for close upon two centuries, whereupon a yet more astonishing figure showed itself in the person of Amenheinhat I, whose accession (*circa* 2000 B.C.) heralded one of the greater golden ages in the story of Egypt. Cities came into being and expanded, the peasant went out to plough unarmed ; prosperity was widespread ; and it was now that, in addition to the Pharaoh, the priests, and the nobles, there arose a fourth new estate in Egypt—a prosperous middle-class. Hitherto, artists, scribes, and craftsmen had one and all been virtually serfs, working for their noble masters. Now ‘the “small man” emerged as a being with a definite status in society’.<sup>1</sup> Architecture, literature, the arts, the crafts, alike showed a renewed vigour ; and much of the jewellery that belonged to the queens and princesses of this dynasty has survived to this day—crowns, rings, bracelets, pectorals—each a flawless

<sup>1</sup> N. S. Drower in ‘The Political approach to the Classical World’ in *The Legacy of Egypt*, edited by Professor S. R. K. Glanville (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1942), page 30.

#### THE BACKGROUND

masterpiece which, though dating from so remote a past, never fails to excite the wonder and admiration of all beholders, not least that of the foremost jewellers and goldsmiths of the modern world.

But the owners of those gems could never have imagined that a day would come when almost every vestige of their brilliant and apparently firmly established civilization would have completely vanished ; when the very sites of their palaces, their temples, and their teeming cities would be silent, unpeopled fields and orchards. So long as the reins of government had been in strong hands all had been well, but so soon as the grasp in which they were held became enfeebled, the gloriously brilliant Egyptian skies were darkened with an ever-deepening gloom.

By about 1700 B.C. the wheel had revolved full-circle and Egypt's second Dark Age arrived, ushering in a new period of prolonged anarchy, the course of which brought home to Egypt the wormwood and the gall of the degradation to which life can descend through enslavement to a foreign yoke.

'It came to pass', wrote Manetho—the Egyptian priest-historian who lived in the third century B.C.—'I know not how, that God was displeased with us, and there came up from the East in a strange manner, men of ignoble race who had the confidence to invade our country, and easily subdued it by their power without a battle. And when they had our rulers in their hands they burnt our cities, and demolished the temples of the gods, inflicting every kind of barbarity upon the inhabitants, slaying some, and reducing the wives and children of others to a state of slavery. At length they made one of themselves King . . . ; he lived at Memphis.'

These new and alien rulers of Egypt—known to Egyptologists as the Hyksos—seem to have been a pastoral people and of predominantly Semitic stock, and it may have been towards the end of this period that the youthful Hebrew, Joseph, was sold into slavery to a passing band of desert rovers, who re-sold him into Egypt, 'unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.'

★ ★ ★

There are some interesting water-marks suggesting a connection between the entry of Joseph into Egypt and the Hyksos period. One of these is the reference in Exodus to Pharaoh's chariots and horses, for it is an historical fact that the horse and the chariot were not known in Egypt before the Hyksos régime. Another point of

interest is that the Hyksos are held to have been of Semitic origin, and, this being so, there would have been a natural bond between Israelite sojourners and alien Semitic Pharaohs whereas, on the contrary, the Egyptians loathed and hated their foreign Hyksos rulers. This is made clear by the measureless contempt expressed for the Hyksos in authentic Egyptian records. Further, the fact that both Israelites and Hyksos were pastoral peoples would add significance to the Israelites making it clear to Pharaoh—on Joseph's insistence—that 'Thy servants are shepherds',<sup>1</sup> whereas, on the other hand, Joseph had told them that shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptian people.<sup>2</sup>

Taking all the known facts into consideration, it is the Hyksos period during which the entry into Egypt of the Israelites would have been most likely to take place. Professor Albright's opinion is indeed explicit: 'An intimate connection between the Hebrew settlement in Egypt and the Hyksos conquest may be considered certain.'<sup>3</sup>

Egyptian historical records make it clear that many generations of Egyptians lived and died under the humiliating yoke of these foreigners before a leader of sufficient stature and calibre arose who could guide Egypt to the recovery of her lost independence. It was the rulers of Thebes who began and developed the anti-Hyksos revolt; and it was one of these rulers, named Amosis, who delivered the final blow that expelled the plague-smitten, filthy people—as the Egyptians called the Hyksos—from the soil of Egypt and drove them far out across the frontier of Palestine.

The victorious Liberator of his country ascended the throne of the Pharaohs (*circa* 1580 B.C.) to become the founder of a new Dynasty under the title of Amosis I, and, says Professor Albright, 'there is, accordingly, every reason to regard Amosis as "the Pharaoh who knew not Joseph" of Ex. i. 8.'<sup>4</sup>

This new Dynasty, the Eighteenth, founded by Amosis, was Egypt's Imperial, and greatest, Age. The revivifying effect of the

<sup>1</sup> Genesis xlvi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis xlvi. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Professor W. F. Albright in *The Biblical Period*, which is a monograph (importers, Basil Blackwell, Oxford) from *The Jews: Their History, Culture, and Religion*, edited by Louis Finkelstein (Harper Brothers, New York, 1950). Some Egyptologists now believe that the co-called Hyksos conquest was actually the gradual infiltration of a Semitic people who eventually seized power.

<sup>4</sup> Op cit. See also Professor T. E. Peet: *Egypt and the Old Testament*, pages 74 and 75; and J. Finegan: *Light from the Ancient Past*, page 106.

## THE BACKGROUND

Hyksos expulsion caused Thebes to grow into that wonderful city which is now the mightiest relic of an ancient civilization to be found anywhere in the world. It was the victories of this Dynasty that brought into Egypt an unprecedented accession of tribute and slaves ; it was this Dynasty that annexed and administered a substantial part of the ancient world ; and the Pharaohs of this brilliant period inevitably take their place among the outstanding Rulers of all time. Thothmose I extended the boundaries of his country (according to his own statement) 'as far as the circuit of the sun'. Hatshepsut, the great Queen of this Dynasty, was historically unique. Never before had a woman taken her place on the throne of the Pharaohs, and so great was this jolt to Egyptian tradition that in the sculptured bas-reliefs depicting her (presumed) supernatural birth, she was represented as a boy ! And further to convince her faithful lieges that she was in every respect equal to the great kings who had preceded her, she insisted that in the grammar of her inscriptions the feminine endings should be changed to masculine. She even took to wearing the state 'false beard' for ceremonial occasions.

The memory of this imperious and irresistible Queen is still kept alive by the ruins of that rare architectural gem, her Mortuary Temple. This loveliest of all the triumphs of the Egyptian temple-builders—eight hundred feet long—stands on the western side of the Nile at Thebes. Built on gently rising ground in three successive colonnaded terraces, each higher than the other and each connected by graded approaches, it reaches from the cultivated plain to the menacing desert cliff-wall that forms its immediate background—a mountainous mass that climbs six hundred feet sheer skyward. It is in the heart of this mass that the sanctuary was hewn. In the days of the Temple's ancient glory its 'Great Doors', to quote Hatshepsut's description of her own famous building, 'were of black bronze and the inlaid figures were of electrum'. An avenue of enormous sphinxes, each a colossal superhuman portrait of herself, linked the Sacred River with the immense pylon-entrance to the temple precincts. To-day the temple is a ruin, but—no less than when it was the great Queen's own 'dream of beauty in stone'—the salmon-red tints of the foreground and the triple vista of glittering white colonnades combine with the sombre background of dark-red cliff so subtly as to enthrall the mind of the beholder with a spell that nothing can resist.

Her successor, Thothmose III—the 'Alexander of Egyptian history'—was the builder of the first real empire that the world has ever

known.<sup>1</sup> The spoils of so many nations flowed into Egypt during his reign (*circa* 1504–1450 B.C.) that the Treasuries of Amon—the greatest of all the gods worshipped at Thebes—were flooded to overflowing. ‘From the fastnesses of Asia Minor, the marshes of the upper Euphrates, the islands of the Aegean, the swamps of Babylonia, the distant shores of Libya, the Oases of the Sahara, the terraces of the Somali coast, and the upper cataracts of the Nile, the princes of his time rendered their tribute to his greatness.’<sup>2</sup> Year after year did this Pharaoh’s war-galleys, mooring at Thebes, disembark an unlimited supply of captive man-power, and the imagination can perhaps be inspired to call up a mental picture of long files of oppressed Israelites assisting the vast army of captives from other countries to raise some of those gigantic temples whose ruins remain to remind us of the Old Testament epoch.

One portrait-statue of this Pharaoh, a triumph of the sculptor’s art, brings out the strength of his character and of his personality, its facial expression being so lifelike as to appear to suggest an alteration of mood with the least perceptible change of every varying shadow.

The power and splendour of Egypt continued to grow during this Dynasty until, under Amonhotep III (*circa* 1405–1370 B.C.) it reached a peak of achievement which, looking back across the intervening millennia, may seem almost incredible. This is the Pharaoh known to Egyptologists as the Magnificent. With immense wealth and captive labour he was able to gratify every wish and every whim. Courted, flattered, the object of diplomatic attention from all the great Powers of his time, he was surrounded by every conceivable luxury. But his portrait statue, entirely disenchanting, shows him an apparently hard, obstinate man, worn out, utterly disillusioned—a man for whom the world had nothing to offer that he could have thought worthy of his acceptance.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Professor Breasted: *A History of the Ancient Egyptians* (Smith Elder, London, 1916), page 243.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, page 242.

## THEBES

**T**HEBES had by this time become a city of incredible magnificence—the world's chief wonder. To the ancient Egyptians it was known by many names: City of the god of the Hidden name; Victorious Thebes; City of the Lord of Eternity. Its streets, lined by serried rows of high, narrow houses, some of several storeys, were thronged at times almost to suffocation with pedestrians, litters, and chariots. Its most outstanding and majestic edifices were its temples; but it also included a substantial number of public buildings, schools, and villas with the luxury of artificial ponds and laid-out gardens irrigated by sluices regulating the inflow of water from the Nile.

The two most wonderful of all the Temples of Thebes—separated by about a mile and a quarter—were connected by a wide Avenue, lined on either side by immense sphinxes. This was only one of several sphinx-bordered avenues embellishing the city, and some of these bizarre forms of massive grandeur still survive *in situ* to-day, all but undamaged, though half as old as time: silent witnesses of the fascinating splendour of the metropolis of the world's first empire.

The greater of the two vast Temples linked by this mile-and-a-quarter-long Avenue of Sphinxes is known as Karnak.<sup>1</sup> 'No monument in any country in the world can bear comparison with Karnak.'<sup>2</sup> It is not so much a single temple as an assemblage of huge sanctuaries, each built upon a scale comparable with, and sometimes surpassing, our own great cathedrals. The entire group is surrounded by an immense girdling wall, each of the four sides of which reaches a third of a mile in length. Within these walls were included the Great Festival Hall, the House of the Archives, the Sacred Lake, and the massed, exquisite edifices built for Pharaoh and the priesthood, as

<sup>1</sup> 'Karnak' is an Arabic word meaning 'a window', and is doubtless applied in modern times because great 'clerestory' windows are so conspicuous a feature of its ruins.

<sup>2</sup> The section on 'Egyptian Art' by Jean Capart in *The Legacy of Egypt*, edited by Professor S. R. K. Glanville (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1942), page 98.

well as the several marvellous fanes used for the worship of the old Egyptian gods.

'The general effect', says Professor Breasted, 'must have been imposing in the extreme; the brilliant hues of the polychrome architecture, with columns and gates overwrought in gold, and floors overlaid in silver, the whole dominated by towering obelisks clothed in glittering metal, rising high above the rich green of the nodding palms, or mirrored in the surface of the temple lake. All this must have produced an impression both of gorgeous detail and overwhelming grandeur, of which the sombre ruins of the same buildings, impressive as they are, offer little hint at the present day.'<sup>1</sup>

Of the actual arcana studied and practised within the temple precincts but little is known or is likely to be re-discovered; nor can we hope for a complete understanding of the complicated secrets of their religion. That the occult, divination, and magic each played a prominent part is certain. Egypt has always been looked upon as the home of magic. It will be remembered how, when Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh and Aaron cast down his rod . . . it became a serpent; and Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; and the magicians of Egypt they also did in like manner with their enchantments. It will be remembered, too, that the silver cup which Joseph commanded his steward to place in Benjamin's sack of corn was the cup in which my lord drinketh, and whereby he divineth. Divination, indeed, seems to have been taught in the temples, particularly at Heliopolis, where the High-priest's title was the Great Seer.<sup>2</sup>

The part of Thebes described so far has been that which stood on the eastern bank of the Nile—that part of the great Egyptian capital which included such an infinity of industry, pleasure and vice; a city of work, of leisure, and of the arts; a city of love and laughter, of music, the dance; and of entertainment in all its ancient forms. Unlike that part of the city which lay on the western side of the Nile, it was emphatically the Metropolis of the Living.

But Egyptian Thebes—the No of the Bible—was built on both banks of the Nile, and the scenes that met the eye on the western bank of the River were startlingly opposite to those on the eastern

<sup>1</sup> *A History of Ancient Egypt*, by Professor J. H. Breasted (Smith Elder, London), page 258 of the 1916 edition.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Murray : *The Splendour that was Egypt* (Sidgwick Jackson, London, 1949), page 217.

side. The Thebes that stood on the western side of the Nile was a Metropolis of the Dead—a macabre city without parallel in human history ! In this Death-city of Thebes, in the most complete antithesis to that of the Metropolis of the Living, the houses, the shops, the factories, even the long avenues of sphinxes and the shrines, made up a most astonishing parallel to those of the Living City, but the eyes of the people were sad, their lips unsmiling, and the boats of all sorts and sizes that made towards the western shore bore not only the living but also the dead on their way to their last resting-place. And though many of the barks sailing westwards were gaily dressed as for a festival ; although they carried minstrels on board who played and sang ; their songs were the songs of lamentation for those who would never return to the Living Thebes.

Vast and magnificent were the Temples in this City of the Dead. But they were the Mortuary Temples of departed Pharaohs. The buildings that lined its streets included the dwellings of the members of the all-important Guild of Embalmers (the physicians of Genesis) who handed down the mysteries and secrets of their art from father to son.<sup>1</sup> In hovels, of which there were many, dwelt the *paraschites*—the outcasts whose duty it was to open the bodies of the dead and prepare them for the embalmers. The shops were for the sale of essences, flowers, food of all kinds, and of everything needed by the mourners, or that might be of service to the Dead. The workshops contained special premises for the production of sarcophagi, and for the manufacture of the linen bandages used in the swathing of the mummy ; others supplied the amulets of lapis-lazuli, cornelian, and other semi-precious stones wherewith the dead were decked. There were, too, showrooms in which models of mummies and mummy-cases were on view, with counters on which were displayed specimens of mummies made in miniature and painted in bright colours in order to illustrate the different grades and qualities of the mummies which could be made for the various prices charged.

This Bazaar of the Dead was thronged with mourners who might be seen examining or purchasing the gilded and richly decorated sarcophagi intended for the reception of the bodies of the opulent, or the simple coffins of sycamore that were made for the poor.

The most secret and certainly the most gruesome quarter in this Death-City was enveloped in clouds of sweet-attar and the fumes of pungent spices. Here stood ranged in rows the ovens, numbering

<sup>1</sup> Cf. page 377 in *The Legacy of Egypt*.

### THIS CITY OF DEATH

many hundreds, in which the natron and the various oils which preserved the bodies from corruption were heated. Within a perimeter wall was a veritable township of temporary booths, each of them erected for the reception of the newly dead. Here the body was opened and prepared, and on this part of the work being completed, the temporary structure was demolished. Held in greater awe than any other place even in this City of Death was the long, low edifice where the final preparations were made for the fateful journey of the deceased to the Land of No-return. The rites that took place here reached the last degree of occultism. To the chanting of the most powerful incantations and the singing of ritual hymns, the mumumies were encased in their cerements and decorated with the appropriate amulets by officiating priests who, for the fulfilment of their tasks, garbed themselves in clothes and masks representing the divinities of the nether-world.

This city of frustration extended for several miles along the left bank of the broad Egyptian river, and its environs were not less striking than the city itself. Beyond its farthest limits lay the cultivated fields in all their lustre of bluish-green—which at harvest-time became one continuous blaze of glorious gold—interspersed at intervals with clustered growths of tall, graceful palms. Beyond the fields rises a range of lofty, barren, sun-scorched desert heights, a menacing, ghostly range without parallel within the limits of the globe. The hills are one and all devoid of even the most infinitesimal trace of life ; not a lonely shrub, not a blade of grass relieves the desolation. Some of these heights approach the shape of a perfect cone ; others soar cliff-like and sheerly precipitous upwards from the plain. Scanned more closely they are seen to be pock-marked, so to speak, from head to foot ; for—to quote Pierre Loti's vivid description of the scene—‘ the chain of living rock that rises before us, coloured at each successive sunrise with the delicate rose of dawn, is densely packed with the bodies of the dead ’.

The openings cut into these hills for the reception of the bodies of the poor are mere fox-holes ; but others are the doors of the wonderful tombs or mortuary chapels of great and powerful families who had flourished during Egypt's most glorious age—families whose names may have been household words when the Children of Israel were serving with rigour in the house of bondage.

Hewn out of the very bowels of the mountain-side, these tombs and mortuary chapels of the nobility usually consist of two or more

chambers, often supported by columns, their walls adorned with wonderfully preserved paintings depicting the everyday life of people of all classes—invaluable works of art giving graphic, and indeed almost photographic glimpses of the pulsating life and times to which we are so impressively introduced in the Books of Genesis and Exodus.

The work of the embalmer completed, the mummy was placed in a coffin which was often a masterpiece of craftsmanship, heavily gilded in the case of the rich, its cover shaped in the form of the deceased with arms folded across the breast. The coffin was placed on a couch shaded by an ornate canopy and mounted on a sledge. As the funeral procession approached the Western Heights it was preceded by men carrying such things as might be of service to the dead in after-life. Next came a priest, followed by a sledge carrying the shrines for the canopic jars which held the embalmed internal organs of the dead. These were followed by the mummy itself on an ox-drawn sledge accompanied by a priest who burned incense as he walked and poured libations on to the ground. The hills once reached, the procession made its way up a winding path and the coffin was at last unloaded on a rocky platform in front of the tomb. There the concluding—which was also perhaps the most important—part of the ritual was performed. For although the embalmer had so far as possible rendered the body imperishable, it still lacked life. The lid of the coffin was now removed; the mummy was purified with holy water and fumigated with incense; the priest touched the mouth with magical instruments, pronouncing words of power so potent that sight, hearing, touch, and taste were one by one returned to the body and all its functions thus gradually restored.

Outside the House of Death a banquet now began of which the deceased was believed to partake in company with the living. The feasting ended, the lid was replaced, the coffin was borne on sturdy shoulders into the tomb, and, to an extreme and final outburst of lamentation, lowered down the shaft to the underground chamber. On the following day the shaft was sealed for—as it was believed by those who took part—the duration of eternity.

This range of desert hills is interrupted at intervals by rocky gorges, by deep rents, by the loneliest of lonely valleys. One of these latter, which has no counterpart elsewhere in the world, is known as the Valley of the Kings. To this silent, forbidding recess in the Theban range, the greatest of the Pharaohs were borne to the accompaniment of all the pomp and pageantry of their age, and here they were laid

## THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS

to rest in sepulchres that were hewn deep into the mountain-rock and whose glories could hardly have been surpassed by the Palaces of the Living.

As you make your way in the heat of the Egyptian day along this scathed and scalding valley of ultimate human experience, perhaps shuddering at the sinister entrances to the tombs that gape upon you from every side, the fantastically wrinkled and tortured shapes of the lonely mountain summits stand out in grim contrast against the dazzling radiance of the ultramarine heaven, and you feel you might be walking through a visionary valley of the Apocalypse such as was imagined by Loti—a valley walled round with living flame.

The rectangular-shaped tomb-portals, carved out of the rock-face, give admittance to corridors and stairways, or alternatively to gently graded inclines, leading gradually downward to a succession of corridors and halls whose walls are covered with painted scenes. Eventually the burial-chamber of the Pharaoh is reached, sometimes hundreds of feet within the heart of the mountain.

The conflicting sensations aroused by the entry into one of these tombs of the Pharaohs, intensified as they are by the unique blending of architectural form and colour, are such that the experience has no equivalent within the limits of our modern world.

Herc, if anywhere, is Silence ! Here, if anywhere, is Death !  
‘O cloquent, just, and mighty Death !’

CHAPTER 3

THE ISRAELITE AGE

To the subjects of Amonhotep the Magnificent, the Pharaonic tradition, firmly linked with the worship of the all powerful Theban god, Amon Ra, must have seemed to rest on unassailable foundations, and this makes the suddenness of the reformation that followed—the first religious reformation known—the more astonishing.

Amonhotep III was succeeded by Amonhotep IV, a profound thinker and an idealist who resolved to establish the worship of one god, Aton, as the state religion of Egypt and to suppress all rival deities throughout the length of the Nile Valley. Aton was an ancient but hitherto neglected name of the solar disc ; and Amonhotep IV, to represent the one god, chose the symbol of the Sun-disc with numerous rays proceeding earthwards, each terminating in a hand that grasped the Egyptian symbol of Life.

Whether he worshipped the actual sun or whether his ideas were being expressed symbolically is a matter on which even doctors may disagree ; but his famous Hymn of Praise appears to contain certain ideas about the universality and unity of God that were re-echoed in a much later age by the 104th Psalm.

There had already been a strong tendency to monotheism on the part of the Egyptian priesthood, but the priests had hitherto taken good care that this tendency should be ‘accommodated in practice to the practical polytheism of the people’,<sup>1</sup> and the sudden royal proclamation of an entirely new doctrine resulted in a conflict between Amonhotep IV and the forces of Pharaonic tradition that shook the country to its deepest foundations.

Exasperated to the last degree by the inveterate intransigence of the Theban priests of Amon Ra, the young king changed his name from Amonhotep to Akhnaton ; simultaneously he decided to abandon the time-honoured capital of Thebes, and set about building a new capital on a hitherto unoccupied site about three hundred

<sup>1</sup> J. Finegan : *Light from the Ancient Past* (Oxford University Press, 1946), page 95.

#### THE FIRST PLANNED CITY

miles lower down the Nile than Thebes, giving it the name of Akhetaton—Horizon of Aton. To this new capital he proceeded to migrate with his entire Court and government, and it is in this city of Akhetaton that, for the first time in history, we see the distinct workings of a modernistic spirit. It is hardly surprising that this Pharaoh has been called the first doctrinaire in history.

At first all went well at the new capital. The wealth that for countless centuries had poured into the Treasuries of Amon Ra at Thebes was now diverted to the coffers of his upstart rival, Aton at Akhetaton ; the long-resplendent city of Thebes in consequence fell into a decline ; her glory waned ; her trade failed. Akhetaton, on the other hand, continually grew in size and beauty. The newly built city had the novel advantage of being planned, and was almost certainly the first planned city the world had seen. Its streets were laid out at right-angles, an idea which, though it might now be popularly called American, was designed by one of Akhnaton's architects nearly three thousand years before America was discovered. Lining its broad avenues stood the residences of the great court functionaries and the imperial officials, their dwellings surrounded by gardens glowing with all the hues of the rarest flowers and shrubs. Here, too, arose the Royal Palace, a structure of such prodigious proportions and intricacy of corridors, halls, bath-rooms, and toilet-chambers as to present a veritable maze to all comers.

In this beautiful planned city the break with Theban orthodoxy was complete and challenging. Beginning as a revolt against the extreme dictatorial power of a wealthy and fanatical priesthood, and perhaps inspired—as many revolutions are—by the highest motives, it brought with it, as revolutions do, a golden opportunity to rebel against other forms of established custom. But the motive for the break in this case came from above, from the personal convictions of the Pharaoh, and not from below, as with revolutions that have inverted the order of society. Hence, in Akhetaton, it was from the Pharaoh himself that Egyptian art received the impetus to break with the body of artistic convention that for a thousand years had governed and, in his view, stifled its development. The result was a sudden outburst of new art. ‘Artists began to speak with a new tongue’,<sup>1</sup> but, unlike those who are breaking with tradition to-day,

<sup>1</sup> Jean Capart in the section ‘Egyptian Art’ in *The Legacy of Egypt*, edited by Professor S. R. K. Glanville (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1942), page 112.

they strove to 'make the chisel and brush tell the story of what they actually saw'<sup>1</sup> so that under the influence of this reform the Egyptian artist showed his delight in lovely natural designs.

Fascinated and dazzled by his constructive and apparently epoch-making approach to the eternal truths, Akhnaton found no time to devote to the most clamorous problems of his administration whether at home or in the Empire beyond Egypt's borders, with the result that there was disorder at home which led inevitably to the decline of Egypt's ancient prestige abroad. Dispatch after dispatch arrived at Akhetaton from faithful vassals of Pharaoh in his foreign possessions to warn him of the fate that threatened his territories. But Pharaoh remained unmoved. Like Gallio, he cared for none of these things. So it came about that the high-built edifice of the Egyptian Empire began to disintegrate, to totter, and to fall.

The Imperial Archives of this period—unearthed only about sixty years ago among the desolated remains of the once-exquisite city of Akhetaton—have revealed the unspeakable tragedy of a great Empire dissolving like a dream. Here among the records of Akhnaton's Foreign Office came to light the despairing appeals from the loyal adherents of the Egyptian Crown in Palestine and Syria for help against the Hittite invader. Here were demands for protection against local traitors only too ready to take advantage of the King's pacifism. From city after city came heart-breaking entreaties, and the letters grew increasingly insistent. 'Like a bird caught in a snare, that am I', was an appeal that came from an Egyptian Governor in Syria as the Hittites tightened their stranglehold on his city. And this was all too soon followed by an even more despairing call: 'If no help comes, then am I a dead man.' And, following the later message—silence! Other Governors and fighting-men, finding it impossible to attract the royal attention, sent messages to his secretary: 'Tell the King frankly that he is losing all!'



After Akhnaton's death the scene becomes obscure. We have a vague glimpse of a successor, quickly followed by a boy-king, Tutankhaton, and then, soon after the latter's accession, the entire Court and government forsook Akhetaton and returned to Thebes.

The young Pharaoh's name was now transformed from Tutankhaton to Tut-ankh-Amon, a change that speaks for itself; Amon Ra

<sup>1</sup> Breasted : *History of the Ancient Egyptians*, page 278.

'TIME SEEMED ANNIHILATED'

returned instantaneously to favour ; the heart of Egypt began once more to beat and her life to flow along normal channels.

But the great Empire that had been built by the efforts of ten Pharaohs in the wars of two centuries had been lost in twenty or thirty years while Amonhotep the Magnificent had been beautifying Thebes and Akhnaton had been giving all his attention to philosophy, to the new art and to the inditing of his inspired hymns to Aton.

\* \* \*

Tut-ankh-Amon died when he was no more than eighteen years of age. His tomb, so sensationaly discovered by Howard Carter in 1922, is the only royal tomb in the Valley of the Kings that has ever been found more or less unplundered and intact. The first entry into the antechamber of this tomb was one of the most thrilling moments in the history of modern discovery. The beam of light from Howard Carter's electric torch revealed treasure that had lain concealed for thousands of years—chariots glistening with gold and inlay ; gilt couches on which Pharaoh had slept ; beautifully carved chairs ; painted and inlaid caskets ; alabaster vases ; bows ; arrows ; royal robes which Pharaoh had worn : a throne overlaid with gold and adorned with glass, faience, and stone inlay. Every inch of the floor-space was covered with the 'heaped-up riches of a Pharaoh who had died some three thousand two hundred and fifty years ago—before Crete had passed her zenith, before Greece had been born or Rome conceived, or more than half of the history of civilization had taken place'.<sup>1</sup> Carter and those who were with him entered the tomb with a feeling of awe. Time, he tells us, seemed to have been annihilated and to be a factor in human life that had lost all meaning, for, although more than three thousand years had passed since human feet had trod the floor on which they then stood, there were signs all around them that bridged the immense gulf that separated their day from ours. A half-filled bowl of mortar, a blackened lamp, a finger-mark made when the paint was fresh, a farewell garland that had been dropped upon the threshold. A sealed doorway in the north wall of the antechamber was guarded by life-sized statues of the king, one on either side, 'facing each other like sentinels, gold kilted, gold sandalled, armed with mace and staff, the protective sacred cobra

<sup>1</sup> These were the impressions of Professor Breasted, recorded by his son Charles Breasted in his book : *Pioneer of the Past* (Jenkins, London, 1948), page 316.

## THE ISRAELITE AGE

upon their foreheads'.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the sealed doorway was the Sepulchral Hall, and within that hall the shrine—seventeen feet by eleven, and nine feet high—overlaid with gold from top to bottom. In this golden shrine lay the mummy of the Pharaoh Tut-ankh-Amon, 'a ruler', says Professor Breasted, 'who had dominated the ancient world when the Hebrews were captives in Egypt, and Moses, their leader and liberator, had not yet been born'.<sup>2</sup>

From the short period of chaos that followed the death of Tutankh-Amon there emerged the figure of Haremheb; the ruler who paved the way for another grand Pharaonic Dynasty—the Nineteenth.



'By 1300 B.C., the stage was set, culturally and religiously, for the emergence of a heroic figure like Moses.'<sup>3</sup>

The Pharaoh who ruled in 1300 B.C. was most probably either Sethos I or Rameses II of the Nineteenth Dynasty.

The controversy between Egyptologists as to the probable date of the Exodus has up to the present shown no sign of coming to any early conclusion, for although scholarship recognizes the historic basis of the statements in the Books of Genesis and Exodus, the problem of chronology remains unsolved, and there has been a plethora of argument on the subject which can but recall the quatrain of Omar Khayyam:

Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument  
About it and about; but evermore  
Came out by the same Door as in I went.

There are two chief theories as to when the Exodus took place. One of them places it in the Eighteenth Dynasty—*circa* 1580–1320 B.C.—and the other in the Nineteenth Dynasty—*circa* 1320–1200 B.C. Those who favour the Eighteenth Dynasty, supporting their contentions with evidence of undoubted weight, consider that Hatshepsut may have been the daughter of Pharaoh who discovered the infant Moses in the ark of bulrushes, that Thothmose III was the Pharaoh of the Oppression, and that the Exodus almost certainly took place at the beginning of the reign of Amunhotep II.

<sup>1</sup> Howard Carter and A. C. Mace: *The Tomb of Tut-ankh-Amon* (Cassell, London, 1923), page 99.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Breasted: *Pioneer of the Past* (Jenkins, London, 1948), page 322.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Albright, op. cit., page 8.

Many modern scholars, however, Biblical as well as Egyptological, favour the Nineteenth Dynasty as being the most likely period. According to Psalm 78, the Israelites seem to have dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan, and as the general impression given in the Book of Exodus is that the majority of the oppressed Israelites lived not far from Pharaoh's Court, it would follow that Pharaoh presumably resided at or near Zoan. The Pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty did not, but those of the Nineteenth did. For Zoan is the Hebrew name for Tanis,<sup>1</sup> the ancient Egyptian town in the North-Eastern Delta to which the Pharaohs of the Nineteenth Dynasty transferred the seat of government—Thebes remaining the religious capital—and which is almost certainly Raamses, the treasure city of Exodus i. 11, on the construction of which the Israelites toiled and where Pharaoh (possibly Sethos I or Rameses II) 'did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with heavy burdens'.

The discoveries of Egyptologists make it possible to draw a vivid picture of the surroundings in which Moses grew to manhood during the Ramesside period—a picture that would be equally true whether the Exodus took place during the Eighteenth or the Nineteenth Dynasty, there having apparently been little if any change in court life during those two periods.

Though little is known with certainty of the early life of Moses, tradition is by no means silent. As a young man he was, according to the Acts of the Apostles, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and the tradition assigning this side of his education to Heliopolis (On) is interesting because this city contained the oldest and greatest College for the training of the priesthood as well as of the laity. It was the forerunner of all the Colleges of Europe and it was here that Plato is believed to have come to acquire all that he needed of the wisdom of the Egyptians.

Situated about six miles north-east of the site upon which Cairo now stands—though more than two thousand years were still to pass before Egypt's present capital was founded in A.D. 969—the city of Heliopolis in ancient times covered an area of at least three miles square. Here stood the Temple of the god Ra (one of the most highly venerated of all Egypt's gods), consisting of the usual outer, inner, and inmost colonnaded courts, around which were grouped the

<sup>1</sup> The Greek (Septuagint) version reads : 'En pediō Taneōs', which means 'in the plain of Zoan'.

spacious mansions of the priests and sages. An avenue of sphinxes let up to the imposing pylon-entrance.

It was on the high altar of this temple, so ran the august tradition, that the most mysterious and sacred of all the world's feathered denizens, the phoenix, deposited the ashes of its predecessor. According to the most popular tradition the phoenix lived for five hundred years and at the end of that period built a nest with the twigs of spice trees. Kindling these with fire it consumed itself, but a new phoenix arose from the flames and this fledgling, as soon as it had grown strong enough, took up the ashes of its parent and, flying to Heliopolis, laid them on the altar of Ra in the sanctuary of the Temple.

In contrast to the once-pulsating life of this celebrated University City, nothing now meets the eye but carefully irrigated fields with a few primitive villages and a suburb of Cairo, though here and there in the silent recesses of the countryside one may still encounter a few fragments of the ancient city walls, and a solitary red granite obelisk rises out of the fields to testify to the erstwhile splendour of the vanished Temple of Ra.

His education completed, Moses no doubt returned to Court, and we can imagine him in his Egyptian surroundings, not in the least resembling the bearded patriarch of the days of the Wilderness portrayed by the immortalizing chisel of Michaelangelo, but such as, having been brought up as the adopted son of an Egyptian Princess, he would certainly have appeared from the evidence of actual paintings and reliefs of the time. For the important fact that he was not brought up as a Hebrew appears most plainly in more than one passage in Exodus.<sup>1</sup> 'No Jew to see to', we may visualize him as a young man, clean shaven after the prevalent Egyptian court fashion, the short hair combed back from the forehead, dressed in a loose-sleeved garment of the snowiest linen, open at the neck, and with a kilt-like skirt reaching below the knee, his feet encased in shoes with pointed toes. The floors of his apartments were covered with bright-coloured mats; the chairs were upholstered and furnished with cushions; the carved bedstead, made perhaps of ebony inlaid with ivory, had an overarching canopy supported by four decorative pillars; and a notable part of the room's furniture was a wooden chest with trays that lifted out for the storage of his shirts and under-garments. Splendidly tinted dishes and other vessels of the newly invented Egyptian polychrome glassware, and elaborately chased

<sup>1</sup> Exodus : xxiv.-xxvi. and vi. 12.

## MOSES

gold and silver plate adorned his table. At night his rooms were lit by lamps or candles transfusing a softened light through bowls and vases of translucent alabaster.

The court entertainments which Moses would certainly have attended, took place in large, tastefully decorated rooms whose ceilings were supported by columns gaily festooned with flowers and coloured ribbons. The guests, richly dressed and begarlanded, sat at little tables while, to the rhythm of drums, tambourines, and castinets and to the music of lute, harp, and flute, slenderly built girls, in diaphanous attire, or nude, performed seductive dances to bewitch their senses.

\* \* \*

Leaving Doctor and Saint to continue their great Argument on the precise date of the Exodus, we have it on the authority of Professor Peet 'that an exodus occurred need not for a moment be doubted',<sup>1</sup> and we can feel the strongest assurance that the account given in the Book of Exodus has a background substantially identical with that of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties. All the Pharaohs mentioned in these pages as having perhaps played their parts in these dramatic events—Thothmose III, Amonhotep II, Sethos I, Rameses II—can still be met face to face, for the mummies of all of them are still to be seen in Cairo.

\* \* \*

Thenceforward the story of Pharaonic Egypt is a remarkable repetition of earlier history. A strong Pharaoh . . . a line of weaklings . . . internal dissensions ending in chaos . . . loss of prestige . . . the accumulated wealth of ages dissipated . . . famine stalking through the land. At rare intervals, a man of destiny appeared and the ancient glories would for a time revive. Even such a man was Shishak, a contemporary of Solomon, who ascended the throne about 950 B.C. and who, in the fifth year of the reign of Rehoboam, attacked Jerusalem 'with twelve hundred chariots and three score thousand horsemen, and . . . people without number'. On that occasion he 'took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the King's house, he took away all'—an historical fact recorded not only in the Books of Kings and Chronicles but also on one of the

<sup>1</sup> *Egypt and the Old Testament* (University Press of Liverpool), page 106 of the 1924 edition.

#### THE ISRAELITE AGE

walls of the Temple of Karnak, where a relief shows the god Amon leading forward rows of Hebrew captives on each of which is carved the name of a palestinian town or district which Shishak claims to have captured—one of them being the Field of Abraham.

The years that succeeded the death of Shishak were years of Decline preceding the final Fall. Ethiopia, for a thousand years an integral part of the Egyptian Empire, suddenly threw off the yoke and invaded the territory of her erstwhile suzerain . . . Then came the Persians . . .

And then, with Egypt still under Persian control, the pattern of her future was woven on a Greek loom by inexorable Fate in a little island off the coast of Hellas.

## THE FOUNDING OF ALEXANDRIA

**T**HE precipitous slopes of the small Greek Island of Samothrace rise steeply out of the sapphire waters of the Aegean, ruggedly magnificent. Awe-inspiring, too, they must have been in the fourth century B.C., when the Island was still regarded as the home of certain half-divine beings who were venerated with rites accounted among the most famous mysteries of all antiquity.

Among the novices who performed these mysteries was a young and very beautiful princess named Olympias, who claimed descent from Zeus, the Greek counterpart of the Theban god, Amon. Olympias was, says Plutarch, a zealous devotee of the orgiastic excitements of the cult, and the serpents which she carried when dancing in honour of the Wine-god Dionysus could be seen wreathing themselves about the ivy wherewith the women were dressed in those ceremonies ; and which even wreathed themselves about the javelin in her hand and writhed about the garland encircling her head.

In or about the year 359 B.C., the young King Philip of Macedonia—whose kingdom lay to the east of what is now known to us as Albania—landing on this very island, was completely captivated by the wild but irresistible fascination of this lovely royal mystic and married her.

It did not take him long to discover, when it was too late, that the bride he had married in haste was a potent and dangerous witch. On the night before the wedding she dreamed that a thunderbolt had entered her side, and that withal there was a great fire that dispersed itself all about her in flames. Soon it began to be noised abroad that Olympias was in the habit of consorting with a snake, credibly asserted by popular belief to be none other than Amon in serpent form, so that the King, not unnaturally disturbed, sent a swift messenger to the Delphic Oracle for advice as to the course he should take. The Oracle's response was that he should henceforth honour Amon above all other gods. The reply did not however impede him, to quote further from Plutarch, from withdrawing his love and kindness from so uncanny and alarming a spouse.

## THE FOUNDING OF ALEXANDRIA

The marriage was therefore dissolved. Very soon afterwards Olympias gave birth to Alexander, and at the very moment of the birth the matchless temple of Diana of the Ephesians—vastest of all ancient Greek faneS and one of the World's Seven Wonders—was burnt to ground-level. 'This day', declared the priests of Ephesus, 'a torch has been kindled in some part of the world which will one day consume the whole of the East'—a prophecy which was soon to be fulfilled. In this wise amid lightning flashes and crashes of thunder, the news of the birth of Alexander the Great was brought to his father while he was on a military expedition.

Blue-eyed, fair-skinned, clear-complexioned, startlingly handsome, his golden locks falling thickly about his neck, the boy Alexander grew to manhood, physically and mentally equipped to play a part such as befitted the reputed descendant of a god. How far, if at all, Alexander himself gave credence to the legends about his birth is open to doubt.

At the age of thirteen he was placed under the tutorship of Aristotle, and it was from that celebrated philosopher that he learned the art of clear and logical thinking.

In 337 B.C. Philip was murdered.

There was more than one claimant to the throne, but the personal magnetism of the youthful Alexander rallied to his side the great and invincible army created by his father, sweeping every rival from his path. Hence by the spring of 334 B.C., at the age of twenty-one, the young king was ready for the campaigns that immortalized his name.

By 332 B.C. his army had fought its way to the threshold of Egypt. Gaza was occupied after scenes of unparalleled carnage and unspeakable outrage, and Alexander now crossed the desert to Pelusium, the eastern seaport of Egypt and key to the Delta, whose ruins are still visible about eighteen miles east of the existing Harbour of Port Said.

Pelusium surrendered without a struggle, and the Egyptians, whatever may have been their real thoughts about the rumour that Alexander was the mystically born son of Ammon, hailed this opportunity of ridding themselves of the detestable Persian yoke, and greeted the young Macedonian as their Liberator. In this way Egypt passed peacefully into Alexander's hands.

From Pelusium the Greek army marched southward to Memphis where Alexander, after making a spectacular entry at the head of his glittering host, offered oblations in the Temple of the Egyptian god, Ptah. This done, he retraced his steps to the Mediterranean,

#### A CITY TO BE NAMED AFTER HIMSELF

where he selected the site for a city to be named after himself, and to be the chief port of the empire that he planned to create.

With the eye of genius Alexander chose a site at the junction of East and West which could become the centre of the commerce of the then known world. This site was opposite the small Island of Pharos, and it was here that he delineated the main outlines of his dream city. This task completed, he proceeded to the Oasis of Siwa, where stood the famous shrine of his mythical-mystical ancestor, Amon. The Oasis of Siwa was a twenty-day journey across the Libyan Desert, and at the time of Alexander's visit its Oracle rivalled the chief Greek Oracle at Delphi, but whatever secrets may have been revealed to him must remain for ever unknown, for they died with him. All that is known is that the priests of the temple greeted him as the son of the god, and that this fact left a deep and abiding impression on his mind. Thenceforth, apparently feeling himself to be under the protection of the gods, he planned and fought the great campaign which he now regarded in some sort as a divine mission —the conquering of Babylon, or Babel.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile he returned to the site that he had chosen for his new city opposite Pharos, and there had a final talk with his Court Architect, Dinokrates. It was he who had rebuilt the temple of the goddess Diana at Ephesus which had been destroyed by fire on the very night when Alexander himself was born.

Alexandria then began to take shape as a truly imperial city. A Boulevard measuring not less than a hundred feet broad became its backbone. Provided with colonnades to protect pedestrians and shoppers from the fierce Egyptian sun, it extended for more than three miles in length from the eastern to the western gate, following much the same route as the present-day Boulevard Fuad I. At a point close to the site occupied at the present time by a mosque which has been named The Mosque of the Prophet Daniel by the Moslem population, this imposing avenue was crossed at right angles by a second colonnaded avenue extending from the city's northern to its southern extremity. The remaining streets, crossing these main thoroughfares at right angles, thus divided the city into well-defined blocks.

The spring of 323 B.C. found the young King with his mission completed in Babylon, where he received embassy after embassy from the farthest confines of the known world to congratulate him

<sup>1</sup> Genesis xi. 3-9.

## THE FOUNDING OF ALEXANDRIA

upon his achievements, but it was at this moment that he was stricken down by the fever that ended his life. So it happened that he breathed his last in the Palace of his great Babylonian predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, and passed away at the age of thirty-three.

The struggles for power, intrigues, murders, and gradual disintegration of the Empire that followed Alexander's death fall outside the scope of these pages. All that can be recorded here is that Egypt became the prize of one of Alexander's greatest generals, Ptolemy, who first ruled the country as a satrap, and finally declared himself king. The Egyptians recognized Ptolemy not only as Pharaoh but also as a god, and it was in this way that the dynasty of the Ptolemies was founded. Alexander's body was brought back to the city that he had founded. Embalmed in honey, according to an ancient tradition, it reposed in a resplendent coffin of massive gold.

Year following year, Alexandria continued to grow, until it became, next to Rome and Antioch, the most magnificent city of the age. The vast lighthouse of gleaming marble, which also became one of the Seven Wonders, was the world's first erection of this sort for the benefit of mariners. It rose to a height of nearly six hundred feet above the Island of Pharos, and its powerful beacon-fire was visible at night, it was alleged, from a distance of above thirty miles. The Island of Pharos itself was linked with the mainland by a mile-long mole known as the Heptastadium, which divided the water-front into two harbours, that facing north being known as the Great Harbour, and the other facing south-west being the Harbour of Happy Return.

The Royal Palace, a masterpiece wrought out of every exquisite available material—wood, stone, and metal—that could be assembled, stood at the south-east corner of the Great Harbour and a flight of steps led down to the water of an inlet known as the Royal Harbour. Near the centre of the city was situated the University—the Mouseion—the first of all the world's schools that merited the illustrious name of 'University',<sup>1</sup> where men of letters, including many of immortal renown, wrote and lectured. The Library contained half a million rolls. Here 'Aristarchus, anticipating Copernicus, guessed the earth's movement round the sun'.<sup>2</sup> Here Eratosthenes calculated with

<sup>1</sup> It was, says Sir H. Bell, a combination of something like a modern academy and a university.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sir H. Bell: *Egypt—from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1948), page 54.

#### THE FIRST STEAM-ENGINE

amazing exactitude the circumference of the globe. Here Euclid wrote his epoch-making *elements*. Here Hérôن produced a machine that could fairly be described as the world's first experimental steam-engine. Nor was it Alexandria's last or least claim upon the gratitude of posterity that it was the city where the first translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew into the Greek, known as the Septuagint, was made.

Around the Mausoleum containing the embalmed body of Alexander stood side-chapels devoted to the cult of the kings of the Ptolemaic Dynasty—a Dynasty that ruled Egypt for nearly three centuries and was brought to an end by the tragic death of the last and most illustrious of the line—the glittering Cleopatra the Great.

## CHAPTER 5

### C L E O P A T R A

Of the great Cleopatra's ancestors little need be said. The son of the founder of the dynasty, Ptolemy II, murdered two of his brothers ; Ptolemy III was murdered by his son, who became Ptolemy IV and who is believed to have planned the murder of his brother, uncle, and mother. Ptolemy V had no feeble-minded scruples against putting to death anyone who had offended him, and another king of this dynasty, ridding himself of his nephew because he was heir to the throne, married the dead boy's mother. So grew this spate of crimes against nature, but there is no need to relate any further details until we reach the reign of Ptolemy XII. This king married his stepmother, murdered her, and was promptly murdered himself in turn. He was succeeded by Ptolemy XIII, the father of Cleopatra. Uneasy indeed must have lain the heads that wore the crown in the pedigree of the world-famous Cleopatra.

There is no doubt whatever that the first Ptolemies brought wealth and prosperity to Egypt. Their administration was strong and capable and there was order in the land. But these Macedonians could never forget that they were a master race ; they looked upon the liberated Egyptians as definitely their inferiors. Greek financiers, scientists, technicians controlled the elaborate bureaucracy ; Egyptian employees, artisans and peasants filled the lower ranks of society. The Court was at Alexandria, a foreign city that was never even considered to be an integral part of Egypt ; the rest of the country provided a solid foundation upon which rested the pyramid of Ptolemaic power.

As time went on the character of the ruling class deteriorated and a decline set in, and there is clear evidence even at this early stage in Egyptian history of the existence of a Nationalist movement. Nevertheless, Ptolemy succeeded Ptolemy, and the Egyptians, with the same courage in adversity and the same capacity for hard work that is still their outstanding characteristic, tilled and sowed and reaped and tilled and sowed to reap again. It was the fruits of the labour of the

### CLEOPATRA'S FATHER

fellahin of those days, added to the trade brought by the great Mediterranean port which Alexander had founded, that helped to fill the coffers of the nonchalant sybaritic Pharaohs of this Dynasty to overflowing.

Yet throughout the entire Ptolemaic period the people of Egypt continued to worship their age-old gods as their fathers had done before them for so many millennia, though Ptolemy I, in the hope of forging a link between his Greek and Egyptian subjects, had founded a new (Hellenic-Egyptian) cult. To accomplish this he took the bold step of setting up a new god to combine the Greek god Zeus with the Egyptian Osiris-Hapi. The new god was named Serapis (a contraction of Osiris-Apis) and the new Temple, built of red granite, and approached by a hundred steps, dominated the entire quarter of the city where it was erected.

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Cleopatra's father, one of the most depraved and dissolute even in the whole long line of the Ptolemies, found himself in a grave predicament. He himself on mounting the throne in 80 B.C. had taken the title of Ptolemy XIII, but his predecessor had left a will bequeathing the Kingdom to the Roman Republic. The new King, whose one and only desire was to be left to his own devices and vices, could find no better way of protecting his throne than by bribing as many members of the Roman Senate as were venal enough to accept his insults, hoping that by this means he would be left unmolested. When Julius Caesar, then all but bankrupt, became Consul, Ptolemy bribed him to the extent of about half the entire amount of Egypt's revenue, and the resulting taxation, confiscation of property, and inevitable debasement of the currency so infuriated the Alexandrian mob that they rose in rebellion. Ptolemy thereupon fled to Rome, leaving behind him the eighteen-year-old Princess Berenice, a younger daughter, Arsinoe, two infant princes, and Cleopatra, then eleven years of age, of whose remarkable Destiny there were as yet but few indications.

When Ptolemy arrived in Rome Julius Caesar was in Gaul, but Pompey, at that moment the idol of the whole of Rome, gave the self-expatriated king some measure of hospitality. In Egypt, however, Ptolemy's affairs declined rapidly from bad to worse. The throne was seized by Berenice, who proclaimed herself Berenice IV, while the people of Alexandria, far from sorry to be rid of a ruler whom

## CLEOPATRA

they both detested and despised, despatched a delegation of their sympathizers to Rome in the hope of securing permanent recognition of the government they had set up to replace that of Ptolemy XIII. A masterly counter-stroke of the King met the occasion. Hiring a gang of ruffians to waylay the delegation before they reached Rome, he had some of them murdered, and placated the others by gifts.

It was now that Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus formed their Triumvirate, and it was their sanction that enabled Ptolemy to hire a bankrupt Roman Proconsul in Syria, by dint of a colossal bribe, to lead an expedition to Egypt to place him again upon the throne of the Pharaohs.

Once more, therefore, an invading army appeared before the Fortress of Pelusium. Once more the Fortress surrendered. And on its fall the Roman legions seized Alexandria. In this way Ptolemy XIII found himself once more in possession of the throne.

Among the Roman troops who entered the city on this occasion was a young and handsome cavalry officer who in due course met face to face the young and beautiful Princess Cleopatra. A contemporary relates that this officer immediately fell under the spell of Cleopatra's Evil Eye. His name was Mark Antony.

One of Ptolemy's first acts after his reinstatement was to put the beautiful and young but rebellious Queen Berenice to death. His next was to propitiate his many Roman creditors by appointing one of them as Controller of Taxes. Egypt thus found herself with a foreign army in occupation of the capital, foreign officials controlling the country's revenue, and a king who could only reign with the permission of a foreign power.

For four years of harassed existence Ptolemy continued to reign. His death in 51 B.C. was unlamented. Under his will, Cleopatra, then about eighteen years old, and her ten-year-old brother became joint rulers of Egypt with the titles of Cleopatra VI and Ptolemy XIV, and the Roman People themselves were appointed the Executors of the Will.

The Royal Palace at Alexandria now became a hotbed of intrigue, in accordance with the usual fate of most Oriental Palaces. The precise facts about the development of the plot that followed have not yet become known. All that is known is that the chief villain of the piece was a Palace Eunuch named Potheinos and that his two chief fellow-conspirators were Theodotus, the Royal Tutor, and Achillas, the Commander of the Palace Guard. Whatever the facts,

#### A CRISIS AND A TRAGEDY

the result was that Cleopatra, at twenty-one years of age, was compelled to flee for her life to Syria, leaving behind her the iniquitous Trio who proceeded to rule Egypt in their own interest though in the name of the Boy-Pharaoh, who was then about fourteen years old.

It was not long before the high spirit and invincible self-confidence of Cleopatra led to the collection of an army of which she placed herself at the head, and, on approaching Pelusium, she found the army of her young brother drawn up between her advancing force and the sea-coast in order to guard the approach to that town and fortress.

A decisive battle which must have brought far-reaching consequences appeared quite clearly to be inevitable. But this battle never took place, for it was then that one of those coincidences happened that so often raise history to a higher level of dramatic intensity than any drama ever staged.

A galley was now rounding the headland, on the deck of which were seen to be both Pompey and his wife. For the great Pompey before whom the world had so recently bowed had become a fugitive escaping from the close pursuit of Julius Caesar. The friendship between Pompey and Caesar—the two greatest men in Rome—had led to the accustomed rivalry ; the rivalry had developed into a hostility that had led to war ; and Pompey's forces had been worsted. This was the reason why Pompey, confident of the hospitality of the Royal House of Egypt which he had laid under so many obligations, was sailing to Alexandria in the hope that in due course of time he would be able to devise a plan for his own return to power.

The young Pharaoh called together his Cabinet of scoundrelly advisers, Potheinos, Theodotus, and Achillas, to discuss the difficulties of the situation. To offer Pompey their protection would provoke an immediate attack by Caesar ; a refusal, on the other hand, would drive him to take refuge in Cleopatra's camp, and then, if Pompey by any means should return to power, they themselves would be left in a serious position. A point-blank refusal was therefore out of the question.

The evil genius of the Royal Tutor solved their problem.

'Dead men,' he observed laconically, 'do not bite.'

So, before long, from the deck of their galley, Pompey and his wife could see a small boat putting out from the shore and making in their direction. On board could be seen Achillas, two centurions (one of whom, named Septimus, had formerly served under Pompey)

## CLEOPATRA

and some attendants. The boat came alongside the galley and Achillas invited Pompey to accompany him to the shore. Pompey accepted the invitation, and, taking with him two of his own centurions, a freedman, and a slave, he descended into the small boat and took his seat. But his suspicions, now that it was too late, were rapidly awakened, and the disembarking of troops from the Egyptian warships made his anxiety the more acute. The most ominous sign of all was the sullen silence of his hosts. At last he turned to Septimus.

'Surely,' he asked, 'I am not mistaken in believing you to have been formerly my fellow-soldier?'

Septimus nodded; but even he still remained stubbornly silent.

The boat touched the beach. Pompey gave a hand to his old freedman to help him from his seat. He turned, and Septimus instantaneously stabbed him in the back. At this signal others struck him with swords. Pompey pulled the toga over his head with both hands and, collapsing, met his tragic fate in silence.

As Pompey's severed head was held aloft his wife's cry of despair could be heard from the shore. The captain of the galley hurriedly weighed anchor and put out to sea.

Pompey's body was dropped into the water, only to be eventually washed up on to the beach. The devoted old freedman lingered until the conspirators had left, and then, with the help of a Roman soldier who had once served under Pompey, collected all the available driftwood and jetsam for the funeral pyre of one who had played a great part in the epic of Rome.

\* \* \*

A few days later Julius Caesar arrived at Alexandria. He had expected to conquer and capture Pompey. The Fates had anticipated him. He took possession of the Palace, and on the pretext of being the executor of the late King's will he summoned Cleopatra and Ptolemy to state their claims.

The young King came at once, and Potheinos accompanied him. But Achillas, prompted by the eunuch, brought twenty thousand troops to Alexandria and so placed them that they could effectively prevent Caesar and his small force from leaving the neighbourhood of the Palace. At the same time he made it all but impossible for Cleopatra to reach Caesar, and, even if she had succeeded in eluding Achillas and entering the Palace precincts, it would have been comparatively easy for Potheinos to arrange for her to be murdered.

#### CLEOPATRA MEETS JULIUS CAESAR

before she could reach Caesar. It was impossible, therefore, either for Caesar to communicate with Cleopatra or for her to communicate with him, and his plan to act as arbiter and dictator of Egyptian policy was thus baulked—or so it seemed.

Late one evening, when the sky was ablaze with the ethereal tints of Egypt's unrivalled afterglow, a small boat manned by a powerful Sicilian slipped into the Great Harbour whence it proceeded to the Royal Harbour at its south-east corner. Imperceptibly it drifted towards the Palace steps as the brilliant hues of evening faded and darkness fell almost at a single stride.

The occupant of the boat stood up, fastened a rope round a bundle enclosing what appeared to be a mattress and blankets, and hoisted it up on to his shoulders, just as an Egyptian peasant might do to-day. By some unknown means he gained entrance into the Palace and was admitted into Caesar's presence. Lowering his burden here, he untied the rope. A blanket fell, and Cleopatra, dishevelled as to a tress or two but no whit the less collected, cool and confident, stood before Caesar, radiating all the witchery and romance of her utterly resistless, Lamia-like charm.

CHAPTER 6

THE SHADOW OF ROME

FOR a single beat of Time's wings the two gazed at each other —Caesar of patrician mien but basilisk-eyed and gaunt, with that 'lean and hungry look' he so feared in Cassius, and with the eagle-like glance before which even his boldest opponents quailed ; Cleopatra, in the full flush of her irresistible charms, all eager to try out the fatal power of her Greek-Egyptian allurement ; Caesar, the living embodiment of the grandeur that was Rome ; Cleopatra, who from the first glance knew that the Master of Rome was her incalpable victim.

Whatever Cleopatra's moral character may have been, there must surely have been some drops of the divine 'ichor' of the Pharaohs in her veins to enable her to serve the cause of her Dynasty with such passionate energy.<sup>1</sup> 'Too long viewed through the distorting medium of official Roman propaganda',<sup>2</sup> she is now, at last, recognized as 'the greatest of the successors of Alexander the Great'.<sup>3</sup> As Dr. Tarn has so well said : 'Rome, who had never condescended to fear any nation or people, did in her time fear two human beings ; one was Hannibal, the other a woman.'

The stage was thus set for the greatest of all such duels in Roman history.

Far into the night she and Caesar talked, and so faultless was the part that she played that Caesar inevitably became, as Dion Cassius has put it, the advocate of her whose judge he had intended to be, and when morning broke, and the young King Ptolemy was brought before Caesar, he intuitively divined that the association between his sister and Caesar had already begun. After a brief and humiliating interview he rushed from the room and, exclaiming in uncontrollable

<sup>1</sup> Professor Sir H. I. Bell says : 'If we regard her (Cleopatra) merely as the super-harlot whom Shakespeare, in accordance with tradition, depicts, still more as the kittenish adolescent of Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, we shall not only be doing her grave injustice, we shall be getting our historical perspective seriously out of focus' (*Egypt*, page 62).

<sup>2</sup> Idem.

<sup>3</sup> Idem.

'IN THE NAME OF CAESAR'

anger that he had been betrayed, snatched the crown of the Pharaohs from his head and dashed it upon the ground.

Soon enough after this, fighting between Egyptian and Roman troops began and the streets of the magnificent metropolis were deluged with blood. In the Harbour, the Egyptian Fleet was ablaze down to the water-line. Lapping the dock-side buildings, the flames spread to the city where, according to some authorities, the world-famous Library was burnt to cinders.

Within the Palace, two eunuchs plotted and plotted, each for his own individual hand. Potheinos exhausted his infernal arts to rouse resentment against the Romans by reminding them of Caesar's intolerable draughts upon what had once been the almost fabulous resources of Egypt's Treasury. Under his skilful legerdemain the young Pharaoh's golden dishes and goblets disappeared from the royal table and wooden platters took their place ; and at the same time the report was cunningly spread that the most priceless vessels of the Crown had been melted down and used by Caesar in part-payment of the alleged debts which he declared to be due to himself as the principal creditor of the late King. To the further infuriation of the populace, the temples themselves were stripped of their treasures in the name of Caesar.

The other eunuch, Ganymedes, working on a different plan, eventually succeeded in escaping from the Palace with Princess Arsinoe, and, by the unstinted bribery of officers and officials, endeavoured to raise her to the throne.

Events moved rapidly, but not as the schemers had planned. Potheinos, caught in the act of corresponding secretly with Achillas, was promptly beheaded. Achillas was murdered by Ganymedes because, for his own reasons, he remained loyal to the boy Pharaoh.

The drama that followed the murder of Achillas developed at breathless speed. Strengthened by reinforcements, Caesar launched an attack on the Egyptian army, and the Egyptians, out-generalled and out-fought, were decisively defeated in a battle near the Nile to the north of Memphis. Young Ptolemy endeavoured to escape in a small boat, but the boat was swamped by a number of fugitives from the battle and capsized, and the body of the fifteen-year-old Pharaoh, when subsequently found, was identified by his golden corselet.

The gates of Alexandria were thrown open, and Caesar rode

through the city to the Royal Palace in a superlative blaze of glory and grandeur.

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Caesar now permitted Cleopatra's youngest brother, who was about eleven years of age, to join her as nominal king-consort in accordance with ancient custom.

By this time, however, Caesar's presence was imperatively required at Rome, but in order to avoid separation from Cleopatra, he first set out with her on a royal progress up the Nile.

Escorted by four hundred ships, they sailed up the River in a vast double-decked floating palace measuring three hundred and forty-five feet in length, with a mast a hundred feet high, carrying a linen, purple-fringed sail, and propelled by a double bank of oarsmen. And Cleopatra, according to Houssaye, instinctively played the part of a crowned Aspasia, never ceasing to be the charmer, but joining dignity to grace, hiding the courtesan under the Queen.

In 47 B.C. their child was born—a son, Caesariion.

There is some doubt whether Caesar had left for Rome before Caesariion's birth, but a year later Cleopatra appeared at Rome herself with her eunuchs, her slaves, her young brother, and the one-year-old heir of the Caesars and the Ptolemies, as well as an immense train of baggage.

Possibly she may have reached Rome in time to see the great triumph in which Caesar's victories over Gaul, Egypt and other places were celebrated. If she did, she must not only have heard the jeers of the crowd at the sight of the images of Potheinos and Achillas, but must also have seen her own sister, Arsinoe, exhibited as a captive in chains.

She had come to Rome expecting that mightiest Caesar would wed her, and that he and she together would sway the destinies of Rome. She and her suite dwelt in a spacious villa surrounded by beautiful gardens. But though flattered and courted, she aroused the jealousy and even the hatred of the Romans. The rumour that Caesar meant to marry her deepened the distrust and antagonism of his political enemies, and lurcd to the Senate House, where he went in answer to a message, he was attacked and slain at the foot of the statue of Pompey which he had re-erected when the populace had cast it down.

When Caesar's will was read it gave the death-blow to Cleopatra's

hopes ; for he had made his great-nephew, Octavian, his heir. The dazzling prospect of unsurpassable grandeur vanished in a moment and it seemed for ever, and Cleopatra returned to Egypt.

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Mark Antony was now the most powerful man in Rome, and he was determined to be its sole ruler.

His rival was Octavian, who, when eventually he became Emperor received the title of Augustus. And as he is known to history by this name, he will be referred to as Augustus from now onwards.

Although a temporary reconciliation was effected between these two rivals, and although a Triumvirate was actually established (with the division of power between Antony, Augustus, and Lepidus), the resulting peace forboded no more than a truce such as may be shared between strong men for a while, but the end of which, with little if any doubt, is war.

The politics of Rome are not for these pages except in so far as they impinge upon the hem of the Egyptian story, and all that need be said is that Cleopatra's one desire was to remain neutral.

She was, however, Queen of a country that was far too rich and far too important to be overlooked by Rome, and when Antony set out for Asia to consolidate the power of the Triumvirate in the East, she could not have been in any way surprised at receiving a demand from Antony that she should meet him in Tarsus to discuss the situation.

She was then about twenty-eight years old, an age—as Plutarch commented—‘when woman’s beauty is at the prime’. And the man whom she was about to meet was reputed to be as handsome as she herself was beautiful.

Tarsus, in those days a commercial centre of first importance, is a few miles upstream from the mouth of the River Cydnus, at the north-eastern corner of the Mediterranean. In anticipation of the encounter, Cleopatra ‘furnished herself with a world of gifts, a store of gold and silver, and sumptuous ornaments. . . . But yet she carried nothing with her wherein she trusted more than in the charms and enchantment of her passing beauty and grace.’ So wrote Plutarch.

On hearing that she had reached the River Cydnus, Antony awaited her at the public Tribune in the Market Place. But as reports of the splendour of her fleet began to spread amongst the expectant crowd

surrounding the Tribune, the entire concourse melted away to join the throng on the quayside, until at length only Antony and his actual retinue were left. Eventually, instead of his anticipated reception of the Queen of Egypt, he himself received an invitation from Cleopatra to dine with her. And he accepted it !

Late in the evening the Queen's great vessel was seen to approach the quayside rowed by banks of oarsmen. 'The poop', says Plutarch, 'was of gold, the sails of purple, and the silver-painted oars kept stroke in rowing to the sound of music.' Cleopatra herself lay under a pavilion of cloth-of-gold tissue, apparellled and attired like the goddess Venus. Around her were boys dressed as cupids, and slave-women attired as Nereids and Graces, and the faint exotic aroma of an Egyptian incense (the prescription for which is inscribed in hieroglyphs on a wall in an Egyptian temple) was wafted on the breeze to the tensely expectant multitude on the shore.

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne  
 Burn'd on the water, the poop was beaten gold ;  
 Purple the sails, and so perfumed that  
 The winds were love-sick with them ; the oars were silver  
 Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made  
 The water which they beat to follow faster,  
 As amorous of their strokes. For her own person  
 It beggar'd all description.

The walls of the room of the vessel in which Cleopatra later entertained Antony were hung with cloths embroidered in purple and gold, and every dish in which food was served was of gold, inlaid with precious stones, chased and embossed with masterly craft. And when Antony expressed his surprise, Cleopatra—says Socrates the Herodian—'<sup>smiling,</sup> made him a present of everything he saw'.

Plutarch tells us that the festivities lasted several days, during which she so won upon Antony that she awakened and stirred up many vices yet hidden in him.

Her conquest of Antony achieved, Cleopatra sailed for Alexandria ; and Antony, without a moment's thought for the pressing nature of the duties that clamoured for his attention in other parts of the world, and conscious only of the fact that life apart from Cleopatra was unbearable, followed her without a moment's hesitation.

'I am persuaded,' remarked Augustus, 'that he has been bewitched by that accursed woman.'

It is obvious that Cleopatra meant to use Antony as she had begun

to use Julius Caesar. Whether she ever loved him may well be questioned. What is certain is that she intended to make use of his blind devotion to preserve for her at least her own independence and to secure the throne for her children. Her unbounded ambition even led her to hope for a day when she and Antony would become joint-rulers of an Egypto-Roman Empire in which Egypt, by its wealth, by its geographical position, and by her own union with the most extravagantly idolized and powerful Roman of the day, would play the leading part.

In anticipation of that golden era, she used all her charms on Antony so that he remained her willing slave throughout the entire winter when the shock of a menace to Roman power in Syria and Asia Minor by the Parthians suddenly roused him from this demoralizing infatuation. To aggravate the acuteness of the danger, a violent feud sprang up in Rome itself between his own supporters and those of Augustus, a feud which spread with all the fury of a tropical hurricane.

Roused, therefore, like a man from a drunken debauch (grimly remarks Plutarch), Antony tore himself from the arms of his charmer and sailed from Egypt with all speed.

Six months later Cleopatra gave birth to twins.

From time to time news of Antony's changing fortunes reached her. His wife and his brother had been defeated by Augustus. He and his wife, Fulvia, had met but they had quarrelled, and Fulvia had since fallen ill and had died. Later came news of a reconciliation between Antony and Augustus; a treaty had been negotiated between them making Antony supreme master in the East while agreeing that Augustus should be given a completely free hand in Italy. Last of all came the news that this treaty had been sealed by the marriage of Antony to Augustus's sister, Octavia, and that Octavia had since given birth to a daughter.<sup>1</sup>

Cleopatra had, it seemed, once again staked all that she had to lose, and had lost!

Once more, however, came a dramatic change.

That pestilential passion of Antony for Cleopatra which had seemed to slumber, awakened tempestuously. Political as well as emotional causes may have contributed to the sudden change, for the resources of Cleopatra might well have inspired him with the hope that with her assistance he might, in the not distant future, be able to defy

<sup>1</sup> It was this daughter who eventually became the grandmother of the Emperor Nero.

Augustus and perhaps become master of Rome and of Egypt as well. Plutarch's only comment is that Antony's passion for Cleopatra now gathered strength and broke into flame, and, while on his way to the East to take up the command of the army with which he intended to invade Parthia, he sent an emissary to Alexandria to bring Cleopatra to meet him as a matter of the utmost urgency.

The two met at Antioch, where they went through a form of marriage, which, however, was invalid in Roman law.

In the Spring that followed, Antony opened his campaign for the invasion of Parthia, Cleopatra accompanying him as far as the Euphrates, whence she returned once more to Alexandria. It was on this return journey that, as she was travelling by way of Damascus and the Jordan Valley to Jericho—according to the account left by Josephus—she encountered Herod who, considering her as a possible future menace to his plans for his own career, arranged for her to be ambushed and murdered on the lonely robber-infested road from Jericho to Jerusalem. Realizing however in time that this might involve him in even more acute peril, he changed his mind and escorted her in person to Gaza and thence to Pelusium.

On arriving at Alexandria, Cleopatra gave birth to a son whom she named Ptolemy.



Meanwhile, Antony's Parthian campaign, which made all Asia shake, had led not to victory but to one of the most crushing defeats ever suffered by Rome; but the news of Antony's discomfiture at once called forth all the better qualities of Egypt's great Queen whose habitually clear brain enabled her even in this emergency to organize the collection of money, clothes, and munitions of war, after which she assembled a fleet and set sail for Syria. Here, at a village on the Phoenician coast between Sidon and the modern Beirut, she met Antony and the remnant of his army—ragged, starving, indigent. After distributing food, clothing, and other necessaries to this army, she returned with Antony to Alexandria.

Antony's star, so long in the ascendant, was at last waning. His prestige in the East was at its lowest ebb, and news reached him from Rome that Augustus now held the West in complete subjection.

Nevertheless, after a brief interval for reorganization, he again left Alexandria to initiate a fresh campaign against Parthia, Cleopatra accompanying him. But now came another shock—a message from

## ANTONY'S TRIUMPH

Athens to the effect that Octavia, Antony's lawful wife, was about to join him, bringing with her a force of picked Roman soldiers, munitions, and money to help him to retrieve his fortunes. For one moment it appeared as if the virtues of Octavia the only good woman who had ever had any influence on Antony's life, might at last be given an opportunity of eclipsing the fatal charms of Cleopatra.

But Antony was determined at all costs to prevent the two women from meeting, and, even at the risk of provoking war with Augustus, peremptorily ordered Octavia to remain at Athens.

Cleopatra used all her arts to retain her influence over Antony—and used them with such effect that she even succeeded in goading him to take the irretrievable step of ordering Octavia to return to Rome.

War between the two most powerful men who shared the heritage of Rome now became all but inevitable, and the gulf between East and West became dramatically apparent when Antony, after conquering Armenia, determined to celebrate his triumph in Alexandria rather than in Rome—a complete break with immemorial custom, for no Roman triumph had ever been previously celebrated anywhere but in the capital ; and Antony, by giving preference to the Egyptian city, was emphasizing the completeness and finality of the break between them.

Antony's triumph was therefore staged at Alexandria, and a phalanx of his Roman legionaries headed the brilliant procession that left the Royal Palace and passed between crowds massed to suffocation in the gaily decorated hundred-foot-wide street of Canopus. The native mob lavished applause to the echo on the Egyptian troops and even upon the Asiatics, but reviled and mocked the captives, though the sight of the defeated King of Armenia loaded beyond endurance by massive chains of gold brought awe-struck silence.

A chariot drawn by four white horses bore Mark Antony.

Slowly the procession passed the University, crowded with sages and scholars, and at length approached the colossal Serapeum, where, waiting to receive homage from the captives, was seen the Queen of Egypt seated on a golden throne upon a silver-plated platform, bedecked in the dazzling robes of Isis and wearing the authentic crown of the most beloved goddess of the Egyptian pantheon.

After this pageantry events moved swiftly but inexorably towards one of the great tragedies of recorded history. For while Antony

#### THE SHADOW OF ROME

was plunging from one dissipation to another, and crowning each new indiscretion with greater and more incredible follies, Augustus was resolutely strengthening his hold upon the West pending the opportune moment for declaring war, not on Antony but on Cleopatra.

CHAPTER 7

## CLEOPATRA—AUGUSTUS

**I**T was in 31 B.C. that the issue was decided by a battle which remains one of the baffling mysteries of warfare. The true story may never be known, for it is buried deep beneath the version left for posterity by the victors, who both hated and feared Cleopatra.

The narrow Gulf of Ambracia on the western coast of Greece separated the armies of Antony and Augustus. Antony's headquarters were near Actium, the town that has bequeathed its name to the crucial encounter that followed and which was on the southern shore of the Gulf. Augustus was encamped on the opposite side. Antony's fleet occupied the Gulf, while that of Augustus cruised outside it.

After a few months of skirmishing, Antony's position had been continually weakened, and by the end of August his fleet was effectually blockaded in the Gulf.

When at length he determined on an engagement, it was at sea and not on land that he ordered the battle to begin. His soldiers objected. 'General,' said one of them who bore the scars of many a wound received in Antony's service, 'why do you distrust this sword and these wounds and place your trust in miserable timbers? Let the Egyptians and the Phoenicians fight on the sea, but let us Romans have the land, where we know well how to conquer or to die.'

Nevertheless Antony ordered his fleet to break the blockade and thousand upon thousand of his legionaries were sent aboard his ships. Augustus's fleet which awaited them was formed into three divisions, right wing, centre, and left. Agrippa was in command of the left wing.

Antony's fleet was also formed into three divisions, that on the right—facing Agrippa—being commanded by Antony himself.

In addition, Antony had the Egyptian fleet of sixty ships, commanded in person by Cleopatra, who drew up her squadron in the rear of Antony's right and centre.

Antony's plan seems to have been to use a change of wind, which he apparently anticipated, to turn his enemy's left, and as this would leave a gap in the line of battle, he arranged that as he moved outwards, Cleopatra's squadron should come in on his left to fill the space thus caused.

When the wind eventually changed, both Antony and Agrippa raced to turn each other's flank. Antony's flagship was grappled, and, while vessel after vessel was being fired, sunk, or captured, some of Antony's squadrons suddenly backwatered and returned to the Gulf. Others had apparently intended to do the same, but were prevented because Cleopatra's fleet blocked the way. They therefore raised their oars in token of surrender.

Antony was thus left with only his personal squadron, which was engaged, and Cleopatra's, which was isolated. He then signalled to Cleopatra to carry out a plan which they appear jointly to have agreed to adopt in the event of the day going against them. This plan was to break through to Egypt and to leave Antony's most trusted general, Canidius Crassus, to bring what remained of his army back to Egypt overland.

Cleopatra's sixty ships, therefore, immediately hoisted sail and stood southward while Antony, who could not extricate his flagship, leapt into a five-banked galley and followed Cleopatra.<sup>1</sup>

The Queen signalled Antony to come on board her ship. He did so, but refused to speak to her. In the utmost depths of despair he walked to the prow and sat down, holding his head in both hands.

Hour after hour passed while he continued to sit there staring out to sea, a broken man, his world in ruins, and days went by before the combined intercessions of Cleopatra's most favoured attendants Iras and Charmion, succeeded in bringing him and the Queen together.

At length Egypt was sighted and anchor dropped off an insignificant Roman outpost about a hundred and sixty miles west of Alexandria: a desolate spot with a little fort, a few huts and palms, the sea and the desert. Here Cleopatra left Antony while she herself

<sup>1</sup> No two accounts of this battle agree, but Dr. Tarn gives the results of his long and deep study of the subject in the *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. xxi, 1931, pages 173 *et seq.*, and the most recent description is in the first volume of Major-General J. F. C. Fuller's *The Decisive Battles of the Western World*, published by Eyre & Spottiswoode while this book is being written (1954).

sailed on to Alexandria, and when once she was back at her capital all her qualities as a great Queen became once more apparent. Her first care was to make provision for dealing with any outbreaks that might take place when her sensational defeat became known at Alexandria. As if victorious, she sailed into the Great Harbour to the accompaniment of triumphal music and with pennants flying, and the sailors were instructed to dance on the decks. Her vessel was moored at the Palace steps and the Queen herself was carried ashore in royal state. Once inside the Palace she took control of the garrison and was complete mistress of the situation.

News of the disaster at Actium nevertheless filtered through, and certain of the Queen's foremost subjects began to stir up trouble. But they paid for it with their lives, and Cleopatra, her old self-confidence returning, and with the certain knowledge of her popularity with the majority of her people—especially with the native Egyptians<sup>1</sup>—coolly and energetically but defiantly planned the restoration of Egypt's greatness, notwithstanding all the odds that were accumulating against her.

Antony succeeded in reaching Alexandria, to some extent buoyed up by the hope that, with the support of his army, some sort of peace with Augustus might even then be achieved. But news of the surrender of his troops after Actium extinguished all such hopes, and thenceforward blow followed blow in rapid succession. Every city in Greece submitted to Augustus, and Asia Minor followed suit. Antony's Empire in the East had crumbled in his hands.

A broken man, he then lived the life of a recluse, seeing no one, not even Cleopatra, until the coincidence of the coming of age of Caesarion and of his own son brought about a joint celebration of the occasion at which he and the Queen met. She may not have loved him. It is doubtful whether she ever loved any man, for ‘the keynote of her character was not sex at all, but ambition . . . and the essence of her nature was the combination of the charm of a woman with the brain of a man, both remorselessly bent to the pursuit of that one object, power’.<sup>2</sup> But she was a loyal wife to Antony and had no thought whatever of abandoning him,<sup>3</sup> and for all the menace of the future she refused to abandon hope. There burnt in her a spark of the fire from Alexander’s spirit. She was perhaps the only one of all his heirs whom his fire had touched.<sup>4</sup> Antony, on the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. x, page 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, page 35.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, page 104.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, page 38.

other hand, completely demoralized, once again gave way to extremes of dissipation, and Cleopatra, whose plans depended for their success on Antony's co-operation, exerted herself to regain control of him. To do this she adopted the only course which seemed open to her—that of proving herself, as ever, irresistible, and joining him in a round of amusements under, as it seemed, the shadow of death. It was while she and Antony were holding their last wild banquets that she, who never did things by halves, began her cold-blooded experiments with poisons. Doses were administered to prisoners under sentence of death, and Cleopatra, during her personal inspections of the victims in their torment, made the discovery that the bite of an asp brought on a drowsy stupor and a gentle exudation that broke out over the face—symptoms preceding coma and leading to an apparently painless death.

At last came the news that Augustus had reached Syria and that all its garrisons had surrendered. Antony, who had now entirely abandoned himself to riotous living, left the whole burden of governing the country and organizing its defences to the Queen while she, with her old heroic, indomitable courage, fought her lonely battle against Fate. Her position, though serious, was not necessarily hopeless, for Alexandria—its site so wisely chosen by its illustrious founder—was strongly fortified. Cleopatra's Egyptian force was stiffened by a certain number of Roman and Macedonian troops, and a formidable fleet lay ready for action in the Harbour. She therefore felt that Augustus might be disposed to negotiate, and, her main concern being now for her son's inheritance, she sent her crown, her sceptre, and her state chariot to him with the request that, in return for her surrender, he would first accept them, and then bestow them again, if not upon herself, at any rate upon Caesarion.<sup>1</sup> Her envoy also bore a request from Antony who asked for no more than to be allowed to retire into private life.

After an interval that must have appeared an age came the answer. Augustus would grant any reasonable terms to Cleopatra provided that she would put Antony to death. He next sent one of his freedmen to her with a secret message, but Antony, suspicious of its import, caused him to be seized, beaten and sent back to Augustus who at once, in reply, attacked Egypt from two directions, both armies converging on Alexandria.

Cleopatra, with Iras and Charmion and other attendants, now

<sup>1</sup> This was done by other 'client-kings' of Augustus, including Herod.

established herself in the imposing Mausoleum that she had built for her own interment : an impressive, two-storeyed building, remarkable for its height and the beauty of its workmanship, its doors secured by exceptionally massive bolts and bars.

Now came the news that Pelusium had fallen and that the forces of Augustus had reached the outskirts of Alexandria itself. For a brief instant the embers of Antony's old fighting instinct were rekindled and blazed up higher than ever. By a bold sortie he routed a Roman cavalry division and chased the survivors back to their base. Elated by his success, he ordered his army to leave Alexandria and take up a position on the slightly rising ground east of the city between the Racecourse and the sea—not far from the present-day tramway station that bears the name Camp de César. From this position of vantage he watched the Egyptian fleet as it left the Harbour and approached the fleet of Augustus. It was a thrilling moment. But no victory was now pending for Antony, for the Egyptian vessels suddenly paused and the crews saluted the enemy by raising their oars. The salute being acknowledged, they went straight over to Augustus. The two fleets, thus united, then advanced against Alexandria, and before Antony could recover from his stupefaction his cavalry division also galloped over to join the enemy's lines. His infantry thus deserted, were quickly broken and overthrown, and Antony fled back to Alexandria. Here he burst into the Palace in an ecstasy of fury, declaring that Cleopatra had betrayed him, though it was obvious that it was not the disloyalty of Cleopatra but the bribes of Augustus that had caused his downfall.

Cleopatra, accompanied by Iras and Charmion, hurried to the Mausoleum and caused the great bolts to be secured. The Queen then sent a message to Antony, telling him that by the time he received it she would be dead. At this climax of his misfortunes Antony put off his armour and ordered his most trustworthy slave to slay him, and the man drew his sword—but plunged it into his own body, falling dead at his master's feet.

'Valiantly done,' said Antony. 'I thank thee for having shown me what I should do myself, though you could not do it for me.'

Seizing his sword, he thrust it with all his force into his vitals and fell, mortally wounded.

Cleopatra, who had not so far carried out her threat against her life, desperately ordered Antony's body to be brought to her presence. Antony, whose wound had been staunched, was still semi-conscious

## CLEOPATRA—AUGUSTUS

and was borne through the crowded streets on an improvised litter, goading his slaves on by ceaseless commands, threats, and taunts in the hope of reaching the Queen before he expired.

The Great Doors of the Mausoleum were still bolted and barred in momentary expectation of the arrival of troops from Augustus, but Cleopatra, with ropes lowered from a window and the help of Charmion and Iras, drew up the dying Antony and had him laid upon a couch. At the sight of his sufferings, all the woman in her came uppermost and she burst into a violent fit of weeping. Antony took a draught of wine, rallied for a moment, raised himself with a dying effort, implored Cleopatra to seek safety in flight, asked her not to grieve for him but to remember their past happiness. A moment's interval and he lay dead in Cleopatra's arms.

\*       \*       \*

A Roman officer from Augustus rode up to the Mausoleum and demanded admittance. His instructions were that the Queen must be taken alive to grace the triumph at Rome. But the bolts remained undrawn and Cleopatra, speaking to him through a grating, named her terms: the crown of Egypt for one of her sons.

With this reply the envoy returned to Augustus.

And the Mausoleum doors were still fast barred.

Cleopatra continued to wait before taking her life, in the hope of safeguarding her children, and, as she expected, Augustus's envoy soon returned to the Mausoleum—not, however, this time without assistants, one of whom kept the Queen in conversation through the grating while the envoy himself, mounting a ladder, climbed through an upper window closely followed by other Romans. Hurrying past Antony's corpse they reached the stairs—and there they were detected by one of Cleopatra's attendants.

'Ill-starred Cleopatra,' she called out. 'You are taken alive after all!'

The Romans broke into the room. Cleopatra, turning, drew a dagger from her bosom, but as she raised the weapon it was snatched from her hand and a Roman held her arms at her side while her dress and person were thoroughly searched. She was then left, guarded.

Augustus entered Alexandria in triumph, passing down the Street of Canopus to the so-called Gymnasium to address the chief inhabitants. Here, as he mounted a platform, the Egyptians 'smelt the ground'—in the old Egyptian phrase—prostrating themselves

in an agony of terror until their conqueror assured them of his clemency. He then ordered the death of Antony's son, but allowed the body of Antony himself to be buried with every mark of respect, Cleopatra following his corpse to the tomb that had been prepared for him—a pathetic, tragic figure. On returning to the Mausoleum she fell into a high fever, tossing from side to side on her couch in the upper room, muttering again and again in her delirium : 'I will not be exhibited in his triumph !'

Slowly she recovered her strength, and eventually Augustus decided to see her. 'Which of them sought the interview is immaterial. It was necessary to both. It was more than the meeting of two great antagonists ; two civilizations, soon to be fused, stood face to face in their persons.'<sup>1</sup>

As Augustus entered the room she was reposing upon a couch with no more than the lightest and slightest of robes to veil her charms. Seeing him, she sprang up, and the robe fell to her feet. Her voice trembled with the intensity of her emotion ; and the power of her comeliness and charm, says Plutarch, were as ever, all but irresistible. But it was no more than a cleverly prepared piece of acting by perhaps the greatest actress the ancient world had ever known, and Augustus, in a resolute effort of simulated disdain, stoically conducted her back to her couch and seated himself nonchalantly beside her. What passed between them is known only to themselves, but it seems certain that Augustus told her that he intended to annex Egypt. 'I will not be led in his triumph,' she continued to exclaim again and again after he had left her, and when, soon afterwards, news reached her that Augustus intended to have her sent to Italy three days later, she asked to be allowed to offer oblations at Antony's tomb. Permission was given, and on reaching the spot, Cleopatra fell on her knees, embraced the tomb, and covered it with flowers. And it would seem that one of her attendants used the occasion to arrange for the asp.

Returning to the Mausoleum, she bathed and perfumed her robes, plaited her hair with unusual pains, and sat down to dine, apparently in a mood of complete serenity.

At this moment a countryman approached the door of the Mausoleum carrying a basket. On being challenged by the guard he removed the leaves that covered the contents. It was a basket of figs. It is believed that the asp was brought to Cleopatra among

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge Ancient History, vol. x, page 109.

these figs, though some put forward the improbable view that she kept poison in a hollow pin concealed in her hair—if so, this may have been intended for use in an extremity by her two supremely faithful attendants.

The Queen now dined. She dismissed all her attendants except Iras and Charmion and wrote to Augustus requesting that her body might be buried beside Antony's. On receiving this message, Augustus at once despatched messengers to the Mausoleum.

On arrival they hastened upstairs, and, opening the door of Cleopatra's chamber, entered.

Upon a golden couch lay Cleopatra, inanimate and stark but glorious in all the Oriental splendour of her imperial robes, bestarred with a galaxy of gems. Lifless at her feet lay Iras. Charmion, breathing hard and keeping her feet with difficulty, swayed unsteadily as, with trembling hands, she secured the crown of the Pharaohs upon the head of her famous mistress.

'Was this well done, Charmion?' asked one of the Romans with smouldering wrath.

'By all the gods, well done indeed,' she panted as she drew her last breath, 'and not unmeet for a Queen descended from so many noble kings.'

So speaking, she too fell dead.

## THE GROWTH OF DAWN

**T**HIRTY years after his triumph over Antony and Cleopatra, Augustus issued his famous decree that all the world should be taxed. He had by this time established himself securely as the first of the long line of Roman Emperors, and had—to use his own words—‘added Egypt to the dominions of the Roman people’.

It was as a result of this decree of Caesar Augustus that ‘Joseph went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into the city of David called Bethlehem to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child’. And it was the events which followed the issue of this decree that suddenly and seriously menaced the life of the Child who was born soon afterwards in Bethlehem.

So it came about that the Holy Family travelled by the immemorial caravan route from Judea to Egypt—across the memory-haunted leagues of barren wilderness once traversed by the armies of Rameses, Cambyses, and Alexander the Great, and, in more modern times, by Bonaparte. Nor can we forget that it was along this same route that the armies of Allenby fought their way into Palestine.

Skirting Philistine Gaza, Joseph and Mary passed on to Pelusium, and thence by way of Kantara and the Land of Goshen to Heliopolis, or On. At the dawn of this, the first, Christian century, this once-important university city had already fallen from its pristine greatness and lay a crumbling ruin, though the lure of its incredible romance still survived to attract tourists from ancient Greece—of whom Strabo was one—to visit the temple of Ra (of which substantial remains then existed) and to gaze at the ruined building that was believed to have housed the supreme spirit of Plato.

No trustworthy lay records remain to assist us in reconstructing the episode of the arrival of the Holy Family at Heliopolis. Tradition alone remains. But archaeology has taught us not to undervalue tradition. A site is still pointed out near the modern village of Matarieh—not far from where the obelisk of the Temple of Ra rises, a lonely but impressive relic amid silent fields—where tradition alleges

that Joseph and Mary and the Babe rested awhile. And this spot lies on the ancient route from Judea to the northern extension of Memphis, which was then, and still is, known as Babylon.<sup>1</sup> It was in this Egyptian Babylon, according to the persistent and unvarying tradition of the Egyptian Christians, that the Holy Three took sanctuary.

It does not seem to be generally known in Europe that there is in Egypt a place called Babylon. But there is. It lies well beyond the modern suburbs south of Cairo, beyond the Aqueduct of El Nasir ; beyond the Church Missionary Society's Hospital ; beyond the primitive shops and the busy Nile-side quays where the great triangular-sailed river-boats unload the crops from Upper Egypt. Near this point, not far from the river-bank though hidden by houses, are the surviving bastions and the ruined walls, no less than eight feet thick, of the Fortress of Babylon built by Marcius Turbo in the reign of Trajan. This fortress is a few hundred yards from the site of the similarly named fortress which Strabo had seen and described in 24 B.C., and which he had found occupied by one of the three Roman legions which were at that time garrisoned in Egypt. And as Strabo then described the inhabitants of this Egyptian Babylon as still worshipping the gods of ancient Egypt, the local Christians not unnaturally claim it to have had a civilian population as well as a Roman garrison in the first century of our era. There is, too, an age-old tradition that a Jewish colony dwelt in this Babylon, in which case the view of the Egyptian Christians that it would have been a natural place of refuge for a Jewish family that had fled from Palestine for safety does not appear entirely unreasonable.

Impressive though the remains of the Fortress of Babylon appear, it is only the upper structure that is now visible, for the surface of the ground has risen several feet since the time of the original building. The chief gateway is opened to-day by a woman with a key of truly Oriental type measuring about a foot in length—probably a smaller variety of the great key of the house of David which had to be laid on a man's shoulder when carried.<sup>2</sup> It consists of a stick with nail-like teeth which fall into corresponding holes when dropped into the lock. On issuing from the arch you find yourself in a quarter that seems to be perishing from an accumulation of years and dust ; and the

<sup>1</sup> 'The Roman fortress of Babylon', as Lane-Poole wrote in *The Story of Cairo* (page 34), 'was a northern extension or successor to the decayed but then still existing Egyptian capital of Memphis'.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Isaiah xxii. 22.

inhabitants—a fact not without significance in a Moslem country—are nearly all Christian.

Completely hidden in a maze of narrow streets and buildings of ‘ancientry’, in the very heart of the quarter enclosed by the Roman walls, there stands a low doorway from which an odour of incense diffuses. From this door a winding corridor leads into a narrow court, reputed to be of millennial antiquity, and from this spot onwards the aroma of incense grows increasingly obtrusive. At the end of this court a door leads into a venerable church, beneath which, surprise of surprises, the visitor discovers yet another church, which is perhaps the smallest Christian church in the world and is venerated by the native Christians above all other sites in Egypt. Nevertheless, it is not, as might at first be thought, the crypt of the church that stands over it, since it is on first-century ground-level. And local tradition declares it to have been built in the Apostolic age to mark the site of the house in which the Holy Family dwelt during their abode in Egypt.

The episode of the Egyptian Sojourn not unnaturally passed unnoticed amid the manifold activities of the World-Empire of ancient Rome, and there are no contemporary written records of the founding of the national church of Egypt by St. Mark the Evangelist some forty-five or fifty years later, so that the warp of the Egyptian traditions of this period cannot be completed by the woof of actual history. All that can be said is that, traditionally, St. Mark belonged to a wealthy Jewish family residing at Pentapolis on the extreme northwest frontier of Egypt; that his parents migrated to Palestine while he was still a child; that in A.D. 45 or soon afterwards he paid a visit to Egypt and that St. Peter accompanied him as far as Babylon—Egyptian Babylon—where he wrote his First General Epistle.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest local tradition, supported by Eusebius, records that St. Mark’s first convert to Christianity was an Alexandrian shoemaker named Annianus. This conversion was soon followed by that of other pagan inhabitants, and it was not long before (to quote from the ‘History of the Patriarchs’) the brethren found means to build a church in the district of Alexandria then known as Bucolia. But

<sup>1</sup> Some authorities consider that the ‘Babylon’ referred to in 1 Peter, chap. 5, v. 13, is not the Egyptian Babylon but is meant to refer either to the Mesopotamian Babylon or to Rome. To this, the Egyptian Christians reply that it would have been natural for St. Mark to revisit his family’s home, and that there was a Babylon in Egypt in which there was a Jewish colony.

when, during the reign of Nero, the Alexandrians learnt that St. Mark, a Jew, was turning the people from the worship of the ancient gods, 'they sought him everywhere and appointed men to watch for him'. It was at this crucial moment that St. Mark ordained Annianus Bishop of Alexandria, and very soon afterwards 'certain idolatrous unbelievers' seized St. Mark, fastened a rope round his neck, and dragged him along the ground to prison where he spent the night. On the following morning he was again dragged through the streets, and, a pyre having been made, he was cast into the fire. His body, on being withdrawn from the smouldering ashes, was 'carried to the church in which they used to celebrate the Liturgy, and there they enshrouded him and prayed according to the established rites'.<sup>1</sup> His body is said to have been buried in this church, and, for centuries afterwards, the election of the Patriarchs of Alexandria took place at his tomb.<sup>2</sup>

No written reference to St. Mark as the founder of the Egyptian Church has been discovered earlier than that of Eusebius (265–339) and many therefore regard the story as no more than a legend. But the Egyptian Christians reply to all doubters by asking : 'If St. Mark was not the first to bring the Gospel to Egypt, who was, and when was it brought?' All that can be done here is to quote a single indisputably high authority, Sir Frederic Kenyon, who says : 'Christianity was no doubt introduced to Egypt in apostolic times' and it would have come 'in the first place to the Jews of Alexandria and the Greek-speaking people generally'.<sup>3</sup>

At the time when Christianity was first preached in Egypt Alexandria was still, as had been the case for centuries past, the heart and soul of the ancient world's learning and culture, and its greatest glory came even more from its writers, scholars, thinkers and scientists, than from its immense wealth, commercial importance, and architectural splendour. By a remarkable coincidence, the famous so-called Alexandrian School was at this time almost entirely engrossed by deep and original

<sup>1</sup> This brief account of the evangelization of Egypt is taken from *The History of the Patriarchs*, written by Bishop Severus in the tenth century. This book is the *Liber Pontificalis* of the Egyptian Church, and the materials for its compilation were the ancient documents for which Severus searched in all the Egyptian monasteries in the tenth century.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. L. Butcher : *The Story of the Church in Egypt* (Smith Elder, London, 1897), vol. i, page 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible* (the smaller one-volume edition published in 1936). The quotation is from page 922.

philosophic speculation of a religious character. Its ever-restless intellects during these first few centuries of our era were proclaiming themselves competent to solve the problem of the relationship between God and His universe and particularly the relationship between God and Man. Philo, the leading Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, promulgated his doctrine of the Divine Logos ; the Neo-platonists developed a system of philosophy which combined Platonic and Oriental elements and ultimately took, for them, the place of religion itself ; the Gnostics opened another field to pagan seekers after truth. And into this maelstrom of competing philosophies and philosophers came the revelation of the Word. In Alexandria it acted as a challenge to superlatively subtle intellects that had been sharpened in the Mouseion, and there then began the life and death struggle between the Goliath of pagan tradition and the youthful Christian Church.

As time went on, the great and famous body of professors and scholars of the Mouseion turned their backs one after the other on that ancient citadel of paganism and became champions of the new religion. But as the Christians grew in numbers the privacy of their worship was noticed and became a cause for suspicion, for ' . . . the mortar which held together an empire embracing many races and peoples differing in background, speech and culture, was the common observance of the state religion. The Christians, refusing their participation in pagan rites, were an alien and unassimilated element in the body politic, and it was natural therefore that steps should be taken to absorb or eliminate them.'<sup>1</sup> Then there began the terrible series of persecutions of which Tertullian wrote : ' If the Tiber reaches the walls ; if the Nile fails to reach the fields ; if the heaven withholds rain ; if the earth quakes ; if there is famine ; if there is pestilence ; at once the cry is raised : " The Christians to the lions ! " '

So fell the long, deep, ever-increasing darkness that ushered in the bloodstained Era of the Martyrs. That a single shred or remnant of the Egyptian Church should have survived is an inexplicable miracle. No extreme of torture ever recorded in the annals of inhumanity was left unexploited by the fiends who inflicted it. Is it to be wondered at that some, as Dionysius tells us, advanced boldly to the altars and declared that they had never been Christians, and some, pale and trembling, jeered at by hostile multitudes, appeared equally afraid to die or to offer the compromising sacrifice ? But the remainder stood fast and boldly proclaimed their unshakeable devotion to their Master.

<sup>1</sup> Professor Sir H. I. Bell : *Egypt* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1948), page 103.

Their descendants, the Christian minority that still survives in Egypt to-day—about a tenth of the population—are known as Copts, their Patriarch claims to be in the direct line of succession from St. Mark ; and their national church, the Coptic Church, is a marvellous example of a Christian minority that has survived the utmost fury and frenzy of their persecutors. It was the blood of the martyrs that was, as Tertullian in an inspired phrase declared, ‘ the seed of the Church ’.<sup>1</sup> The pagan Egyptians and Greeks during the Era of Martyrs marvelled helplessly at the mysteries of a faith that could exalt their familiar friends and fellow-citizens to a degree of heroism so far exceeding all that they could personally imagine. Not a few pagan Egyptians and Alexandrian Greeks possessed one or more well-tried Christian friends, and, when an even severer crisis of persecution supervened, gave shelter to Christian refugees. In this way they came to know something of the personality of the Master for whom Christians so calmly faced the most appalling perils, and by the end of the third century there was quite a large Christian population in Egypt. When, early in the following century, the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Imperial House, it came to be not only a Faith but also a power to be reckoned with.

And the cavilling and quibbling character of the typical Alexandrian sophists remained. The insatiable passion for philosophic speculation inherent in the old pagan Mouseion which had given Gnosticism and Neo-platonism to the world was continued in its now famous Christian Theological College. There, its dialectical hair-splitters—impervious to the teachings of experience, incapable of remembering that sheer logic, though a good servant can be, like fire and water, the worst of all masters, and that it is the letter, in contrast with the spirit, that killeth—gave way to an uncontrollable craving for explosive Theological speculation. It was at this moment that Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, in a mood of more than usually bold Alexandrian speculation, kindled a controversial flame that swept from end to end of Christendom—a flame that still smoulders to-day.

Arius, in endeavouring to make the Christian faith more palatable to the rank and file of the Alexandrian sophists, propounded a dogma designed to meet their uninspired reasoning half-way. After gaining the support of many of the educated Greeks he succeeded, through the sheer power of his preaching, in influencing great masses of the com-

<sup>1</sup> ‘ We grow in numbers,’ he said, ‘ as often as we are mown down by you ; the blood of the Christians is our seed.’

mon people. The Patriarch, at last awaking to the fact that the Christian faith was being undermined before his very eyes, ordered Arius to cease from spreading what he considered to be a dangerous and abominable heresy. But Arius was not prepared to accept any limitation of his views, and on refusal, was promptly excommunicated. In retaliation, Arius broke into open rebellion. To the complete consternation of the Egyptian Patriarch, one bishop after another rallied to the support of Arius and the excommunicated priest now found himself at the head of a strong faction of the most dangerous opponents to orthodox Christianity.

At this crisis the challenge of Arius was as suddenly met by another brilliant product of the Alexandrian schools. This was a youthful deacon named Athanasius, whose eloquence was more convincing even than that of Arius. Fanned from both sides, the fires of controversy spread far beyond the confines of Egypt. Vehement partisans of Arius and Athanasius all over the Roman world argued and supported their arguments with such heat and passion and mounting violence that the Emperor himself was compelled to take action, and a General Council was ordered to be held at Nicea in Bithnyia in the year 325 for the purpose of formulating a comprehensive, final, and binding creed for the Universal Church.

From all points of the compass the Bishops foregathered in answer to the Imperial call. By sea and by land they came—in ships, on horses, on mules, and with them came immense trains of priests and followers. ‘Truth is reason’, was the cry of some; ‘Truth is a mystery’ was the retort of their opponents.

To ensure surroundings that should be in every way worthy of this first Great Council of his Christian Church, Constantine marshalled all the pomp and pageantry that his vast Empire could produce. Court officers who had but recently been the bitterest persecutors of the Christians were now present to welcome the Bishops; the very Roman legionaries who had been used in some of the most recent attempts to crush the Christian faith were now compelled to salute the arrival of the Christian guests. The Imperial Guard themselves escorted the solemn procession of Christian Bishops to the Palace of the Roman Emperor.

So now Arius, whose sincerity of purpose seems at least to have been fairly established, rose to address the unprecedented assembly of Christian divines. A skilled and persuasive orator, he set forth his thesis leading to an uncompromising denial of the words of Christ

himself: 'I and my Father are one', with an eloquence worthy of a better cause since it implied in metaphysical language a point-blank denial of the 'consubstantiability' of the Divine Father and Son.

Then Athanasius rose to address the august assembly, and with no less power and even more devastating oratory, he prevailed upon the majority of the Bishops to formulate with a more than usual precision the doctrinal definitions now contained (with some verbal differences) in the Nicene Creed.

The Alexandrian followers of Arius, with normal 'Alexandrian' intransigence, refused to abide by the decision of Nicea. Excommunications, riots, mob-outrages of the too-familiar Egyptian pattern followed, and the less said about this stormy period the better. The dying echoes of this ancient and regrettable feud can still be heard in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds<sup>1</sup> and the lesser doxology. Of the scene in which this great ecclesiastical drama was enacted no trace remains at Alexandria itself. The Church of St. Mark, where Arius was presbyter, has vanished. No stone remains of the Church of St. Theonas where Athanasius launched the thunders of his anathemas against Arius. But the Alexandrian spirit, staunchly loyal to the unorthodox formulae of its own orthodoxy, still survived, and at the dawn of the seventh century the Egyptians were still debating with fanatical fury the faintest, almost indistinguishable shades of difference between the then current schools of thought—serenely unaware of the growing menace that was rapidly developing in Arabia to everything that Christian Egypt had come to revere—no matter what differences might divide it.

For meanwhile, in the pagan city of Mecca, brooding unintermittently over the problem of Life, Death and Eternity as they appeared to his still darkened, untutored, tortured mind, and shocked in particular by the hideous unreality of the idols of his own tribe, mused the prematurely rejected Prophet of Islam—Mohammed !

<sup>1</sup> Athanasius himself did not write the creed that bears his name.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE ARAB CONQUEST

FILLED with despair as he contemplated the senseless shibboleths and stark depravity of his now unbearable surroundings, Mohammed was shaken to the profoundest depths of his soul. Lingering day after day in caves, in lonely mountain recesses, in barren wildernesses, he hoped that solitude would bring the one supreme inspiration for which he so ardently longed. The contemplation of nature clamantly demanded an answer to the question : ‘ Who was the creator of the Universe ? ’ Could it have been one of the idols of his tribe ? Impossible ! And again : ‘ What was the purpose and manner of the creation of Man ? ’ Insensibly he grew accustomed to the conviction that the world was unquestionably governed by divine ordinance and by that alone. But illiterate, untaught, ignorant as he was, how could he ever hope to express the lava-flow of thoughts that poured unceasingly from his overburdened brain ? Prolonged and bitter, even to the parting of soul and body, was the travail of his mind, and in that overcharged atmosphere the tempest continued to rage with ever-growing intensity until the supreme moment came when, in the stillness of a cave at the moment when Dawn, breaking in all its majesty, was transforming what had begun as a river of liquid pearl into the full golden torrent of the Desert sun, Mohammed heard a voice—a voice according to Sirdar Ikbal Ali Shan ‘ like a whisper in the hush of some great Cathedral. “ Thou art the man,” it said. “ Thou art the Prophet of Allah ! ” ’ From that moment Mohammed felt himself to be an instrument in the hands of a mighty power. In a flash he recognized that it was this overmastering power that was calling him with an urgency that nothing could resist to publish abroad his new message to man of life and death, of perdition, of salvation, of Paradise, of Hades.

Egypt, still rent by internal dissensions past all remedy, was so divided against itself that almost any nation wishing to invade it was certain of support from one or other of the many factions within the country itself. For the Copts and the Syrians detested the Romans as much as they loathed each other ; the Jews hated the Christians,

the Christians the Jews. The odium of all sections and parties was whole-hearted, mutual, and fanatical, and there could have existed no shred of patriotism capable of leading to even momentary cohesion between creeds, classes, races, and religions in that fatally distracted land.

And so it happened that when the Persians marched against Rome, took Damascus, advanced on Jerusalem, smote the Holy City, carried off what was universally believed to be the Holy Cross, and at last, in 616, marched on Egypt—that country collapsed so suddenly and so completely that Greek historians could sum up the conquest in a single sentence.

In 622, however, the Romans crossed into Asia Minor to strike the first blow that led ultimately to the recovery of Christian Egypt from pagan Persia, and in that very same year Mohammed—contemned, reviled, and menaced—quitted Mecca to reside at Medina, and by so doing (though he did not know it) inaugurated the Moslem era. Noteworthy though this particular coincidence is, however, others equally remarkable were soon to follow, for in no age can there have been a more extraordinary succession of dramatic coincidences than at the climacteric period at which we have just arrived. The next occurred in 629. In that year Heraclius, Emperor of Rome, who, in the course of his unparalleled series of triumphs had recovered that most precious of all trophies, the Holy Cross, left Constantinople on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to restore it to its rightful position. On arrival at Jerusalem his brilliant cavalcade escorted the sacred relic from the Golden Gate to the Church on Calvary in an atmosphere charged with such unbearable excitement that it was said that ‘all Jerusalem was weeping from sheer emotion’. And at the very moment when all this was happening, a band of Mohammed’s wild horsemen was crossing the Desert in the direction of Muta, in Syria, to open—as events proved—the campaign of Islam against Christendom which did not end until the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

Heraclius, inspired by a burning faith in his mission as champion of the Cross, now made up his mind to end all warfare between parties within the Church so that Christianity could emerge as a united force against which all the enemies of Christendom would hurl themselves in vain.

With the help of three learned prelates he matured his famous ‘compromise’ which he was convinced would heal the Church’s

#### CYRUS BECOMES VICEROY

deepest wounds. To Egypt, now restored to the Roman Empire, he sent Cyrus, whom he made not only Patriarch of Alexandria but also Viceroy of Egypt, with instructions to draw the Coptic and Imperial Churches together in the happy union which he believed his magic formula would make possible.

But the Egyptians, with their hereditary tendency to irreconcilability, refused to compromise. Egypt was indeed now a nominally Christian country ; the Emperor Theodosius had, as long before as 380, made it an offence to follow any other than the Nicene faith. In the following year he had gone a step farther by forbidding all heretical assemblies ; four years later the great Temple of the god Serapis in Alexandria had been stormed by the Christian mob who, with mingled feelings of terror and exultation, forced their way into the mysterious shrine of the god itself and, with gathering courage, had hacked it to pieces and then demolished the entire temple to foundation level. Finally, Hypatia, the beautiful neoplatonic philosopher whose learning and wisdom had made her the most influential pagan philosopher in Alexandria, had been dragged to the Caesareum (which had by then been turned into a church) and there barbarously murdered by the monks. Such were the death-agonies of paganism in Egypt. But neither unity nor concord followed ; for the settlement of the Arian controversy at Nicea had failed utterly to bring peace even among the Christians themselves in Egypt. On the contrary, the country had remained in a state of almost chronic disorder and strife, and was perhaps the most turbulent part of the whole Roman Empire. The schism which, during the reign of Heraclius, cut off the Coptic Church from Catholic Christendom had sprung from the inveterate controversial spirit of the Alexandrian thinkers, who, in further attempts to define the mystery of the Incarnation had introduced considerations of such extreme subtlety that compromise was impossible.<sup>1</sup> Cyrus however was determined that Heraclius's instructions should be carried out, with the result that a feud now developed between Roman and Egyptian which became daily more irreconcilable and more bitter. It was not a feud inspired by any sense of patriotism, for the Egyptians had never known national independence which was therefore an ideal that could scarcely have entered their heads. It was on religion only that Egyptian passions centred. It was for religious

<sup>1</sup> Those who believed the monophysite doctrine were opposed by the dyophysites, and Heraclius hoped to reconcile the supporters of both doctrines by the compromise of monotheletism.

independence that their forebears had been martyred ; and for religious independence they, of the same heroic breed, were now prepared if necessary to die.

When Cyrus found that neither persuasion nor imprecation could shake the entrenched beliefs of the Copts he began to use ever stronger and stronger measures, and from the intensification of these the Great Persecution began—the persecution of Christians by a Christian. The reign of terror which then began lasted for ten years during which flogging, torture, imprisonment, exile, death, were the risk of all who refused to subscribe to the Orthodox Creed.

While Cyrus was wrecking the Emperor's plans for an all-Christian union, the power of Mohammed continually and swiftly expanded. His ten thousand sworn warriors seized Mecca ; his personal black slave ascended the roof of the Ka'aba—at that time still a pagan temple but now the chief sanctuary of Mohammedanism—whence he summoned all faithful followers of Islam to unite in prayer to the One True God. And one after another the Arab princes threw in their lot with the Prophet.

But powerful though Mohammed's personality was, strong though his sway over the hearts of so great a multitude of men, there came a day when he was struck down by a fever.

On the day of his death he pulled aside the curtain of his apartment, and at the sight of the worshippers bending and swaying—as they still do to-day—at the prayer of the dawn, he felt that the purpose of Allah had been fulfilled.

Mohammed's death was announced to the bewildered people by his father-in-law, Abou Bakr, who continued the mission of the Prophet with the title of Caliph.

Abou Bakr lost no time in subjugating the recalcitrant tribes of Arabia. Syria collapsed under repeated hammer-blows of the Caliphate troops. The Persian Empire fell.

When Abou Bakr died, Omar succeeded him as Caliph, and in the winter of 639-640 a little army of three or four thousand Arab horsemen under the command of Amr,<sup>1</sup> one of Omar's greatest Generals, crossed the borderland between Palestine and Egypt bearing aloft the banner of Islam.

Pelusium was taken ; Amr's small force rode on to Kantara (the British base for the Palestine Campaign during the First World War) ; Heliopolis was reached. Such opposition as had so far been met had

<sup>1</sup> Amr-ibn-al-Asi.

been overcome, not always with ease, but now at last, the Romans realized that they had something more than a mere Bedouin raid to deal with.

Early one morning a large and greatly over-confident Roman army emerged from the Fortress of Babylon and proceeded northwards to meet the Caliphate invaders. But, under cover of the previous night, Amr, now reinforced, had despatched a column westward in the direction of the Nile, and another eastward to the foot of the Desert Hills. He himself led his main army southwards towards the spot where the modern Egyptian capital now stands. The Romans, in complete and tragic ignorance of the disposition of Amr's forces, continued their progress northward, walking blindly into the trap that awaited them.

On the site of what is now the Cairo suburb of Abbassieh the battle was joined. Arab scimitars flashed back the rays of the early morning sun as the Moslems attacked the Romans with all the frenzy of fanatical fury. At the crucial moment the contingent of Arabs concealed at the foot of the hills emerged and fell like a thunderbolt on the unsuspecting Roman rear. Realizing too late that they had been caught unawares, the Romans fell hurriedly back but, as they were in the act of doing so, they were charged by the column advancing from the vicinity of the Nile. Panic-stricken, they took to flight. By land and by river in the uttermost disorder the entire Roman army retreated to Babylon, and as soon as the last of the survivors had reached the Fortress, its gates were closed.

Christianity and Islam were now openly opposed in Egypt and one of the crucial moments in world history had arrived. It is therefore of some interest to consider what manner of man it was whose destiny had decreed that he should be the commander of the Moslem army that now faced Imperial Christian Rome in Egypt.

Amr was now about forty-five years old ; short, broad-shouldered, deep-chested. His beard, of which he was inordinately proud, was dyed with a black substance. Dark-eyed, his expression was remarkable for the penetrating power of his glance, and with equal readiness this expression would kindle to wrath or melt into humour. His wit and his eloquence were both of an exceptional order and he enjoyed the distinction of having been made a military commander by Mohammed himself.

Amr opened negotiations with Cyrus, and the craven Viceroy of the Roman Empire, completely cowed by the prospect that faced him,

## THE ARAB CONQUEST

called a meeting of his Bishops, at which it was decided to bribe the enemy to retire.

In those days one of the walls of Babylon was laved by the Nile and was furnished with a great gate—the Iron Gate—giving access to the River. This gate having been opened with the utmost secrecy (for the very rank and file of the Roman soldiery would have indignantly denounced any attempt to negotiate at this stage), the envoys of Cyrus made their way towards the camp of the Moslems. In due course they returned with their report, and that report was a revelation.

'We have seen', they declared, 'a people who prefer death to life and humility to pride. They sit in the dust and they take their mṣals on horseback. Among them there is no distinction of rank, and even their commander is one of themselves. They have fixed hours of prayer,—and they all pray,—and pray with the deepest reverence, after first washing both hands and feet.'

And these Moslems, who preferred death to life, offered Cyrus the choice of either Islam with brotherhood and equality, or payment of tribute in return for protection but with inferior status, or 'war until Allah decides between us'.

Cyrus still clung to the hope that the Moslems might be bribed and offered them an immense sum, coupling the offer with a warning of the total defeat that would be theirs if they were compelled to meet the vast hosts which the Roman Emperor would eventually send to meet them.

'Do not deceive yourself,' was the reply that he received. 'We are not afraid of numbers. Our greatest desire is to meet you in battle. If we conquer, all is well. If not, we receive the good things of the world to come. We pray that we may be found worthy to become martyrs in the cause of Islam. We do not pray for a safe return to our wives and children. Our small numbers cause us no fear, for is it not written in the Book : "By Allah's will full many a time hath a small company overcome a mighty host ?"'

Cyrus, after striving in vain for more honourable terms, at last sailed from Egypt to submit a draft treaty of surrender to the Emperor.

Constantinople reached, Cyrus found himself standing before his Imperial Master, who, in tones of the most withering irony, demanded to know why a hundred thousand Romans were insufficient to deal with twelve thousand Moslems. Tearing up the Treaty, Heraclius branded Cyrus as a coward and sent him into exile.

At Babylon, Roman and Moslem alike waited in suspense. And

#### THE FALL OF EGYPTIAN BABYLON

then one day, a great shout arose from the Moslem ranks. News had arrived that Heraclius was dead. And it was at this moment that the courage of the Roman soldiery seemed to desert them.

The actual moment of the Moslem assault was skilfully concealed. One night a ladder stood leaning unnoticed against the fortress wall. Under cover of darkness El Zobeir, who became one of the heroes of the Moslem world, silently mounted it, scimitar in hand, and shouting 'Allahu Akbar!', leapt on to the wall. His followers swarmed up the ladder after him and made good their footing on the parapet.

At that moment dawn broke over Babylon and the day was Good Friday. But it was no ordinary anniversary. For it was the Good Friday when the followers of Mohammed broke into the fortress that for more than six hundred years had guarded the site of the house which was held to have sheltered the Holy Family from the wrath of Herod.

The Roman leaders, who had received no help whatever from Constantinople, having no heart for further resistance, capitulated on the sole condition that the lives of their troops should be spared. Three days later their garrison left Babylon behind them in the hands of the Moslem host. And it was the Day of the Resurrection !

Babylon in his possession, Amr now led his army against Alexandria, the capital. With but little fighting they reached its suburbs, consisting mainly of convents, gardens, and vineyards. From these they passed into the streets of what was still one of the world's finest cities with its domes, columns, two-thousand-year-old obelisks, statues, temples, palaces ; its wide avenues embellished with so many masterpieces of architecture. In addition rose the aspiring column of Diocletian, the great Cathedral of St. Mark with the marble shrine containing the reputed remains of the Apostle, the world-famed Pharos : and beneath all this superficial splendour lay a veritable underground city with labyrinths of cisterns, many of which reached a depth of four and even five storeys.

The accounts of the period that followed are conflicting, but the final battles, the brief Roman counter-attack, and other less important events preceding the final Roman withdrawal are not in any case of sufficiently general interest to be dwelt upon here. It is however a fact to be remembered that it was in the year 642, upon the Day of the Festival of the Exaltation of the Cross, while the chaunting of this very service still resounded in the Cathedral, that the shattered remnants of the Roman army completed the arrangements for

## THE ARAB CONQUEST

their own safety, and final orders were issued for their evacuation of Egypt.

A few days later the fleet bearing them put to sea and the Cross had surrendered its unique position in Egypt to the Crescent !<sup>1</sup>

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Egypt now became a province of the Caliphate, ruled by governors sent from the cities which at different times became the Caliphate capitals—at one time Damascus, at another Baghdad. The substitution of Moslem rule was not at first unwelcome to Egyptian Christians after the terrible persecution they had endured under the Romans. And the fact that these early Moslem rulers were lenient need excite no surprise since, as a great Moslem authority has declared, ‘the aim of all true religions is to lead man along the path of faith and righteous practice to the attainment of spiritual peace. Christianity’, he goes on to say, ‘and later Islam, have proved their pre-eminence in this respect, and have advanced the civilization of the world . . . Islam, moreover’, he points out, ‘holds Jesus and His message in the highest veneration.’<sup>2</sup>

With time’s passage, however, the Caliphs, under constant pressure for money as they invariably were, looked with more and more covetous eyes upon fertile, industrious, Christian Egypt as a country capable of making good the deficiencies of their own empty Treasuries. Hence, as time went on, increasing numbers of Christians found themselves constrained to accept Islam, until at length the burden of the sufferings of those who remained Christian became so severe that only the most courageous could endure them. It was under the millstone weight of such recurring severity that the character of the Copts came to be what it is.

The record of Egypt’s governors under successive Caliphs and during her transient moments of independence from the Caliphs of Baghdad would be of no special interest to Western readers, at any rate until the arrival of the year 969, when an event of altogether exceptional interest took place. The birth of Egypt’s present capital —Cairo !

<sup>1</sup> Actually the Crescent was not a synonym for Islam until after 1453. It was originally a Christian symbol but was adopted as a Moslem emblem by Mohammed II after the fall of Constantinople.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Nizamat Jung : *An Approach to the Qur'an* (Diocesan Press, Madras, 1939), page 13 of the section : ‘The Right Path’.

The new capital was the issue of a quarrel that arose over the succession to the Caliphate—an early example of the rivalry between the theory of the divine right of a Ruler and a nation's desire for self-representation. One party maintained that after the murder of the Caliph Ali, which occurred some three hundred years before the date of Cairo's foundation, the succession had passed by divine right to the son of Ali and the Prophet's daughter, Fatima, whose name was on this account given to a new (*Fatimid*) Dynasty. The succession of this candidate however was opposed, and on his death the Fatimid movement would infallibly have ended but for the intervention of one of those mystical figures so common in the Arab world. This remarkable person promulgated the idea that the Divinity had always been latent and incarnate in some spiritual leader and that sooner or later it would reveal itself in a Mahdi (the Divinely Guided) who would become the supreme leader of the Faithful. After preaching for a while that the time had come when a revelation of the Mahdi's identity was imminent he produced, in 909, a reputed descendant of Fatima in the part of North Africa now known as Tunisia and proclaimed him as the true Caliph. Before long the entire Barbary coast together with the country extending from the sacred city of Fez to the frontier of Egypt had fallen under Fatimid sway, but Egypt beat off all attacks of these *soi-disant* Caliphs down to the year 969.

It was in that year that El Moizz, the fourth Caliph of this heretical Fatimid Dynasty, sent to Egypt an army of a hundred thousand men who, marching under the orders of his Sicilian slave, Gohar, attacked and captured the town of Fustat, which Amr had made capital of Egypt. Before that unique night had ended, this victorious slave had laid the foundations of Egypt's present metropolis, and the accounts given by Arab historians of that night's happenings would not have been out of place in the 'Arabian Nights'.

A square area of ground measuring twelve hundred yards each way had been marked out by the planting of poles as the intended site for the city which was to provide accommodation for the Caliph, the Court, the Caliph's slaves, and his African troops ; but as it was not intended, in the first place, to accommodate the general population, it can perhaps be best described as a palace-city. Bells were hung on cords between the poles, and the ringing of these bells was to announce the right astrological moment for the turning of the first sod. The astrologers and diviners, in earnest conclave, were anxiously awaiting the revelation of the auspicious moment at which to give the signal

when, to the general consternation, the perching of a raven on one of the bell-cords set the bells ajangle and the turning of the first sod took place before it could be stopped. All the elaborate precautions for recording the auspicious moment had failed. The whole company of astrologers was horror-struck ! But the signal had been sounded ; the sods had been turned ; and there was no remedy. And the Red Planet, Mars, called in Arabic *El Kahur*, the planet of War and Discord, was in the ascendant at the instant when the signal was given. And so the city was called El Kahira, a word which, in English, has become Cairo, and which was optimistically interpreted as the Victorious.

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As soon as the walls of this city had been completed, the building of the Mosque of Al-Azhar (now the most famous centre of Moslem teaching in the world) was begun ; and in 973 the Fatimid Caliph himself travelled from Tunisia to Egypt to take up residence in his newly built home. Regardless of expense the old capital, Fustat, all-illuminated and decorated, awaited his arrival in suspense, but the Caliph, not deigning to enter a city founded by a rival Dynasty, avoided Fustat and made a brilliant entry direct into El Kahira with his family and kinsfolk, quaintly but piously preceded by the coffins of his ancestors.

In this palace city the new line of Caliphs resided in mysterious seclusion, their sacred persons hidden behind high walls and protected by guarded gates. Only the vaguest and most confused ideas of the magnificence of the interior can be formed from the few references that have come down to us. The Arab historians speak with bated breath of its size and grandeur. We read of its four thousand chambers, and of the splendour of the pavilion where the Caliph sat enthroned. In 1167, when the ambassadors of Amalric, the Christian King of Jerusalem, were granted audience, they reported that they had been led through a labyrinth of corridors, past jealously guarded doors at which they were saluted by stalwart black troops with naked sword-blades. Reaching at last a spacious court, open to the sky, which was surrounded by arcades resting on marble pillars, they journeyed on in continuous amazement at the wonders that met them at every step until, by a multitude of intricate ways, they reached the Throne Room. Here both the number of the Caliph's retinue and the sumptuousness of their dress proclaimed the super-eminence of the Caliph himself. Thrice did the Vizier, ungirding his sword, prostrate himself even to

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the ground as in the act of supplicating a god ; whereupon, with a sudden sweep, the heavy curtains, stiff with all their embroidery of gold and pearls, were drawn aside, revealing the golden throne upon which in more than regal state, the Caliph himself was seated.

★ ★ ★

The only successor of El Moizz who need be mentioned in these pages is El Hakim, the founder of the religion of the Druses. El Hakim, who became Caliph of Cairo in 996, was one of the most sinister, sadistic, and satanical characters in all human history. His basilisk expression and the snaky horror of his cold blue eyes froze the blood of the boldest, and the very sound of his voice roused a shudder. The sinuous manner of his gliding through a crowd earned him the soubriquet of ‘ the Lizard ’, and since he preferred darkness to light he summoned his Council to meet at night and ordered all business to be transacted after sunset. He was accustomed to leave the palace-city after dark mounted on a grey ass and make for the lonely slopes leading to the wild desert plateau where he worked at the problems of his chimerical astrology until his brain was crazed. At length he came to regard himself as the all-sufficient Priest through whom God had revealed himself to an ignorant world, and in the last phase of all his mania led him to the conclusion that he was himself the incarnation of the Almighty.

Under such delusions he caused Christian churches to be destroyed and their property confiscated. Christians were required to decide between three choices : they could become Moslems ; they could leave the country ; or, remaining, they could wear a heavy cross as a symbol of their degradation and undergo other humiliations. It is a strange fact that Christians of merit were nevertheless appointed to high office, and it may fairly be placed to El Hakim’s credit that his Viziers, whether Christian or Moslem, were murdered with the most complete impartiality, while even his own officials were liable to be tortured and killed like flies, to have their arms hacked off or their tongues cut out, while every further kind of barbarity was ready to follow.

Early one morning, however, when taking his favourite ride towards the Mokattam Hills, El Hakim dismissed his grooms, as he had so often done before, and rode out into the desert alone. From this ride he never returned. Several days later his ass was found straying on the hills. It had been maimed. And eventually his

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seven-coloured cloak was also discovered. It was rent by dagger-stabs. Finally a zealot was found who confessed to having murdered him 'out of zeal for God and Islam'. But the common people stubbornly refused to believe that he was dead and to this day the Druses of the Lebanon worship the Divine Wisdom which they continue to believe was incarnate in the person of El Hakim.

## THE MAMELUKES

**A**s time went on the Fatimid Caliphs at Cairo became increasingly indolent and sensual ; and as it is not the times that make the men but the men who make the times, the Fatimid Empire, erstwhile stretching from Fez to the Red Sea, gradually disintegrated for lack of leadership. The Caliph of Cairo, however, even though half-suffocated in the yielding depths of his harem cushions, still retained some lingering spiritual authority as the reputed descendant of Fatima, degenerate though he was.

In contrast to the languid caliphs of the once-powerful Fatimid dynasty, we at length see Nureddin, Sultan of Syria, deservedly winning renown both as warrior and civil administrator.

Both Nureddin, an orthodox Moslem, and Amalric, Crusading King of Jerusalem, realized the strategic value of Egypt, and an appeal for Nureddin's assistance by a harassed pretender to the viziership of Egypt led to a contest which became a struggle between Nureddin and Amalric for the possession of the country.

It was during this period that Saladin, at that time an officer in Nureddin's army, first came to Egypt.

In 1169 the Cairo Caliph, awaking to the danger of imminent invasion by Amalric, sent a piteous appeal to Nureddin for aid, even, it is said, sending tresses of his wives' hair as a symbolic act of desperate supplication. Nureddin responded by despatching a strong force to Egypt, commanded by Saladin's uncle. Saladin accompanied him. The Caliph, deeply impressed by the bearing of Saladin's uncle, offered him the viziership of Egypt, which he accepted, and on his death two months later, Saladin was appointed in his place.

Saladin at once resolved to build up an Empire strong enough to overthrow the Crusading Kingdom and regain Jerusalem. He is alleged to have exclaimed : 'When Allah gave me Egypt, he meant me to have Palestine as well.' As an orthodox Moslem, however, he was now in a difficult position, being an adherent at one and the same time both to the heterodox Caliph of Cairo and to the orthodox

## THE MAMELUKES

Caliph of Baghdad. But after two years, at the death of the Cairo Caliph, Saladin ordered the Caliph of Baghdad to be proclaimed in every mosque throughout Egypt.

So ended the Fatimid Dynasty.

As if by destiny, the famous Nureddin and the gallant King Amalric died within a few weeks of each other. During the years ensuing, Saladin became master of all Egypt and of the inland parts of Syria, though the Crusaders for a time held Jerusalem and the principal seaports of Palestine and Syria. At last Jerusalem itself capitulated to Saladin and the golden cross was taken down from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre ; but the victor nevertheless showed a degree of mercy rare in Moslem conquerors.

The long and arduous task of expelling the Crusaders was not however finished when Jerusalem fell. Throughout Christendom there arose a determination to regain the Holy City. And to this day the Arabs have traditions of *Malek Ric*—our Richard Cœur de Lion.

The greater part of Saladin's time having been taken up by war against the Crusaders, only a few years of his reign were spent in Egypt ; but the Citadel which he began to build at Cairo stands to this day as his imperishable monument, dominating the scene on the east of the Nile as the Pyramids dominate the West.

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After Saladin's death in 1193, Egypt was ruled by the dynasty that he founded, the Ayyubid Dynasty, which endured until 1250, and it was during this period that the Mongol hordes under Jingiz Khan and his successors swarmed from the steppes of eastern Asia and established an empire extending from the Vistula to the Pacific. In 1258 a grandson of Jingiz captured Baghdad and slew the Caliph. For a time, therefore, the Caliphate ceased to exist. But Baibars, a general serving under a man who had raised himself to be Sultan of Egypt, met the Mongols in Syria, drove them back, murdered his master, became Sultan in his stead, and founded the Mameluke Dynasty in Egypt.

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Rising from the waste of desert sand a few hundred yards beyond the eastern limits of Cairo can be seen the crumbling relics of a mediaeval City of the Dead. Its buildings are the tomb-mosques

of the Sultans of the Mameluke or 'Slave' Dynasty of Egypt (mameluke being the Arabic for slave) who governed, or misgoverned, the country for the next two hundred and fifty years, and some of these tomb-mosques, with their harmonious proportions, their shapely domes, and their finely carved, slender, soaring minarets, are masterpieces of Saracenic architecture.

This Egyptian Slave Dynasty is without parallel in Occidental history. To understand it we must go back to the early days of Islam when the Caliphs of Baghdad, finding it difficult to control the ambitious and unruly Emirs<sup>1</sup> who held the rudder-lines of government, recruited bodyguards from the ranks of slaves—usually Turks, Circassians, or Mongols—captured in war or purchased in the Central Asiatic slave-markets. Light-skinned, agile, comely and intellectual, these illiterate barbarians readily adopted the language and religion of their masters and in course of time qualified themselves to undertake the most arduous as well as the most dangerous tasks. Not infrequently therefore they attained high rank in the Caliph's service and often established undeniable claims to be considered for the post of provincial governor.

Saladin had surrounded himself with carefully chosen companies of these Mamelukes, educated them with unusual care and trained and equipped them to perfection for the art of war. His successors continued this policy, recruiting their body of slaves from the same source. Their officers had risen from their ranks but had acquired distinctive influence at Court in their capacity as Cup-bearers, Tasters, Masters of the Horse and the like. Some of them gained full enfranchisement and therewith the right to acquire property and become themselves slave-owners—the owners of Mamelukes.

During the reign of Saladin's grand-nephew a *corps d'élite* of picked Mameluke horsemen was stationed on the Island of Roda in the Nile not far from the Fortress of Babylon (now a part of Cairo), and this body, called the Bahri, or 'River' Mamelukes, from their barracks being on the Nile, soon became the most prominent and dynamic force in all Egypt, the virtual masters of the country. Even the Sultans themselves—the last Sultans of the Ayyubid Dynasty founded by Saladin—were obliged to bow to their will.

In 1250 the last Sultan of this Dynasty endeavoured to reassert his

<sup>1</sup> There is no equivalent in English. An Emir was sometimes a nobleman, sometimes a prince. The nearest English equivalent to an Egyptian Mameluke Emir was a mediaeval baron.

## THE MAMELUKES

authority over these ‘slaves’, but he was murdered by his own Mameluke bodyguard. Chaotic conditions followed, but from 1260 onwards Mameluke succeeded Mameluke as Sultan of Egypt—the ‘slave’ Sultan of Egypt.

As a rule a Mameluke Sultan’s title to the throne rested on his own personality, his popularity with the body of Mamelukes to which he belonged, and the perfection of his fighting force. During this most turbulent period of all Egypt’s turbulent history almost every Mameluke Sultan came to a violent end. The brevity of so many reigns bespeaks the insecurity of their tenure. In the two and a half centuries of Mameluke rule, the average length of a Sultan’s reign was five years; many reigns failed to reach a year; some continued for a few feverishly exciting and superlatively hazardous months.

Under these circumstances the Mameluke Sultans did their utmost to buttress their power by making grants of land to their Emir supporters, many of whom enjoyed a regal splendour almost equal to and sometimes exceeding that of the Sultan himself. Each had a chosen force of slaves ready at his behest to commit at a moment’s notice any act of desperation, outrage, rapine or murder; so that Egypt became the scene of a series of appalling cold-blooded atrocities.

With monotonous repetition of their predecessors’ methods, a band of ambitious or discontented Emirs, bribing the officers of the royal household or the royal guard would block the approaches to the Private Chambers and secure the co-operation of a confederate in the Sultan’s entourage in striking the fatal blow. The conspirators would then elect one of their number to ascend the throne. Pitched battles in the streets between rival Mameluke factions might then follow with their usual accompaniment of arson and pillage. Respectable citizens having fled to their homes in the various protected quarters, or wards, into which Cairo was divided, the Gates of each ward would be closed, and throughout each succeeding period of anarchy the merchant princes of Cairo would shiver with impotent fear behind the gates of their wards until peace was for a time restored.

Hoping to secure the official blessing of Islam, Baibars, the founder of this River Dynasty of Mamelukes, sought and found an heir to the Caliphate. Bringing him from Damascus to Cairo, he caused him to be enthroned as the rightful pontiff of Islam and declared Egypt to be the seat of the Caliphate.

After the first thirty years of Mameluke rule all the River Mameluke

Sultans were descendants of the great Kalaun, whose mausoleum is one of the most beautiful Arab buildings in Cairo. But despite the apparent recognition of the hereditary principle there was no regular succession of sovereigns, nor did the country enjoy any of the blessings of peace. Far from it. Kalaun's son and successor was murdered after two years' reign by a party of Emirs who left his body on the ground to be buried by villagers ; and although his successor, Nasir, was one of the few Mameluke Sultans to keep his throne, his reign was interrupted twice, and his descendants rose and fell at the will of the Mameluke leaders of the day.

In 1348 came the most appalling of all visitations, the Black Death. Appearing first in China, it spread westward over Asia to Egypt and thence across Europe to England where its ravages swept away half the population. In Cairo, twenty thousand people died in a single day. The name of the Mameluke Sultan who reigned at this time is recalled by the sight of his magnificent mosque, that of Sultan Hassan, one of the most superb monuments of Egypto-Arabian architecture in Cairo. Rising from its foundations on a shelving rock just below the Citadel, its huge proportions produce an effect of irresistible majesty. This Sultan is said to have been so proud of this masterpiece that he had the architect's hand cut off with the vague hope that its loss would cripple his genius and prevent any repetition of so great an achievement. Although this story is probably false it fits the character of the man.

In 1382 the Bahri, or 'River' Mameluke Dynasty, was ousted by the Burgi, or 'Tower' Dynasty, so called because they belonged to a Mameluke Brigade that was quartered in the Citadel. All were Circassians except two who were of Greek origin.

It is one of the strangest of paradoxes that despite the turmoil and bloodshed of the Mameluke era it was at this particular moment that the Saracenic art of Egypt produced its greatest masterpieces. At a time when the country was held in the merciless grip of these foreign monsters, the art and architecture of the country reached height after height of mediaeval perfection. Under this same régime, too, philosophy and letters flourished, and it is to this period that the world owes the final form of the incomparable 'Arabian Nights'. It is true that Baghdad is described as the city in which the scene of these stories is laid, but their setting as well as the manners and customs of the actors who take their part in them were drawn from the background of the society in which the narrators of the stories moved.

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And that background was Mameluke Cairo. Bowls, incense-burners, goblets, dishes of inlaid silver and gold such as figure in these tales have survived to confirm the fidelity of the picture. These Sultans, with their powerful Emirs, their wines, their women, their arts, their jovial company decked in the most exquisite of robes ; the sprinkling of rose-water ; the perfuming of beards ; the hanging of rooms with priceless tapestry ; the covering of floors with the costliest of carpets ; the embellishment of doors and ceilings with the choicest carvings and ivory inlay ; the ambergris, the frankincense that burned in their censers and filled the air with so seductive a fragrance ; the dim light that was shed by the deep colours of their stained-glass windows. All these features unite to form a picture that could only have been fully realized in Mameluke Cairo.

The Egyptian scene with the ‘Tower’ Dynasty in power differed but little from that which had preceded it. After the death of a Sultan—normally by assassination—his son would be set on the throne while rival Emirs tried their strength, spun their labyrinthine plots, and bribed competitors. The strongest would make himself ruler and hold the throne—until he in turn was unseated. Such was the brevity of the reigns of these ‘Tower’ Mameluke Sultans that fourteen out of twenty-five averaged less than eight months.

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In 1517 the Sultan Selim and his Turks smote the Mameluke Sultan of Egypt ; occupied the country ; moved the Caliphate from Cairo to Constantinople ; and thenceforward Egypt remained a province of Turkey until it was liberated by the British Army during the First World War.

Egypt’s status after its conquest by the Turks was at first that of a Pashalik, its Turkish Governor being known merely as the Pasha. The Mamelukes however quickly recovered their former power, because the Turks found their services indispensable. A Mameluke Emir—now called a ‘Bey’—was appointed by the Turks to be head of each district into which the country was divided, the most powerful of all the Mameluke Beys being the Governor of Cairo, who was known as the Sheikh el Beled. The holder of this office came in time to be more powerful than the Pasha himself, and soon there was but little difference between the new régime and the old.

By the eighteenth century the Pasha had grown to be a cipher and the Mameluke Governor of Cairo—the Sheikh el Beled—was

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the real master of the land. Disputes between rival Beys continued as before the Turkish conquest, and the streets of Cairo continued to run with blood in the old familiar way with every quarter of the city a miniature battle-field.

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In 1797, with Egypt still in this anarchic condition, the victorious armies of Bonaparte had established an unbroken line from Antwerp to Rome. The conquest of England was then considered so certain that Bonaparte caused medals to be struck in celebration of the event. But on realizing that Great Britain was mistress of the Channel he turned his thoughts to the East and decided to invade Egypt. With Egypt in his possession, he would march his armies across the plains of Asia and over the mountains into India, where he would launch a campaign that would lead to the complete collapse of British prestige throughout the East.

The instructions which he eventually received from his Government provided for the expulsion of British interests from the Red Sea, the cutting of a Canal through the Isthmus of Suez, and the ousting of the British from India.

At this fateful moment the Mameluke Governor of Cairo—the Sheikh el Beled—was Ibrahim Bey. The military chief was Murad Bey. And although these two men had often been in arms against each other, they had at this time come to an agreement to share the supreme power.

Under their joint rule—with Bekir as Turkish Pasha—Egypt was enjoying comparative peace at this crucial juncture in the now dovetailing histories of Egypt, France, and England.

## THE TRANSIT OF BONAPARTE

**I**N the year of grace 1798, the 28th June drew to its close with nothing to indicate to the people of Cairo that life as it had been lived in Egypt for centuries past was about to undergo a sudden and violent change. European traders made their way along the lane leading from the Mosque El Hakim to the European Quarter—the Quarter of the Franks—in their usual studiously unostentatious manner. Dressed, however surprising it may now seem to us, in loose *kuftans* of coloured silk, their waists encircled with red muslin girdles, their feet encased in red or yellow slippers that flapped against the ground as they walked, they proceeded on their way practically indistinguishable, as they had good reason to wish to be, from the genuine Egyptians with whom they mingled. Many, indeed most, had been born and bred in Egypt, for the indignities to which Europeans had been subjected under the Mamelukes had grown to be so intolerable that, one by one, the vast majority of European traders had left Egypt to seek business openings elsewhere. Circumstances had compelled a few stragglers to remain, and they and their descendants had perforce to endure with all the complacency they could muster, the barefaced, impudent blackmail, and all too often downright persecution that lay with such intolerable weight upon the spirits of all Christians who had the misfortune to live, no matter for what reason, in Cairo at that time.

Normally, when darkness fell, the massive gates barring the entrance to the European Quarter were shut, and silence pervaded the city till dawn, except when, as so often happened, the henchmen of one particular Mameluke Bey encountered the henchmen of a rival. At such a moment the ring of prancing hoofs and the clash of steel on steel would reach the painfully strained ears of Christian and Moslem alike ; a faint glow from a lanthorn of antique design suspended on high might possibly reveal the rich Arabesque of a Saracen doorway or momentarily reflect a bejewelled scimitar in the act of striking a mortal blow ; but the next sound would almost invariably suggest the dragging of a lifeless body into the nearest

building. These and any other such occurrences, however, would have been far too common to be noted in those days of uninterrupted Mameluke feud, and a whole night of such incidents might have been voted quiet for Cairo by a majority of its inhabitants a hundred and fifty years ago.

The particular night in June 1798 to which reference has been made was, however, far from normal. On the whole route between Alexandria and Cairo, village after village was roused by the clatter of galloping horses spurred on by their riders till they could gallop no more ; whereupon the riders—all of whom were Government messengers—leapt from their mounts and proceeded to seize fresh horses from the nearest stables. At every halting-place for horses on this entire route to the capital the news spread like wild-fire that English warships had anchored off Alexandria ; that the force at the disposal of the Governor of the city was totally inadequate for its defence ; that every available man must be mustered immediately if Alexandria were not to find itself in the grip of a foreign Power.

The fact that Alexandria escaped this predicament was due to the apparently eccentric behaviour of the English Admiral. An English officer, rowed ashore, made his way quietly enough to the city's municipal headquarters where he was admitted to the presence of the Governor, Said Kerim. The information that he gave to the Governor was that the English Admiral was hot upon the tracks of a vast French army which was at that very moment crossing the Mediterranean under the command of a general named Bonaparte, who was believed to be plotting a surprise invasion of Egypt. All that the Admiral asked was permission to await the arrival of the French fleet, and, in the interim, to purchase supplies for his own ships.

Said Kerim's appalling and total ignorance of Europe and everything European was equalled and even surpassed by his contempt for all foreigners. He believed that the English officer was bluffing. He found it impossible to understand how the threat of an invasion of Egypt by the French could possibly concern or interest the English, and he inevitably concluded that the English fleet had been sent to subjugate Egypt and for no other purpose whatever.

‘Why,’ he asked the officer, ‘should you English want to fight the French in Egyptian waters when you have the whole of the Mediterranean in which to settle your differences ?’

And this apparently reasonable point of view drew wholehearted

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approval from the assembled sheikhs and *ulema* whom he had called into consultation.

'Go back to your ship,' he shouted. 'Tell your Admiral that Egypt belongs to the Sultan of Turkey, and that neither the English nor the French have any concern with it. Now please go away!'

This Oriental rebuff made no impression on Nelson. His orders were to find the fleet of Napoleon. And as Napoleon was not at Alexandria it was not long before the English fleet put to sea and disappeared below the horizon, leaving Said Kerim to congratulate himself on having so shrewdly disposed of a presumptuous and interfering foreign Admiral who clearly harboured some evil design against Egypt.

But the departure of the English fleet had hardly taken place before the billowing sails of another—and very different—fleet hove into view. This time it was not a matter of a score or so of ships of the line. Napoleon's warships were but the escorts of hundreds of transports conveying his army of forty thousand men with artillery, horses, and stores complete. Once again the government messengers leapt on to their steeds and made for Cairo at full speed. But the news they carried this time was of the arrival of a Frankish fleet that 'had no beginning and no end'!

At dawn on the 1st July the huge French armada hove to opposite a fishing hamlet of mud huts on a flat, treeless waste a few miles west of Alexandria. The sea was rough; enormous breakers hurled themselves against the shore; and the uncharted approach to the coast was beset by perilous reefs. But Napoleon, dreading above all things the imminent certainty of Nelson's arrival, issued orders for all ships to man and lower boats whatever the risk might be. The result was not the spectacular landing that he himself had envisaged. But the order was implicitly obeyed; some of the boats were swamped; others were driven back; some sank to the bottom; others were beached but so badly holed that they could not be refloated. At about midnight Napoleon himself scrambled ashore. No more than a single brigade had by then disembarked, and Bonaparte, in need of rest, stretched himself at full length on the sand and snatched a couple of hours' sleep.

At about 2 a.m., such troops as had already landed were ordered to stand to arms; by dawn they had arrived before the walls of Alexandria, no longer the wonder-city of Cleopatra and Augustus,

but a small, dingy town of between eight and ten thousand inhabitants. Its once colossal trade had disappeared ; its palaces, temples, schools ; its once-boasted culture, had all vanished. The houses were of mud ; for windows they had nothing more than a few holes botched over with rude lattice-work ; their entrances could not be passed without stooping. The defences of the city were in the condition of utter neglect that was only to be expected after centuries of Mameluke and Turkish rule. But the Governor put a bold face on the matter. *He* would never dream of capitulating to any force, however great, of Frankish infidels, and he called upon all good Moslems, irrespective of age and sex, to prepare to repel and destroy the invader.

Napoleon sent forward an officer under a flag of truce. For his temerity he was roundly cursed in set terms by a Sheikh as an infidel, and his offers to negotiate were met with yells of contempt and derision.

Bonaparte promptly drew up his army in three divisions, two of which had the duty of scaling the walls ; the third marched towards the Rosetta Gate, through which a French soldier of ultra-Herculean proportions succeeded in smashing an entrance, bolted and barred though it was. Fighting their way through the streets, the French soon discovered that every hovel could be a citadel in itself—defended, it must be said, with magnificent heroism. But the end was a fore-gone conclusion, and it was not long before the utterly disillusioned, pallid, nerve-shaken Said Kerim was applying for a safe-conduct. He was taken to Napoleon's headquarters, where, upon a copy of the Koran, he had the supreme mortification of taking the oath of allegiance to the Republic of France.

The remainder of the French troops, the guns, the horses, the stores, were now landed, and the advance on Cairo was fairly begun. News that the French had left Alexandria soon reached the capital, where, in Ibrahim Bey's palace,<sup>1</sup> in a beautiful position overlooking a branch of the Nile a mile or so beyond the walls of Cairo, an assembly of robed and turbaned military rulers and religious leaders had met to discuss the emergency. A fanatic yelled 'The Christians must be massacred !' But the clamour that followed this blood-thirsty proposal was soon silenced by Ibrahim Bey and Bekir Pasha. Of the result of the impending conflict not one of them felt the least shadow of doubt. Ignorant of everything beyond Egypt's borders, they

<sup>1</sup> On the site of the present Kasr-el-Aine Hospital.

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were buoyed up by fanatical versions of Moslem victories over the Crusaders, and with yet later stories of the valour of the Corsairs in their encounters with Christian shipping. To these historical, if highly coloured, remembrances of Frankish impotence was added their unfortunately correct knowledge that even the most insulting treatment they had ever shown to the European traders in their midst had never called forth a word of expostulation from any of the Christian Governments of Europe.

'Let them come!' cried one of the Mamelukes. 'We will soon trample them under our horses' hooves.' And to Murad Bey was given, as was only to be expected, the honour of going forth to meet them as they advanced towards the capital.

Cairo was seething with uncontrollable excitement. Dervishes danced their defiant dances through its picturesque, still-mediaeval streets to the music of reed pipes and the dull repetitive rhythm of the native drum, calling for the chastisement of the Infidel. Sheikhs standing in the streets recited passages from the Book of Bokhari. Learned *ulema*, collecting the children from the schools under their charge, led them through the streets reciting Mussulman incantations suitable to the occasion. A green-turbaned descendant of the Prophet on emerging from one of the ancient gates of the Citadel raised the banner of Islam, and to this the citizens flocked in their thousands to join in processions. Arrived at the Nileside village of Boulac (now a part of Cairo) they one and all hurled themselves into the work of throwing up the entrenchments which Ibrahim Bey, at this late hour, had put in hand. Soon the city was almost deserted except for the women, whose shrill Oriental lamentations were the only sounds to break the unnatural silence following the general exodus of the male population.

Then came the report that Murad Bey, of all men, had suffered a catastrophic reverse near the village of Shubrakhit, about fifty miles from Alexandria. There, so it was rumoured, his force of Mameluke cavalry had been confronted by serried squares of steel bayonets towards which they had spurred their horses with all their inborn reckless courage. A word of command had rung out, a hail of lead had followed, and, long before the enemy could be reached, the flower of Murad's force had perished. It was the Mamelukes' baptism of fire on their first introduction to warfare as waged by the Europeans of those times. Baffled by this discovery of their own impotence they withdrew, and then, as was subsequently learned, one of their number,

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arrayed in his Saracen chain armour, rode back to the French squares defiantly waving a huge Crusading sword and challenged them to select an officer with sufficient courage to meet him in single combat. A bullet pierced his forehead.

Murad Bey, badly shaken by a reverse so utterly contrary to all previous experience, made the best of his way back to Cairo, where, from the moment of his arrival, the population realized beyond any possibility of concealment that this first Mameluke force to encounter the Franks had been completely and unequivocably defeated. Dumb-founded, disillusioned, baffled, they could find no better scapegoats for their tragic failure than the Christian community. At once the age-old cry of 'Christian perfidy' broke out. The Christian churches were violated with the grossest forms of sacrilege; the houses of prominent Christians were broken into and pillaged; the sacking of the entire European Quarter was imminent. But Ibrahim Bey, to his infinite honour, had the innocuous inhabitants escorted to the Citadel and a guard placed over their property. On the following morning his noble-hearted wife in a moment of magnanimity unsurpassed by any of the courtesies shown to the Christians by the illustrious Saladin, gave them sanctuary in one of her palaces until the danger had passed.

Meanwhile, the French army, worn out by the overpowering heat, harassed by the sniping of Bedouin guerillas, tortured by mosquitoes and every loathsome insect in the list of Egypt's plagues, was making its way in a spirit of barely suppressed mutiny towards Cairo along the west bank of the Nile.

When the morning of the ever-memorable Battle of the Pyramids dawned, it revealed a panorama that thrilled the jaded troops with its entrancing beauty and interest, and their spirits rose in response. To the left, on the opposite side of the Nile, stretched timeless fertile fields—fields that were the future site of modern Cairo. Beyond these fields gleamed the embattled walls of mediaeval Cairo and the domes and minarets of the city's mosques. Heavenward above them towered Saladin's vast Citadel. Beyond still, in even loftier height, frowned the precipitous cliff-faces of the barren desert hills. The entire scene was tinted by the exquisitely delicate hues of the Egyptian dawn. Silhouetted against the sky to the right, where the 'verdure of the sown' blended with the dull gold of the desert sand, rose the three great immemorial Pyramids, gilded by the rays of the rapidly rising sun. Bonaparte turned to his escort. ' Soldiers ! ' he exclaimed.

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‘ From the summits of those monuments, forty centuries look down upon you ! ’

Ibrahim Bey, in his plans for defending the Cairo-side of the Nile, had erected batteries along its bank for a distance of about three miles from the suburb of Boulac northwards. The French, however, advanced along the opposite (western) side of the river, and the main Egyptian army was therefore drawn up on that side, parallel with the Nile, to meet them. Their right flank covered the village of Embabeh ;<sup>1</sup> their left extended to Ghizeh, about four miles farther up the River. Both flanks, however, were composed of an ill-disciplined mob, some armed with blunderbusses, others with impromptu spears—mere knives lashed to the ends of long sticks—or with nothing better than roughly shaped quarterstaffs ; a veritable gallimawfrey, a hotchpotch of ineffectual oddities indeed, to be set the stern task of coping with the seasoned veterans of Napoleon.

The only troops of Egypt to present any appearance of less outmoded—even if still mediaeval—methods of warfare, were the Mamelukes who occupied the centre of the line. These, who numbered about ten thousand, were characteristically attired in all their most showy pageantry, and superbly mounted on Arab horses richly caparisoned with trappings of gold and silver. Long-sleeved, richly coloured robes reached their ankles ; over them were their coats of mail. Their cloth pelisses were tucked into their wide pantaloons. Their heads were adorned with lofty turbans around which were wound fold upon fold of coloured muslin. Their feet were encased in yellow slippers. Their heavy stirrups were of copper. Every man of them carried a whole armoury of weapons—a carbine, a brace of pistols, a lance, a mace, and—almost needless to say—a scimitar.

Murad Bey, magnificently appareled and rendered conspicuous even above the rest by the flowing white beard that concealed his breast, was commander on this side of the Nile.

The entire population of Cairo had gathered on the opposite bank of the River, where they became the helpless but fascinated spectators of the impending tragedy. The French army—marshalled in five squares—took the form of a wide crescent that threatened to turn both Egyptian flanks. The battle was opened by an impetuous charge by a large contingent of Mamelukes led by Ayoub Bey. Like a thunderbolt they bore down upon the French right as it was

<sup>1</sup> On the river-bank at the place where the train to Upper Egypt now crosses the Nile by the bridge soon after leaving Cairo main station.

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endeavouring to turn the Egyptian left near Ghizeh. But Napoleon's disciplined troops held their fire awaiting the word of command. Volley then followed volley, emptying Mameluke saddles by the hundred. Undaunted, the heroic survivors continued to ride on like our own deathless six-hundred, shouting defiance and brandishing their weapons. Napoleon's veterans, with parade-ground discipline, fired, re-loaded, and fired again. The first body of Mamelukes to reach the square fell to the last man. The contingents that followed hot-foot upon the first, hampered as they inevitably were by fleeing, frantic, riderless horses, wheeled to the right only to bring themselves under a murderous cross-fire from the next French square. It was more than even Mamelukes could face. They turned and fled in the direction of the Pyramids.

Bonaparte then directed his attention to the other flank—at Embabeh—and the vast crowd of spectators on the opposite side of the Nile was held spellbound by the sight of the inexorable encirclement of the Egyptian right flank. Their despairing voices rose in one thundering crescendo : ‘ May Allah give strength to the men of Allah ! ’ But the entrenchments in front of Embabeh were carried at the point of the bayonet and then the French left forced its way between the village and the Nile. The fellahin levies flung away their arms and ran for their lives, and the Mamelukes who had ridden to the support of the Embabeh flank found themselves trapped within a crescent, the horns of which were rapidly closing in. Withdrawing under a withering fire to the scanty shelter of a clump of palms, they fought on for a time with desperate gallantry, but the contest that had begun as a battle now became sheer massacre. The dazed and bewildered Mameluke remnants were now faced with the alternatives of flight or extermination. Breaking into a panic-stricken gallop to which fear lent wings, they rode and out-rode each other in a mad race to the Nile into which they incontinently plunged. The weight of their armour and accoutrements drew them straight to the bottom and, like Pharaoh’s chariotry of old, they sank like lead into the mighty waters. The French army—transported by the unprecedented calamity that had confounded their enemies and gripped by an insatiable lust for loot—immediately broke ranks. In utter insubordination, and taking no notice whatever of the orders of their officers, they thought only of a booty beyond the wealth of their wildest dreams—of bejewelled weapons, of rich armour, of priceless accoutrements, of the costliest silks, of the gold habitually carried by the

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Mamelukes in their leatheren girdles. The bodies of the dead, from the first to the last, were ruthlessly robbed and despoiled. The very dead were dragged up from the river bottom. The field of battle which but a few minutes before had been a shambles now became a vast market where the dazzling spoils were hastily displayed and where bartering and selling was feverishly continued until the darkness of the Egyptian night lent a merciful cloak to conceal the evil-doings of the day.

Murad Bey, by using a gap in the French lines, succeeded in reaching his palace at Ghizeh. On doing so, his first act was to order all river craft to be fired to prevent the French from crossing the Nile to Cairo, and his second was to make for Upper Egypt as fast as any relaying of horses could carry him. Ibrahim Bey and Bekir Pasha fled first to Matarieh and thence crossed the desert to Palestine. And meanwhile, every road leading from the east bank of the Nile to the capital was blocked by the former spectators as they streamed back to their Cairo homes in the uttermost depths of despair.

Night closed in. The sky, lurid with the reflection of the flames of the burning boats on the farther bank of the Nile, gave colour to the wildest rumours of the unparalleled orgies of vandalism and carnage of the French. Hence, the people, finding themselves abandoned by traditional leaders who, for centuries past, had taught them that it was dangerous to act for themselves, could think of nothing better than an instinctive, instantaneous, and simultaneous mass-evacuation of the city. Camels and asses changed hands at fantastically exorbitant prices ; those who were unable to ride fled on foot in a procession of countless hundreds. Carrying all they could of their worldly goods, they swarmed through Cairo's ancient gates in a new exodus such as had not been witnessed in Egypt since the days of Moses. Outside the walls, unspeakable hordes of Bedouin, rendered savage at the idea of losing the loot which they had so confidently believed would be theirs after the defeat of the Frankish army, were waiting to indemnify themselves at the expense of the Cairenes. The sharp cracks of firearms and the screams of anguish told their own tale of murder and rapine and rape.

Dawn broke. A few of the leading men who had resisted the impulse to flee came together in Cairo to discuss the position. The difficulties were at first felt to be insuperable. At length two Sheikhs from the Barbary States, who could at least claim to be neutral,

agreed to go as a deputation to Bonaparte's headquarters. To the accompaniment of the blessings and prayers of all, these two Sheikhs crossed the River to Ghizeh and were admitted to Bonaparte's presence.

'Where are your colleagues?' was the first quiet question, and the Sheikhs were more than astonished at the tone of kindness in which it was spoken. With heads bowed low and in attitudes of profound respect they told him that no man had been found who dared to accompany them. 'They ought to have come with you,' he said. 'I am not at war with the Egyptians. On the contrary, I have come to free them from tyranny.' (So Napoleon, confident of 'landing' his much coveted prize !)

The result was that the two Sheikhs returned to Cairo with a message of hope, and, as the city had not after all been sacked, the fugitives of the previous night began, in small but increasing numbers, to find their way back home. The nerve-racking horror of the long hours of darkness had melted at contact with the rays of the swift and sudden breaking of the Egyptian day; and the fugitives' fears, like night-birds, began to fold their wings as the light increased. In a mood of returning confidence some of the more optimistic spirits began to recall some of the reports they had heard of a marked degree of mildness and humanity shown by the French at Alexandria. In particular, the seductive influence of Bonaparte's proclamations was recalled—proclamations which began with the significant words: 'In the name of the most merciful God'; words invariably prefixed by Moslems to their most important documents.

It was not long therefore before a more representative delegation proceeded to Ghizeh to initiate negotiations with Napoleon. Its reception could hardly have been more cordial. All the blessings which the mighty French Republic had conferred upon a grateful France appeared now to be waiting to be conferred upon a grateful Egypt as well. Impassively, albeit tempered by the traditional courtesy of the Orient, the deputation listened to proposals that were to them entirely incomprehensible. It seemed to them that they were expected to be equally and simultaneously loyal both to the Republic of France and to the Sultan of Turkey, a proposal which, so far as it was understood, was a manifest contradiction. Nevertheless, the French succeeded in making an impression of sincerity; in addition they appeared to be both courteous and kind; and, the dominant factor being that Egypt herself was in a helpless condition,

#### THE TRANSIT OF BONAPARTE

boats were sent to convey an advance-guard of the French army to Cairo.

The first detachment landed soon after dark on the city-side of the River. Lighted by torches that shed a fitful glare on the picturesque buildings lining the narrow native streets, the French force was escorted by the chief among the citizens of Cairo to the Citadel, to which they were admitted.

Several days were occupied in the formidable task of ferrying the French army across the River. But at last the millennial day arrived when Bonaparte was to make his spectacular entry into Cairo—an occasion of great and memorable splendour. Drums beat. Fanfares blared. The conquering Corsican rode through streets guarded by French infantry and packed by Moslem myriads. At length the procession reached the luxuriously appointed palace of Elfi Bey, one of the wealthiest of the wealthy Mameluke Emirs, where Bonaparte promptly established his headquarters.<sup>1</sup> It seemed at last as though Bonaparte's intention of creating a vast Oriental Empire was approaching realization.

There was only one doubtful factor—Nelson!—and he, for the moment, could be conveniently ignored.

<sup>1</sup> The world-famous Shepheard's Hotel (which was destroyed in the anti-British riots of January 1952) was built on the site of this Mameluke palace.

## THE OCCULTATION OF BONAPARTE

**W**HEN the news of the Battle of the Pyramids eventually reached the French Fleet, it was anchored in Aboukir Bay, between fifteen and twenty miles east of Alexandria, and it was actually while their Admiral—François Paul Admiral Comte de Brueys—and his brother officers were assembled to discuss how to celebrate Bonaparte's victory, that news was brought to him that a British fleet was making straight for the Bay. The French Admiral was in no wise disturbed. It was easy to calculate that owing to the distance of the approaching fleet and the moderate strength of the breeze, they could not possibly make Aboukir before nightfall, and no Admiral in his senses, in the absence of reliable charts and knowing the perilous character of the navigation, would care to face the risks of a battle in Aboukir Bay in the dark. So, at least, the situation appeared in the mind of the French Admiral, 'a brave sailor of ripe experience'.<sup>1</sup> But Nelson had repeatedly promised : 'I will bring the French Fleet to action the moment I can lay a hand on them !' Since early in May, lacking the assistance of even a single frigate to serve as 'eyes', Nelson had been scouring the vast expanse of the Mediterranean in search of Napoleon's fleet. That the enemy was afloat was a well-known fact, but there was no shred of evidence to suggest any clue either to his whereabouts or to what his purpose might be. It is a most remarkable fact that the two fleets had actually crossed tracks during a particularly hazy night, and that Napoleon himself, his fleet, his four hundred transports and their forty thousand troops would have been one and all at the bottom of the Mediterranean if Nelson had possessed any adequate means of locating them, and the course of world history would have been completely changed.

While this unconscious but tremendous game of hide-and-seek was being played, it was Nelson's practice to call his captains together on

<sup>1</sup> Sir Geoffrey Callender, M.A., F.S.A., Professor of History, Royal Naval College, Greenwich : *Sea Kings of Britain* (Longmans, Green, London, 1934), page 255.

## THE OCCULTATION OF BONAPARTE

every possible occasion and discuss with them every conceivable situation likely to be met with when the 'great day' came—as to come he was determined it should. The upshot was that every man of them knew down to the smallest detail what action to take when the enemy was encountered, no matter whether this took place at sea or in harbour, by day or by night, and whether hampered or unhampered by transports.

The liberty not only of England but of many a country besides England now depended upon Nelson. For Austria had been stricken powerless; Belgium had been incorporated as part of the soil of France; Holland, Switzerland, and the Italian Republics had been forced to accept governments on the French model; and Prussia had adopted a policy of neutrality. England therefore—not for the only time in her history—was left to confront single-handed an arch enemy of Europe and of mankind.

It was on the 22nd June—a week before his first call at Alexandria, to which reference has already been made—that Nelson, while off the coast of Sicily, had heard that Malta had surrendered to Bonaparte and that the French Fleet had put to sea again.

But where had they gone?

'To reveal his genius', says Sir Geoffrey Callender, 'and exalt his name to the stars, Nelson . . . on the 22nd June, had but to decide unerringly where the French expedition had gone. They might have returned to Toulon or they might have doubled back to Naples. They might be in the Adriatic or the Gulf of Tuscany. They might have turned west to Carthegna, or made sail to Constantinople. They might in fact have gone anywhere from one end of the world to the other; but probability with some insistence pointed west to the Straits and beyond.'

'Nelson went east to Egypt.'<sup>1</sup>

It was Nelson's conviction that Bonaparte's ultimate objective was India, and he found that his four senior captains shared his view. Unhesitatingly, therefore, he gave orders to crowd on sail and make a bee-line for Alexandria; but on arrival there he discovered—as we have already seen—that the roadstead was unoccupied. The reception of his envoy by the Governor of Alexandria, Said Mohammed Kerim, had convinced him on this earlier visit that no foreign fleet had up to that moment arrived, and his disappointment

<sup>1</sup> Sir Geoffrey Callender: *Sea Kings of Britain*, pages 259 and 260 of the 1934 edition.

had been acute. No single shred of information was picked up in the town itself, so he had put to sea again—baffled ! And now, after a further month's search he was still, as he himself admitted, 'as ignorant of the situation of the enemy as ever'. But on the 28th July, off southern Greece, an officer whom he had sent ashore to pick up what news he could, came back with the information that Bonaparte was believed to be attacking Egypt. Supplementary information obtained from boarded shipping lent colour to that fact since a French Fleet had been seen four weeks earlier sailing south-east from Crete. This dispelled any lingering doubt that Nelson might have felt about Bonaparte's plans, and for a second time he crowded on all sail for Alexandria. As had happened before, its minarets were sighted without encountering any trace of the enemy, but on this occasion, as soon as the Alexandrian forts became visible through the *Vanguard*'s telescopes, it was seen that the French tricolour was flying over them ! The next step was to discover if the French Fleet was inside the harbour.

Still having no frigates, Nelson sent forward two ships-of-the-line, the *Swiftsure* and the *Alexander*, to inspect at closer quarters. In due course the *Alexander* signalled 'no sign' of a French sail in the Harbour, and Nelson's chagrin was keen, for on his first visit to Alexandria on the 28th June he had arrived too soon ; now, on the 1st August, he had arrived too late. Bonaparte's army had landed ! That was now certain ! And the French Fleet was presumably far advanced on its return journey to France with no one to stop it.

Yet Nelson did *not* sail west to France. Relying on his amazingly sound instinct he sailed *east*, coasting the shore of Egypt as closely as possible. And within the short space of two hours the *Zealous* signalled : 'Enemy in sight.' The French were lying at anchor in Aboukir Bay ! Without a moment's delay Nelson signalled : 'Prepare for battle !' and a deep-throated cheer greeted that signal from every English ship, for the French menace of an invasion of England had been left unmet for far too long, and the crews to a man felt that the coming battle would once for all dispel this black cloud that had for so long hung over England and threatened its existence.

The signal flown, Nelson, who had hardly eaten or slept for several days, ordered the serving of his dinner.

The first count by the *Zealous* made the number of the enemy sail

#### THE OCCULTATION OF BONAPARTE

to be sixteen. Actually there were seventeen. Of these, thirteen were ships-of-the-line, including nine of seventy-four guns, three of eighty, and one—the superb *L'Orient*—of 120 guns. There were also four frigates, and some smaller craft. Nelson also had thirteen ships-of-the-line, all seventy-fours, but only ten were available for immediate action. The *Swiftsure* and the *Alexander*, which had been sent forward to have a closer look at Alexandria (as well as one other, towing a prize) were miles astern. Nelson also had the *Leander*, of fifty guns, and a brig.

Nelson now sent up two more signals. The first was an order to concentrate on the enemy's van and centre, the other to anchor by the stern. But these two significant signals told every captain that Nelson's intention was to strike a particular portion of the enemy's force with the whole weight of the entire English Fleet and utterly to crush the portion thus singled out before any reinforcement could arrive. In this way a fleet of inferior strength would obtain the superiority. Every imaginable eventuality having already been fully discussed at Nelson's conferences with his captains, only one further signal had to be flown.

The wide sweep of the palm-fringed Bay of Aboukir at first swerves back somewhat abruptly to the south-west, and then extends in a deep curve to its easterly point. The distance from point to point is about eighteen miles. The French Fleet, anchored in its western curve, was separated from the open sea by a low-lying tongue of land jutting out to the north-eastward and prolonged seawards by a line of rocks and shoals which link it with a small island (then fortified) lying some distance out to sea. The water of the Bay deepens so gradually that large ships have to stand well off-shore. The French ships were anchored near to the shoal water, and Brueys, quite certain that the English Admiral could not possibly find a way of attacking his fleet from both sides, had made up his mind that any assault he might have to beat off must inevitably come from the seaward. He was convinced, too, that the English would, 'without doubt', postpone action till night was over, so that the battle could be fought in the broad light of day. He therefore relied upon the inestimable advantage of being able to get his own ships into battle position under cover of darkness. Never could any commander more totally have mis-calculated an adversary. Nelson was indeed confronted by a host of difficulties, and tremendous odds had to be taken; but as Berry, his thirty-year-old flag-captain, faithfully recorded, he viewed Brueys's

dispositions with the practised eye of a seaman bent on immediate victory, and his unfailing intuition told him that 'where there was room for an enemy ship to swing, there was room for one of ours to anchor !' Indeed, that inspired deduction was the determining feature of his victory.

Three precious hours were allowed by Brueys to lapse in complete inaction. A very large proportion of the French crews were permitted to remain ashore and were taken up with the digging of wells, the filling of water-casks, and similar pernickety business, all of the most insignificant and trumpery importance if compared with the Titanic conflict pending. All this while the English ships were drawing perceptibly nearer, until at last, when the sun was already low in the heavens, they had reached such close proximity that the fatal nature of his error flashed suddenly on the French Admiral's mind. With desperate urgency he signalled to the French ships to 'clear for action', but so complete had been his previous belief in the security of his position on the shallow landward side, that the larboard guns of his fleet had not even been unlimbered, and the decks of many of them were still so cumbered with an unseamanlike clutter of tackle as to be practically useless. Hurriedly the shore parties were recalled; but many were nevertheless too late to reach their ships in time for the beginning of the battle.

Meanwhile the English Fleet, helped by a favourable breeze, closed in rapidly from the west, with the *Goliath* and the *Zealous* in the lead. The rest of the Fleet followed these two, as it were, in Indian file. Every look-out at the English mastheads kept tirelessly scanning the transparent water for the least sign of hidden rocks. Every ship kept its lead busily at work. And the perfect seamanship revealed by this rapid but methodical and orderly advance of the English Fleet came as a rude awakening to the French officers who were now forced to the conclusion that, after all, Nelson had *sans doute* pilots of experience on board his ships. For the moment Brueys seemed to lose his nerve from sheer amazement.

The *Goliath* rounded the island at the head of the Bay, and Captain Foley, mindful of the shoals, gave the point a wide berth and then set a course that would take him between the French ships and the shore. 'Where there was room for the French ships to swing, there was room for him to anchor !' The battery on the island and the guns of the headmost French ship, the *Guerrier*, opened fire, but Foley, who was searching through his glass for the *Guerrier's* anchor-buoy,

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forbore to reply—he saw no reason at this critical moment for obscuring his vision by his own powder-smoke. In the act of crossing the *Guerrier's* bows, however, he poured a deadly broadside into her and then, turning parallel to her, but bow to stern, he dropped anchor. The anchor hung ! The *Goliath* drifted on past the *Guerrier* and brought up on the shoreward side of the second French ship. The *Zealous* (Captain Hood) following close abaft the *Goliath*, then dropped anchor from the stern, fetching up on the landward side of the *Guerrier* in the very position that the *Goliath* would have taken if every detail had gone according to plan. The sun sank below the horizon. Earth, sea, sails, palms, were all suffused with the myriad hues of the flaming Egyptian sky that make the sunset and the afterglow in Egypt so unforgettable a sight. In the swiftly gathering gloom two more English ships passed inshore of the French line, one on either side of the *Goliath*. Four English ships were thus engaging three French from the landward side. Then a fifth English ship rounded the island and, steering in her turn to the shoreward of the French, anchored somewhat farther down the line. This was the point at which Nelson's flagship, the *Vanguard*, came into action. Five of Nelson's ten available ships-of-the-line had now achieved the feat which to Brueys had seemed impossible—of infiltrating between the French line and the shoals. (The remaining three of the thirteen English seventy-fours were still at a considerable distance from the Bay.) The *Vanguard* now set a course to the seaward of the French Fleet, and was the first of the English ships to do so. Steering past the battered and already mastless *Guerrier*, whose sides were holed and whose crew had but little fight left in them, the *Vanguard* approached the second Frenchman, but finding that her hours, too, were numbered, passed her by and dropped anchor alongside the third enemy vessel, the *Spartiate*, which was already receiving one broadside after another on her larboard side from the *Theseus*. The French *Aquilon*, as yet unmarked, slewed round until she lay almost under the bows of the *Vanguard* and raked the English flagship with most deadly effect. ‘It’s all right,’ remarked Nelson to Berry. ‘Louis will soon be here.’ (Louis was captain of the ship next astern of the *Vanguard*.)

It was now dark. The thunder of the guns rolled across the Bay and shook the mud-built hovels of the Delta villages, but all that was visible to the watchers on shore was the faint glimmer of lanterns at the mizzen peaks of the English ships (which Nelson had ordered

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to distinguish them from the French ships) and the lightning-like flashes of broadside after broadside that pierced the inky blackness of the night. From point to point in rapid succession these flashes outlined and eclipsed in turn the historic mile-and-a-quarter of coast on the western side of the Bay ; and volley after volley momentarily revealed the shining hulls and masts of the ships, while illuminating with an angry glow the heavy pall of cannon smoke that hung like a lurid cloud above the combatants.

The two ships that came next in order to the *Vanguard* sailed past her and dropped anchor alongside the fourth and fifth French ships—still on the seaward side—so that five French ships were now being pounded by eight British ships, five of which, by amazingly skilful seamanship, had got into position between the French line and the land ; the other three engaged them from the seaward side.

Nelson's conferences with his captains were bearing fruit.

The first phase of this great battle reached its climax when the *Bellerophon* sailed into the fray. Whether by chance or design her captain, in the impenetrable darkness, sailed past the next disengaged French ship, the *Franklin*, and fetched up alongside the 120-gun *L'Orient*. He would have liked to lay himself on the bows of this formidable vessel and rake her from stem to stern, but his anchor dragged and he brought up beam to beam, giving Brueys the great chance for which he had been longing, and he took it ! The result could be all too easily foretold. The broadsides from *L'Orient* shattered to fragments eight of the *Bellerophon*'s seventy-four guns. Her crew stood grimly to serve their remaining guns, but Captain Darby was carried below unconscious. The first lieutenant took his place. He too was quickly wounded. The wound was dressed and he continued to command the ship. Then his leg was blown off and he was carried below ; a grapeshot killed both him and the man who carried him. The second lieutenant took command. The mizzen mast crashed into the sea. The main mast followed and the second lieutenant was killed as it fell. The third lieutenant took his place and still the crew fought heroically on. Incendiary bombs now set the *Bellerophon* on fire. The fire was got out and the crew fought on as the men of Nelson's fleet best knew how. But, crushed at last by the intensity of *L'Orient*'s fire, they cut cable. The foremast alone was still standing, and, as the *Bellerophon* drifted into the darkness, that too went by the board. Almost immediately a huge black shape loomed ahead of her, and a voice—an English voice—

sounded out of the night. It was Captain Hallowell of the *Swiftsure*, which, in company with the *Alexander*, had been sent by Nelson to Alexandria to do the scouting work for which he had wanted frigates and had therefore been many miles from Aboukir when the battle began. ‘What ship is that?’ hailed Hallowell’s trumpet. ‘The *Bellerophon* going out of action, disabled,’ was the answer, given in a tone of absolute exhaustion.

The first phase of the battle had ended. The *Swiftsure* and the *Alexander* had at last reached the Bay and the second phase was about to begin. But at this very moment Nelson suddenly staggered and collapsed into the arms of Berry, who was standing beside him near the main hatch. Blood gushed from Nelson’s forehead where he had received a severe flesh wound which prevented the use of his one good eye. The pain was so extreme that Nelson believed the wound to be mortal. ‘Remember me to my wife,’ he said as he fell.

Nelson was carried below to the cockpit and the Principal Surgeon at once left the man whose wound he was dressing. ‘No!’ said Nelson. ‘I will take my turn with my brave fellows!’ He tried to dictate a dispatch to his secretary who had himself been wounded and was unable to cope with the difficulties of the position. Nelson, therefore, though barely able to see, endeavoured to scrawl a few lines with his own slow left hand. And the dispatch eventually sent read: ‘Almighty God has blessed His Majesty’s arms.’<sup>1</sup>

While this was happening the *Swiftsure* had dropped anchor to the seaward of the French line between the colossal *L’Orient* and her nearest companion—the 80-gun *Franklin*—while the other new arrival, the *Alexander*, passed through the French line astern of *L’Orient* and anchored on her landward quarter. Thus *L’Orient* was trapped between two fires, and it was at this moment that the gallant little fifty-ton *Leander* was given her great opportunity. The *Peuple Souverain* was drifting helplessly towards the shallows, leaving a wide gap between the French rear and what was left of the van. Into this gap the *Leander* glided and, with admirable skill, anchored at right-angles to the French line so that she was able to rake the ships on one side of her from stem to stern, and those on the other side of

<sup>1</sup> The author of *The Influence of Sea Power on History* observes how characteristic it was that the few lines Nelson was able to trace ‘blinded, suffering, and confused, expressed that dependence on the Almighty habitual with him’. Cf. Captain (subsequently Admiral) A. T. Mahan, of the United States Navy: *The Life of Nelson* (Sampson Low, London, 1897), page 352.

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her from stern to stem. The mighty *L'Orient* was thus under fire from three sides. Brueys, though wounded in the head and though his hand was shattered, gallantly struggled to carry on. A cannon-ball all but cut him in two. '*Laissez moi*,' he said as his comrades were trying gently to lift him up. 'A French admiral dies on his quarter-deck'.

The decks of the great French flagship had become a shambles but her crew fought on with outstanding gallantry. Smoke and flame poured from her poop and Captain Hallowell, concentrating the *Swiftsure's* guns on the conflagration, baffled the valiant attempts of the enemy seamen to check them. The blaze spread and a ruddy glow overspread the scene of the battle. Berry took the news of *L'Orient's* plight to Nelson who, with his brow stitched and bandaged, heedless of the surgeon's most imperative orders, insisted on being helped up to the deck. Even as he emerged, his first thought being for the peril of *L'Orient's* crew, he ordered boats to be lowered quickly for the rescue of any possible survivors. The flames raced up *L'Orient's* masts and caught the tarred rigging. Spreading downwards deck by deck they threatened the magazine. The ships to leeward slipped their cables, but *L'Orient's* crew stood by to the last to man their guns. Just before ten o'clock the great ship blew up with a roar that woke the peaceful sleepers in far-away Delta villages and startled the French contingent occupying Rosetta nearly twenty miles away. The blinding light of the explosion revealed with awful clarity the wreckage and flotsam on the sea as well as the watching crowd on land. The silent awestruck suspense that followed was broken first by the hissing of the waves as the charred and splintered spars fell into the sea, and then by the occasional sound of oars as English seamen rescued all they could of the enemy crew who were now battling for life in the water.

The fierceness of the glare caused by the explosion subsided, but at that moment the moon rose, and its rays revealed the outlines of the mauled and mastless French vessels with the menacing forms of the English ships lined up against them. Then a single gun spoke—another—and the conflict again reached the climax of intensity.

The guns of half the French Fleet had now been silenced, and the ships of the other half had never been able to help them, since 'with suicidal foresight' they had 'furled their sails'.<sup>1</sup> Nelson was therefore free to concentrate his entire fleet upon what was left of the

<sup>1</sup> Sir Geoffrey Callender : *Sea Kings of Britain*, page 277.

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French centre and the rear. The Frenchmen fought on as gallantly as ever and with the heroism of despair, but the superiority of their armament which had been their great initial advantage had been lost within the first hour or two of the battle, and all their valour was unavailing against the strength of the fleet with which Nelson was now able to oppose them.

Day dawned on a victory the completeness of which astonished the world. Six of the French ships had struck their colours. Two more were fast ashore. Another, still afloat, had lost all her masts and was completely crippled. Two masts alone were still standing on all these nine ships. The imposing Goliath of the French Navy, the Flagship *L'Orient*, had been blown to atoms. Three French ships-of-the-line however remained in full battle trim, and these three made their best speed to reach the open sea. One grounded on the shoals. The remaining two escaped, and though the *Zealous* went in pursuit she was outsailed and the chase was abandoned. Nelson's men had reached the limit of human endurance. One by one they had dropped dead asleep by their guns ; nor could the loudest noise of firing awaken them. Thus, of the crew of the *Theseus* their captain wrote : 'As soon as they had hove our sheet-anchor up they dropped under the capstan-bars and were asleep in a moment, in every sort of posture, having been working at their fullest exertion, or fighting, for near twelve hours.'<sup>1</sup>

★ ★ ★

Bonaparte's grandiose plans for the conquest of Asia had been shattered by Nelson in this Battle of a Single Night. This tremendous victory—so inappropriately called in England the 'Battle of the Nile'—was not merely the most decisive ever gained by the British Fleet up to that time, it brought renewed hope to a Europe shuddering under the threat of enslavement by a World Dictator. The enormous force of the hitherto invincible Napoleon was now pent up in distant Egypt, and England was once again mistress of the sea. That is why Europe, drawing a deep breath of intense relief, was able to rearm with new-born confidence, and Austria and Russia hastened

<sup>1</sup> General Sir Edward Hutton, Chairman of the Military History Committee of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, used to impress upon young officers that Aboukir was one of the decisive battles of the world, because although the battles of Copenhagen and Trafalgar were still to be necessary, the real turning-point was at Aboukir.

#### A 'SECOND COALITION'

to join England in forming a 'Second Coalition'. The subsidies lavished upon them by Pitt helped this rearmament, and the French were driven ever back and back—to the Alps and to the Rhine.

The phase had begun that culminated on the field of Waterloo.

## THE ECLIPSE OF BONAPARTE

As yet unaware that he and his army were marooned in Egypt, Bonaparte began his occupation of the country by devoting his all but superhuman energies to the task of imposing French culture and French ideals on the Egyptians.

On the 7th August, 1798—that is to say a week after the Battle of the Nile—he received news that Ibrahim Bey was making a nuisance of himself in the Eastern Delta. Starting at once, therefore, with a small force, he met Ibrahim at the Delta town of Salhieh, and there, after a sharp encounter, put the Bey to flight despite the totally unexpected bravery and tenacity of his Egyptian adherents.

While Bonaparte was on his way back to Cairo a letter was handed to him by a messenger from Aboukir. He read the letter—not once but twice! Then, after asking the man a few questions, he dismounted, walked a little way into the desert, and stood thinking. ‘So this is the end of my Navy,’ he was overheard to mutter. ‘Can it be that I am fated to perish in Egypt?’

Presently, turning to his officers, he remarked in the most casual manner: ‘*Eh bien*, it will be necessary to remain in these countries—or make a grand exit, like the ancients.’

The news of the disaster completely unnerved his entourage, but he himself, after the first shock, betrayed no trace of emotion; and, indeed, a short time spent in further consideration led him to the conviction that a great destiny still awaited him in the East. Isolated from France though he was, he still possessed his invincible army who could be relied upon never to accept any human authority other than his own. Their personal loyalty, forged and annealed in the process of war, could be assured by his munificence, not least by the prospect of loot, and he could still lead them to India, in spite of the English, there to lay the foundation of the resplendent Oriental Empire of his dreams.

To gain and maintain the confidence of all classes of Egyptians became therefore a matter of the utmost importance. Islam and Christendom might certainly be as far as the poles apart, and Napoleon

was at least not unaware of the natural reaction of a nation predominantly Moslem to Christian rule, but he had always been accustomed to rely upon his skill as a diplomat, and he continued therefore to preface his proclamations with the words : 'There is but One God and Mohammed is his Prophet,' while endeavouring to create in the minds of the religious leaders of Al Azhar the illusion that France, having discarded Christianity at the Revolution, was still seeking another faith to take its place. He even went so far as to attempt to convey the impression that he himself contemplated conversion to Islam, though he did not succeed.

And so, he proceeded to develop his own ideas of what an ordered civilization and a popular government in Egypt should be ; and these ideas represented a nearer approach to these ideals than anything that Egypt had known for many long centuries. He planned and founded the French Institute for the study of the Arts and Sciences, and the 'Description of Egypt', compiled by the staff of scholars who had accompanied him, proved to be the only lasting achievement of the expedition. He appointed a Board of Government composed of a Dewan of Sheikhs and Frenchmen. A few Mameluke officials were necessarily co-opted, for it was only among Mamelukes that men could be found who had had the experience of exercising official authority. With this beginning, blessings of the kind that were so dear to good French Republicans were one at a time to be tactfully conferred upon a grateful Egypt. The streets were now to be properly watered by day and adequately lighted by night ; births, marriages and deaths were to be systematically recorded ; passports and permits were to be issued to those who wished to leave their townships ; property was to be registered ; all irregularities in the imposition of taxes—and above all in their collection—were to be once for all, so Bonaparte's sanguine temperament led him to believe, summarily terminated. Yet even with his most reasonable and desirable reforms Bonaparte made one irreparable blunder. He took it for granted that his reforms would be gratefully accepted by people who had never, for the most part, dreamed of any such possibilities ; and he was pathetically blind to the fact that so many of these innovations must at first appear to Egyptians to be an unwarranted interruption of age-old native custom by aliens and heretics. The streets of Cairo had, for instance, in Cairene opinion, been swept and lighted quite reasonably well before Napoleon's presumptuous intervention, and without any of the irritating proclamations imposing new pains and

penalties on Egyptian defaulters. The lamp now suspended 'by order' outside every house gave a quite unusual prodigality of light, and was therefore an absurd extravagance. Householders, moreover, were now responsible for seeing that the lamps were in position and kept alight all night, a comparatively small grievance that led to others of incomparably greater significance. Government by Mamelukes had been exasperating but comprehensible. Government by French officials was exasperating and incomprehensible. The idea of consulting someone familiar with the customs and conventions of the country before devising his reforms or drafting his proclamations never appears to have entered Bonaparte's mind. At a stroke of the pen, for example, he removed all the immemorial disabilities suffered by the native Christians, such disabilities being in flagrant contradiction to the theory of Liberty and Equality that had inspired the French Revolution of which he himself was the representative in Egypt. For uncounted generations the Egyptian Christians had been forbidden to own land, to wear a turban of any colour but black, to ride a horse, to carry arms. All these and many other indignities and restrictions disappeared as at the waving of a magic wand, and with inevitable results. The Egyptian Christians at once proceeded to flaunt themselves before the eyes of outraged Islam in silks and gold-embroidered costumes ; they bestrode mettlesome steeds of the highest Arab breeding in place of the humble ass with which they had had to be content in the past ; caf  s and restaurants sprang into existence overnight presided over by the ubiquitous Greek : and to aggravate the horror and indignation of the Elect, intoxicating beverages were sold and actually imbibed *coram publico* !

Upon the smouldering wrath of the Moslem community further fuel was heaped when everyone, Christian and Moslem alike, was ordered to wear a red, white and blue cockade as a sign of submission and loyalty.

With Bonaparte continuing his 'Fool's Progress', the Moslem population, though lacking leaders or even a plan, began to produce weapons from hiding-places that had successfully defeated all French efforts for their discovery.

It was on a Sunday in September, 1798, that a spark initiated a great conflagration. The shout '*Nassar Allah ul Islam*'—May God give victory to the Faith of Islam—was raised by some unknown person. The mob that immediately collected swarmed towards the house of the Cadi, the supreme Moslem judiciary—the man whom

they naturally regarded as their leader, to whom they could voice their grievances, and who could bring them to the notice of the French authorities. But the Cadi's own instinctive dread of Bonaparte caused him to bar his doors against the approaching mob. A stone crashed through one of his windows. A second stone followed. Soon not a pane remained unbroken. Reports of the rioting reached French Headquarters and a party of fifteen Dragoons under the command of a general quickly reached the scene of the disturbance but found the approaches blocked. An improvised spear—a knife-blade lashed to the end of a staff—pierced the General's heart and he fell, mortally wounded. The small force that he had brought was at length dispersed and the account of this victory, as it was immediately hailed, ran through the city, growing in importance with each repetition.

The ensuing riots were in many respects a most astonishing parallel to those which, in 1919 and 1920, led to the abdication by Great Britain of the privileged position which she had by that time come to possess in Egypt. Maddened mobs swept through the streets intoxicated with the lust of carnage. And soon into Cairo flocked the fanatical fellahin, swelling the rioters' ranks to serious proportions.

French sentries, wherever isolated, were overpowered and butchered. Barricades to impede the approach of French troops sprang up here, there, everywhere. Houses of French officers and officials were wrecked : the heads of their occupants were paraded in triumph through the city ; all communications with the Citadel were cut. By late afternoon almost every quarter of the city was in the hands of the insurgents. In Al Azhar an emergency council was appointed to direct the revolt and the situation clearly called for the strongest action. Bonaparte, however, still firm in his conviction that he understood the Egyptians, made the fatal mistake of offering to submit all grievances to the judgment of the newly-formed Dewan—an offer which, having been made after the outbreak of mob-violence, was naturally taken by an Oriental population to be a proof of weakness.

It was now that the progress of the revolt of 1798 began to follow a different course from that taken by the otherwise almost identical riots against the British after the First World War. For in 1919 Lloyd George appointed a Commission to enquire and report. Napoleon in 1798, on the other hand, decided that if the Egyptian

#### THE ECLIPSE OF BONAPARTE

mob-leaders wanted war they should have it. At the earliest possible moment the next morning, therefore, he sent four mortars and five howitzers up to the heights east of Cairo and at the same time gave orders that every Egyptian carrying arms should be shot at sight. The French guns then opened fire on the city, and building after building collapsed in ruins. The French troops beleaguered in the Citadel forced the barricades, and by midday the situation was once more in the main under control, the Mosque and University buildings of Al Azhar alone holding out.

Bonaparte, assuming that his motives in sparing Al Azhar could not be misunderstood, offered clemency to the rebels, but his offer was refused with scorn and contumely. Promptly the French artillery mounted the Mokattam Hills that dominate the entire city. Far below lay the flat-roofed houses interspersed with many a dome and minaret, and among them the dome and five minarets of Al Azhar stood out as in silhouette with photographic clarity. Upon these buildings, attended then, as now, by a host of students from every country in the Moslem world, the guns were trained. Fire was opened, and, as minute succeeded minute, the galling character and deadliness of the firing rapidly increased. Weeping women with their infants in arms fled shrieking from crumbling homes in the vicinity of the University ; barricades were swept by ball and shot ; and in the blood-boltered streets bodies lay piled in heaps.

The cannon fire was now concentrated on the crowded courtyard of Al Azhar itself, threatening an unprecedented massacre, with the result that the despairing garrison quickly flew a flag of truce. The firing ceased and dead silence supervened. Suddenly the great gate of the University opened and a small deputation of Sheikhs appeared ; then, mounted on mules, they rode to the French Headquarters, whilst into the venerated Al Azhar buildings—which no Moslem ever enters without first removing the shoes from his feet—a battalion of French infantry marched. A squadron of cavalry followed, and there the horses were stabled and the soldiers remained until a peace that promised to be permanent was duly attained. The city was fined ; eleven Sheikhs and doctors of law were shot ; the Dewan was dissolved ; and three days after the outbreak Bonaparte was able to make his laconic announcement : ‘*La sedition est endormie.*’

But the ink from his pen had hardly dried when the Sultan of Turkey, the suzerain of Egypt, declared war against France ; and in this crisis a single Englishman again stood between Bonaparte and the

Oriental Empire of his ambition. And it was the personal equation that told.

\* \* \*

On the first news of the Ottoman Government's intentions, Bonaparte, with the instinct of a great commander, instead of awaiting the arrival of the Turkish army, himself seized the initiative.

Sir Sidney Smith was at this moment in command of the English Mediterranean Squadron. Cruising off Alexandria he heard that Napoleon was on the march, and, divining that the port of Acre at the base of Mount Carmel would inevitably be his first objective, he made at full speed for the threatened port. Bonaparte's army, marching by the desert route to Palestine, had to meet a certain amount of resistance at El Arish, Khan Yunes, Gaza, and elsewhere, all age-old battle-sites which, for those who fought under Allenby, will ever be freshly remembered.

Before Bonaparte could reach Acre, Sir Sidney Smith had captured seven of the French gunboats conveying siege-artillery, munitions, and stores ; and Bonaparte's first shock on reaching Acre was the sight of his own guns pointed at his troops from the ramparts which he had intended to breach with those very guns.

Bonaparte's plan was to capture Acre—the key to Syria—to raise the entire Christian population of the Lebanon and Armenia, to 'turn the Turkish Empire upside down', and then to march either on Constantinople or Delhi. The capture of Acre was vital to any such plan, and the only force available to defend it against Napoleon's all-conquering army of veterans consisted of Sir Sidney Smith, a few British officers, a handful of British bluejackets, a very small Turkish garrison, and a French Royalist named Phelippeaux who had an extraordinary flair for engineering.<sup>1</sup>

'In that miserable hole,' Bonaparte remarked ruefully many years later, 'lay the fate of the East.'

The defenders of that 'miserable hole', helped by the fire of what had been Bonaparte's own guns and Bonaparte's own gunboats—now manned by English sailors—shattered the legend of Napoleonic

<sup>1</sup> The remarkable partnership between Phelippeaux and Sir Sidney Smith had begun when both were prisoners in the Revolutionary French gaol from which Phelippeaux, after effecting his own escape, had assisted Sir Sidney Smith to escape as well. Phelippeaux, having eventually reached London, was naturally befriended by Smith, and after a time, joined the British Navy.

invincibility. Assault after assault was repulsed, ceaseless sorties were led by Smith himself; breaches by the score were made by the French in the walls and repaired by Phelippeaux as fast as they were made; new and improved defence works were constructed at all exposed points and before them every storming party evaporated. The French sapped and mined. Phelippeaux counter-mined with even greater ability, and, blowing in the French tunnels, ended in a trice what had cost the enemy a week's labour. And the grimy-faced British bluejackets on the crumbling walls grinned at their assailants beneath them, 'defying them and enraging them with their light-hearted taunts'.<sup>1</sup>

Phelippeaux died of sunstroke, but Colonel Douglas took his place and, despite all odds, Sir Sidney Smith and his gallant garrison continued to hold out.

On the evening of the 7th May—the fifty-first day of the siege—the first glimpse of sails far out at sea proclaimed the arrival of Turkish reinforcements. Instantaneously Napoleon made up his mind that the time had come to capture Acre at all costs. Under cover of that night his troops hurled themselves at the fortress in assault after assault, and when morning broke a tricolour was floating over one of the towers. But the garrison refused to capitulate; the British bluejackets closed with their French opponents; the two forces were locked together in a deadly grapple; and from the battered embattlements, 'brave Turks, whose most destructive missible weapons were heavy stones' hurled these missiles on to their assailants, 'overthrowing the foremost down the slope and impeding the progress of the rest'.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the entire day the battle raged, and on the morning of the 10th Acre, under the inspiring leadership of the indomitable Sir Sidney Smith, was still holding out.

Napoleon now therefore determined to make his last, most desperate, and decisive effort. 'It was a grand and terrific spectacle', wrote one of his officers. Napoleon, his face blanched to a deadly whiteness and with a grim, set expression, stood raking the field with his glass, watching the effect of his artillery in an agony of supreme apprehension as his storming parties surged forward in heroic defiance of the annihilating fire. One after the other the members of his staff standing beside him were picked off in rapid succession.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur E. P. Weigall: *Egypt from 1798 to 1914* (Blackwood, Edinburgh and London, 1915), page 37.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from a letter from Sir Sidney Smith to Lord St. Vincent.

Tense moments followed. Then the ‘ever invincible’ French Grenadiers gave way, and although the struggle still continued for some time under the ruined and blackened walls, the fortunes of the day had been decided. The mills of the gods may have been grinding still, but Napoleon’s fame as a general who had never known defeat had vanished for ever.<sup>1</sup>

‘*Cet homme*,’ was Napoleon’s furious but pellucid comment on Smith’s defence of Acre, ‘*m’a fait manquer ma fortune*.’

Abandoning a host of casualties, now amounting to many thousands, Bonaparte, sixty days after the commencement of the siege, led the remnants of his defeated army on their return journey across the Desert. On reaching the Cairo suburb of Matarieh he was met by the sheikhs, *ulema*, and other leading Moslems to whom he rehearsed his account of the ‘victories’ he had won in Syria, exhorting them to continue their allegiance to France. At Cairo he found captured Turkish standards floating above the minarets of the mosques ; the streets were lined with waiting spectators ; the ground was carpeted with palm-branches for the French horses to pass over ; and Bonaparte rode through the city in ‘triumph’ with an escort of generals to the accompaniment of banging drums and flying banners. His military pageant took five hours to pass through the gate leading into Cairo—known in the vernacular as the Bab-el-Nasr, or ‘Gate of Victory’—but he was nevertheless tasting the unaccustomed bitterness of defeat, and it was with a feeling of exultation that, soon afterwards, he heard of the arrival at Aboukir of a large Turkish force with which the Sultan of Turkey intended to re-conquer Egypt, but which he himself characteristically regarded as already delivered into his hands.

He could have found no place either in Egypt or elsewhere better calculated to repair his damaged reputation than Aboukir, the site of Nelson’s victory over his own fleet ; and his spirits rose to mercurial heights as he rode rapidly northwards at the head of a considerable portion of his army.

Sixty transports now lay anchored in Aboukir Bay. A large Turkish force had already landed and had quickly overpowered the three or four hundred French defenders of the town. A further instalment of Turkish troops to the number of several thousands had then disembarked.

<sup>1</sup> ‘His defeat at Caldiero, near Verona, in 1796, had been officially converted into a victory, but Acre could not be termed anything but a reverse.’ Professor J. H. Rose : *The Life of Nelson* (Bell, London, 1834), page 209.

Sir Sidney Smith had not yet arrived on the scene.<sup>1</sup>

The Turkish army was encamped on the narrow strip of land that forms the western tongue of Aboukir Bay and was under the command of a Turkish General of whom Sir Sidney Smith's secretary wrote : 'This is the man who *ought* to have come to save Acre in March last !' The camp was in a state of unbelievable chaos, and not only was there no attempt at organization, but even the most perfunctory obedience to orders was conspicuously rare, the result being that the entrenchments which should have been dug across the peninsula were far from complete despite all the endless appeals addressed to the Pasha-in-Command by Colonel Douglas and Major Bromley.<sup>2</sup>

Sir Sidney reached Aboukir in *Le Tigre* (a vessel captured from the French) on the 20th July, Bonaparte a few days later.

The military details of the fluctuating fortunes of the battle that then took place are of comparatively small interest. All that need be said is that Bonaparte, as Smith's secretary wrote, 'attacked the camp at eight o'clock in the morning and the whole was carried ; the Pasha, artillery, ammunition, tents, and baggage were in his possession by eleven o'clock'. The rest of the Turkish army fled in disorder, some making for the fort at the seaward end of Aboukir Point, others for the sea, which, as Smith wrote to Nelson, 'was soon covered with hundreds of fugitives swimming to us'.

Among the swimmers struggling for life near one of the English boats was a young Albanian soldier with a finely shaped head, eyes of intense grey, and a bushy beard and moustache. He seemed to be in his early thirties, and had the look of a man with an unusually strong personality. This was Mohammed Ali, who was destined to become the founder of the dynasty that ruled Egypt from 1807 until 1953 when his descendant, the infant son of ex-King Farouk, was deposed and Egypt proclaimed a Republic with General Neguib as its first President.

<sup>1</sup> After his success in compelling Napoleon to raise the siege of Acre, Sir Sidney Smith had first proceeded northwards to Syria, and a note in his handwriting has survived bearing the significant date, 'Nazareth, 1799'. In a subjoined comment Sir Sidney remarks : 'I have just returned from the Cave of the Annunciation where, secretly and alone, I have been returning thanks to the Almighty for our late wonderful success. Well may we exclaim, "the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong".'

<sup>2</sup> Major Bromley was an artillery officer. Both he and Colonel Douglas had been brought by Sir Sidney Smith from Acre to assist the Turks.

Young Mohammed Ali was helped out of the water and rowed to safety by English sailors.

The fort near the end of Aboukir Point held out for a few days longer. Then its survivors surrendered to the French and the Turkish force of ten thousand men which the Sultan had sent to reconquer Egypt—and which had constituted the *élite* of the Turkish army—ceased to exist.

Once more Bonaparte led his troops through the streets of Cairo, this time with the captured Turkish commander at his side. But the line of prisoners that followed gave an entirely false impression of Bonaparte's position. For a parcel of English and German newspapers that had come into his possession, and a letter received from his brother, had made it all too clear to him that in Europe the French armies were retreating on every hand ; that France was distracted from end to end by civil discord ; that the menace of a new Red Republican Reign of Terror was actually threatening the settled order of the French State.

In Egypt the outlook was no better ; for the French military chest was empty ; the pay of the French army was in arrears ; the rank and file were riddled with disaffection.

Two courses now stood open to Bonaparte ; to stay in Egypt with his army, or to endeavour to return to France. Loyalty to his men counselled the former ; personal ambition and the feeling that he could serve France better in Europe than in Egypt caused him to choose the latter.

With the excuse that he was compelled to 'visit the Provinces' in order to investigate grievances of the inhabitants, he boarded a Nile-boat at Cairo's river port of Boulac in the small hours of a morning in August and sailed down the River to the coast. On the morning of the 22nd, in the company of a very small, picked party of French officers, he stood on the beach of the little fishing village of Marabout, to the west of Alexandria, near which he had landed a year earlier with such sanguine hopes. About two miles out at sea two French frigates were lying, and Bonaparte, while awaiting a boat to take him on board, walked up and down with as much patience as he could muster while he discussed his future plans with his staff.

'When I arrive in Paris,' he told Menou, 'I shall put myself at the head of the State.' That done, he promised that he would return to Egypt 'to exterminate the enemies of order'.

#### THE ECLIPSE OF BONAPARTE

At about nine o'clock he was rowed out to one of the frigates, and his departure was fortunately timed, for Sir Sidney Smith had taken his two ships-of-the-line to Cyprus for repairs and Bonaparte was thus able to slip away without any untoward happening, leaving behind him a letter which appointed Kléber to act as his successor.

So closely had the secret of Napoleon's departure been kept that hardly one of his officers knew of his real intentions. Hence, when the news was announced, the entire army almost to a man were convinced that he had deserted them.

Eventually he reached Paris, and in November, 1799, under the title of 'First Consul', he became the real 'monarch' of the French Republic.

## SIR SIDNEY SMITH

**G**ENERAL KLEBER, on whom Bonaparte's mantle had descended, differed in many ways from Napoleon. Tall and dignified, he had an inordinate love of display and was a lavish entertainer. His household, a dream of Oriental magnificence, was maintained with a degree of splendour worthy of the *Arabian Nights*. In conformity with immemorial Pharaonic custom, an Egyptian runner went by his bridle ; a second followed at his stirrup ; and two grooms in gorgeous apparel bearing long, conspicuously official wands shouted in stentorian tones as he rode through the streets : ' Make way for our most noble Commander-in-Chief ! Prostrate yourselves, O ye Moslems, at his passing ! ' Indeed, though still claiming to be a Republican, Kléber showed little interest in the two great Revolutionary-Republican ideals of Liberty and Equality, a fact of some importance since it could hardly have failed to influence the course of action which Sir Sidney Smith now felt obliged to take—a course of action which has ever since been misunderstood and misinterpreted even by his own countrymen and stigmatized by the French as a glaring example of English perfidy.

The misunderstanding began when news reached London that letters were passing between Kléber and Sir Sidney Smith on the subject of the possible withdrawal of the French army from Egypt without further bloodshed.

Towards the end of 1799 Kléber proposed that a conference should be held on board *Le Tigre* (Smith's flagship) ; and Smith had every reason for giving this proposal his wholehearted support. In the first place, a Turkish army under the command of the Grand Vizier was on its way from Constantinople to make another attempt to expel the French from Egypt, and Smith, having seen the *élite* of the Turkish army annihilated at Aboukir, was quite certain that this ' rabble of an army ', as he called it, would be exterminated if it were fated to meet Kléber's trained and disciplined veterans in the field.

Unfortunately for Sir Sidney Smith, Lord Nelson had written

him a letter in March, 1799, forbidding him 'to give any French ship or man leave to quit Egypt'; but conditions had so completely changed since the letter was written that Smith felt sure that Nelson would have countermanded the order if he had known all the facts. And there were many facts—quite apart from the certain fate of Britain's Ottoman ally—which convinced Smith of the desirability of facilitating the earliest possible withdrawal of the French army from Egypt. Smith, for instance, had the strongest reasons for believing that the very last thing Napoleon desired was to see Kléber and his army safely back in France! He knew—and Kléber's love of display was only one of many things that lent colour to this view—that Kléber himself and many of his entourage only bore (to quote Smith's words) 'with the present monarchical despotism of Bonaparte as the least of two evils *but with the firm resolution of opposing its permanent establishment*'. He knew, too, that the rank and file of the French army looked upon Bonaparte's sudden departure as a mean-spirited and cowardly action. The officers, Smith said, despised and detested Bonaparte. 'Many', he told Lord Keith, 'are, to my knowledge, averse to the whole republican system, and I have positive ground for saying that *Kléber is Bonaparte's most determined and dreaded opponent.*' This opinion was undoubtedly founded on fact, because there is no question at all that of all the French officers in Egypt, few could have felt less trust in or sympathy with Bonaparte than Kléber.

Smith, taking all this into consideration, and much more, believed (as he told Lord Keith later on when he had to defend himself against those who considered he had acted wrongly) that Napoleon wished Kléber and his army 'to remain in *this* country, [Egypt] far from himself'. With all this in mind, and believing it to be his duty to prevent the extermination of the Turkish army, Smith helped to bring about the conference between the French and the Turks which Kléber now proposed, notwithstanding Nelson's orders.

When news reached London that Kléber and the Grand Vizier were about to meet, Whitehall, true to its traditional habit of ignoring the man on the spot, put its foot down. And it was this that began a game of cross-purposes in which the Fates played an even greater part than either politicians or men-at-arms. On the 15th December, 1799, the Lords of the Admiralty wrote to Lord Keith, then in command of the Mediterranean Squadron, insisting that on no account should the French army be allowed to leave Egypt or to capitulate

#### CONVENTION OF EL ARISH

'upon any other terms than those of giving up their arms and *surrendering as prisoners of war*'.

Lord Keith immediately wrote to Kléber (on the 8th January, 1800) to inform him of the British Government's decision, addressing the letter to Kléber but sending it to Sir Sidney Smith and instructing him to forward it. Sir Sidney, all unconscious that this communication was on its way to Egypt, received two delegates from Kléber on board *Le Tigre* at Damietta. As it happened, before negotiations could be concluded, the ship was driven off the coast of Egypt and the conversations were interrupted. The Grand Vizier and his armed rabble meanwhile reached the Egyptian border, and, the small French garrison at the frontier down of El Arish having been overpowered and butchered in the coldest of cold blood, the negotiations between the French and the Turks were resumed at this town of El Arish, and Kléber's envoys on their way to the Turkish camp were met by the grim spectacle of rows of piles on which the heads of their compatriots were impaled.

Sir Sidney Smith had brought the two parties together, but the negotiations that took place were only between the French and the Turks. Smith merely acted as a trusted mediator to whom points in dispute were referred, though he was as anxious, and indeed perhaps even more anxious than either of the contracting parties for an armistice to be arranged. His task, already difficult enough, was rendered the more difficult on the one hand by the demands made by the Turks 'in the stupid confidence which they placed in their numbers and from their ignorance of the strength of the enemy';<sup>1</sup> and on the other hand by the French 'from their consciousness of their superiority'.<sup>2</sup> In the end, however, an agreement was reached by which, subject to its being ratified, the French army was to be given at safe and honourable opportunity to withdraw from Egypt within three months.

This is the fateful document known as the 'Convention of El Arish'.

Pending final ratification by Kléber and the Grand Vizier (who were not present during the negotiations), the Convention was provisionally signed by General Dessaix and Citizen Poussielgue as Kléber's plenipotentiaries and by two Turks representing the Grand

<sup>1</sup> H. P. Morier (Private Secretary to the British Ambassador Extraordinary at Constantinople) : *Memoir of a Campaign with the Ottoman Army in Egypt* (Debrett, London, 1801), page 74.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

SIR SIDNEY SMITH

Vizier. Hence, as a matter of historical fact, the Convention was not signed by Sir Sidney Smith, since the contracting parties consisted of the Turks and French only.<sup>1</sup>

Traversing the high seas, bound for Egypt, was the ship bringing the British Government's clear and emphatic declaration that the French, so far from being given a 'safe and honourable' opportunity to withdraw, would only be allowed to leave the country as prisoners of war.

The Grand Vizier, acting upon his belief that the French Army would now be allowed to sail for France, issued orders for his own army to proceed at once across the Desert to re-occupy Egypt. In the van went the baggage and camp equipment—unescorted! Following the van came Divisions and Brigades of Artillery, Cavalry, camp servants, camp-followers, and hawkers, all inextricably inter-tangled, each of them marching (according to an English observer) 'as fast or as slow as he pleased'. The rearguard consisted of volunteers who had only joined the expedition in order to grab whatever they could. Auxiliary services, such as those of medicine and supply, were conspicuously absent; but the personal servants and attendants of the Grand Vizier made ample amends for any other deficiencies, since they were sufficient to have furnished a full brigade of infantry!

At Salhieh, where this remarkable procession first came in contact with the Delta cultivation, a prolonged halt was called.<sup>2</sup> And it was here that the Convention of El Arish was signed by Kléber and the Grand Vizier.

With this ceremony completed the Chief Crier went about the camp making the truly remarkable announcement: 'The Army will march for ten hours tomorrow. All who desire to do so may now depart!'

So, on the next morning, the army marched! Eventually it arrived at the Delta village of Bilbeis, at that time a cluster of mud huts surrounded by a mud wall as a defence against surprise attacks by wandering Bedouin. This village is some thirty miles north-east of Cairo, and it was here that the main body encamped. Some of the troops proceeded to Cairo, and here, not only the Citadel but other forts were handed over to them by the French, though it is a curious

<sup>1</sup> The copy in the Record Office bears Smith's signature only as certifying it to be a 'true copy'.

<sup>2</sup> Salhieh is on a branch line of the State Railways. From the precincts of its station the Desert begins.

## LORD KEITH'S LETTER

fact that the Turkish soldiers could not be persuaded to occupy them. They preferred to abandon themselves unrestrainedly to the seductive pleasures of the city, an act of folly 'for which', as Gabbarty, the distinguished Arab historian in a grimly prophetic mood remarks, 'their fate was awaiting them'.<sup>1</sup>

The Mamelukes, now emerging from their hiding-places, streamed into Cairo and other towns and villages as well as into the Turkish camp; and the French, only too anxious to speed up their preparations for departure, promptly sold off their arms, stores, animals, and furniture, and then pitched camp near the site on which Shepheard's Hotel was subsequently built.

When the Moslem population learnt of the approaching departure of the French their jubilation knew no bounds. 'Blessed be the year and happy will be the day of the departure of the Infidels,'<sup>2</sup> they shouted as they passed them in the streets. And, as had happened before, the school-children of Cairo were led through the streets by their masters chanting insulting rhymes invoking curses on all Christians.<sup>3</sup>

It was at this moment that Sir Sidney Smith (on board *Le Tigre* off Cyprus) received Lord Keith's letter addressed to Kléber notifying him that the only condition on which the French army would be permitted to leave Egypt would be as prisoners of war. He had no option but to have the letter sent to Kléber and it was therefore delivered, but he took immediate steps to influence the Home Government to countermand their instructions and, indeed, felt sure that their final decision would be (as he wrote at the time) 'conformable with ours on the spot when the materials of which we formed our judgment shall have reached them'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gabbarty's great work has not been translated into English, but a French translation was published by the Egyptian Government Press (Imprimerie Nationale) in 1891. It is entitled *Merveilles Bibliographiques et Historiques ou Chroniques du Cheikh Abd-el-Rahman el Djabarty*. My quotations are translated from the original Arabic, but the footnotes refer the reader to the French translation. The first will be found on page 170 of vol. vi.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, page 168.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, pages 168-9. Gabbarty comments on the extravagant insults hurled at the French in the streets of Cairo, insults which he himself regarded with feelings of regret and disgust in which the majority of the better-class Egyptians shared.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. a letter written by Sir Sidney Smith from Cyprus to H. P. Morier, dated 22nd February, 1800, and another from Sir Sidney Smith, dated 13th March, 1800, to Lord Keith, written at Alexandria.

At the same time he instructed his representative to get into immediate touch with both Kléber and the Grand Vizier, and, if possible, to persuade them to refrain from precipitate action while he himself was inducing the British Government 'to prevent the destruction of our ally', to 'save our country from the imputation of perfidy and evil intention', and to 'relieve us all from a most distressing and embarrassing situation' by 'delaying the rupture of the Convention'.

Simultaneously with these happenings a young Royal Engineer, on his way from Constantinople to Egypt, was in the act of crossing the lonely wilderness of Sinai, escorted by a small force of Turks and Arabs. He was bearing dispatches of such unusual and indeed sensational importance that it had been thought necessary to entrust them to a British officer rather than, as had hitherto been the practice, to a janissary.

The officer to whom this duty had been given was Captain Thomas Lacey, a member of the British Military Mission which had arrived in Constantinople with instructions to 'direct the efforts of the Porte in such a manner as may destroy even the possibility of General Bonaparte's using any part of his force to the annoyance of the British Dominions in India'.

Captain Lacey eventually reached the Egyptian frontier, and, crossing it, became the first Royal Engineer to enter the country to which so many Royal Engineers have since rendered such invaluable service.

On the 8th March, 1800, Lacey rode into the Grand Vizier's camp at Bilbeis with dispatches addressed by Lord Elgin (Ambassador Extraordinary at Constantinople) to the Grand Vizier and to Mr. Morier, his secretary, who was travelling with the Grand Vizier's army to act as the medium of communication between Lord Elgin and the Turks.

A brief extract from the letter written by Lord Elgin to Mr. Morier will suffice to explain the situation which the dispatches revealed : 'Sir,' it ran, 'One of Lord Nelson's cruisers having captured a ship from General Kléber's army, the British sailors were so fortunate as to recover the papers which had been thrown overboard; and Lord Nelson immediately sent copies of them to me. Receiving them, I lost no time in requesting permission of the Sublime Porte to forward them to the Grand Vizier. . . . Captain Lacey of the Royal Engineers has been chosen for this service . . . I beg therefore that you will, as soon as possible after his arrival, demand an audience

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for him of the Grand Vizier . . . I most anxiously hope that these papers will reach His Highness in time, as they contain every explanation that could possibly be wished of the situation of the French army and of the cunning perfidy with which the present negociation is carrying on. I have to beg you will recommend to His Highness’s most serious attention, the details contained in this correspondence and in particular that you will point out to his notice that the plan of Bonaparte is to establish a French colony in Egypt ; and that Kléber and others, tho’ they differ from Bonaparte as to the present circumstances, agree with him that France ought to wrest this Province from the Turkish Government whenever it can do so . . .<sup>1</sup>

From this it will be seen that despite Sir Sidney Smith’s hope—which proved to be justified—that the British Government, after considering all the facts, would allow the terms of the Convention of El Arish to be honoured ; and notwithstanding all his efforts to persuade Kléber and the Grand Vizier to await a decision to that effect from London, the extermination of the Grand Vizier’s army had now become inevitable.

A sudden, feverish resumption of French military activity in Cairo mystified the inhabitants. The calm and orderly preparations for the departure of the French army abruptly ceased. Artillery and ammunition carts rumbled ceaselessly through the narrow streets. The Citadel and the Forts were re-occupied by the French !—a bloodless victory, since Turkish inertia had left them devoid of garrisons ! No explanation of these movements was given to the population and the wildest rumours were rife, the most prevalent being that an Anglo-Turkish plan for massacring the French had been revealed by French spies.

On the 11th March the criers went about the Grand Vizier’s camp at Bilbeis announcing to all and sundry the fact that a new camp had been established at El Khanka (about fifteen miles from Cairo) and that—as Captain Lacey wrote—‘it was left to all to take up their new ground *at such intervals of time and in such order as they thought proper*’.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, on the following day, the Grand Vizier’s vast and motley host started for El Khanka, where the scene (says Lacey) ‘was more like a fair than a camp’.

Some days later, the Turks advanced to Matarieh on the outskirts

<sup>1</sup> Record Office Papers : F.O. 78/28.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Captain Thomas Lacey, R. E., to Major Holloway, dated ‘Camp at Jaffa, 21st July, 1800’. Quoted from *Royal Engineers Journal*, vol. xiv, page 95.

of Cairo ; and Kléber, by then ready to act, sent the Grand Vizier his ultimatum : ‘ Withdraw your troops to Salhieh or I make war ! ’ But the Grand Vizier in a sublimely self-sufficient mood arrogantly replied : ‘ A Grand Vizier never retraces his steps ! ’

Kléber honoured this answer by giving it publication in an Order of the Day, and at the same time—the psychological moment—he also made known to his troops the warning which Lord Keith had sent him that, in spite of the Convention of El Arish, they would only be permitted to leave Egypt as prisoners of war.

‘ Comrades,’ he declared, ‘ a French soldier has only one reply to such insolent communications. And that is in victory ! ’

Marching out of Cairo he met the Turks at Matarieh, where the Grand Vizier’s army was practically annihilated. The Grand Vizier himself, mistaking the advancing enemy for his own troops, allowed them to approach to within a mile of his own Headquarters unmolested, and it was not until Lacey hurriedly rode up to warn him of his danger that he could be persuaded to rise from his sofa, leave his Turkish pipe, and join the fleeing survivors of his routed army, who, with the French at their heels, were stampeding in headlong retreat. Lacey lost all his belongings, and would undoubtedly have perished (he reported) ‘ had it not been for the humanity of a Mameluke ’.

Before the news of the tragedy of Matarieh could reach London the following dispatch was on its way from Downing Street addressed to Lord Elgin at Constantinople : ‘ As the General commanding the enemy’s troops appears to have treated with Sir Sidney Smith as a person whom he *bona fide* conceived to possess authority . . . His Majesty, from a scrupulous regard to the public faith, is pleased to direct that his officers *should abstain from any act inconsistent with the engagements to which Sir Sidney Smith has erroneously given the sanction of His Majesty’s name* ’.

But the decision had been given too late ; for, even while the words were being penned, the miserable Turkish survivors of the Battle of Matarieh were straggling into Syria and the French were left absolute masters in Egypt. The only course now remaining to the British Government was to sacrifice British lives and the British taxpayers’ money in order to effect what Sir Sidney Smith’s plans would have made possible ‘ without ’ (to use his own words) ‘ further effusion of blood ’.

The remainder of the story of the French Occupation of Egypt

must be told in brief. Kléber was assassinated by a Syrian from Aleppo who was living in the Al Azhar University. Menou then became Commander-in-Chief.

Sir Ralph Abercromby was sent to Egypt with about five thousand men. Subsequent reinforcements increased his force to about 16,000. Abercromby's men landed at Aboukir under a hot discharge of shot, shell, grape, and musketry and advanced towards Alexandria. Before reaching the city a desperate but decisive battle was fought with the French which left the British masters of the field, though Abercromby himself succumbed from the wounds that he received. General Hutchinson assumed command ; Alexandria was invested ; a combined British and Turkish force advanced to Cairo ; both Cairo and Alexandria eventually surrendered, but could only be persuaded to do so on condition that the French army was repatriated.

'Everything happened,' said Sir Sidney Smith in a letter to Lord Elgin, 'precisely in the way I expected and foretold it.'

When the news reached Napoleon he is reported to have exclaimed : 'We have lost Egypt ! My projects and my dreams have alike been destroyed by England.'

England herself, however, had no intention of remaining in Egypt, and the British army, in the spring of 1803, sailed for home, taking with them one of the most powerful of the Mameluke Emirs, Elfi Bey, so that he could be consulted by the British Government respecting the means to be adopted for restoring the former power of the Mamelukes !

Thus ended Bonaparte's 'mis'-adventure in Egypt. It had been a disastrous failure but it left some indelible marks. It gave the Egyptians a first experience which they did not forget of organized government ; it brought them into contact with Bonaparte's staff of savants and opened many Egyptian eyes to the advance which science and scholarship had made in Europe ; it shook the power of the Mamelukes ; it awakened some English minds to the strategic importance of the region where East and West meet ; and it brought to Egypt the ancestor of King Farouk—the young Albanian officer, Mohammed Ali.

CHAPTER 15

THE 'PHARAOH' OF MODERN EGYPT

M OHAMMED ALI was still in his early thirties. A man of magnetic personality he was short, thick-set, ruggedly strong, with mind and body highly strung, and deep-set eyes in which, it was said, a strange fire sometimes blazed. Possessing great personal charm and capable of inspiring more than ordinary loyalty and devotion, his features, when he was roused, assumed an expression that would alarm any opponent. The exact date of his birth is uncertain, as are the circumstances of his parentage. He seems to have been of Albanian origin, and his early years were spent in the small walled seaport of Kavalla near the frontier of Thrace and Macedonia. There he was left a penniless orphan in early childhood and grew up in the service of the local governor. Hence, he was not only fed and clothed but was taught to ride, shoot, and repeat the Moslem prayers. Lacking any other vestige of education he never achieved any fluency in writing or reading. 'The only books I have ever read,' he once said in later life, 'are men's faces, but those I have seldom read amiss.' While still a youth he earned a little money by trading in tobacco, of which the finest Turkish quality grew near Kavalla, and when in 1798 the Sultan decided to send an army to Egypt to oust the French, Mohammed Ali was one of a troop of three hundred Albanians recruited for service and who landed at Aboukir the following year.

The departure of the British Army now left a vacuum in Egypt, an opportunity which might have been seized either by the Mamelukes or by the Turks. But the Turks were divided into two factions, those on the one hand who recognized the authority of the Turkish Pasha, and, on the other, the Albanian contingent (with whom Mohammed Ali had come to Egypt) who would obey no orders but from their own commander, Tahir Pasha. That the Mamelukes also should be divided among themselves was only to be expected. Their two chief factions consisted of the followers of Elfi Bey and those who supported Bardissi Bey.

During the inevitable conflict that followed between Turk, Mame-

lukc and Albanian, the country sank into a state of almost unimaginable chaos, but all that need be said here of the complicated struggle between the contestants for power is that at one period the head of Tahir Pasha was thrown out of a window—a not uncommon sight, perhaps, in old-time Cairo—and young Mohammed Ali, the next in rank to Tahir Pasha, adroitly stepped into his shoes.

The state of the country was at this time as bad as during any of the other periods of anarchy in the long Egyptian story ; the fellahin were a prey to brigands and marauders ; villages and fields were abandoned ; famine itself became an imminent menace ; in Cairo, janissaries, Mamelukes, Bashi-bazouks, and every other description of ‘soldier’, pillaged shops, plundered merchants, outraged harems. Mohammed Ali, while ostensibly supporting at one moment the Turkish Pasha, at another a Mameluke Bey, was astutely continuing to build up a substantial party of his own among the sheikhs and leading citizens of the country. And the result was that when the state of anarchy increased beyond all precedent, and when Cairo was being pillaged and sacked by mutinous soldiery, the sheikhs met together and decided that the one and only man who could restore order was Mohammed Ali. Anticipating the Porte’s approval, they therefore implored him to assume the governorship.

The Turkish Pasha learning this, called upon the Mamelukes to support him and turned the guns of the Citadel on the troops of Mohammed Ali in the town below. Instantaneously, Mohammed Ali ordered his own guns to be dragged up to the desert heights dominating the Citadel itself, and, in this commanding position, patiently awaited events.

At length the decree arrived from Constantinople appointing him Pasha of Egypt. The deposed Pasha accepted the verdict, quitted the Citadel, boarded a boat at Boulac, sailed to Alexandria, and then left the country.

Mohammed Ali was at this moment probably no more than thirty-six years old !

The Mamelukes however still remained as a possible threat to his position, and in his determination to end this menace once for all by any means that offered, whether fair or foul, he devised a scheme for their liquidation which, for its truly Oriental thoroughness and audacity, and for the barbaric subtlety of its execution, rivalled and even surpassed anything recorded in the annals of Mameluke times.

The occasion chosen was a ceremony at the Citadel to which he had

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invited a large number of guests to see one of his sons invested with the Pelisse of Honour before leaving for Arabia in command of an expedition to recover the holy cities of Mecca and Medina from a rebel sect. All the Mameluke chiefs were invited to the ceremony, and were encouraged to bring with them as many followers as they chose. Nearly five hundred arrived, intending to take their place in a procession which was expected to be of outstanding brilliance.

The guests assembled in the Great Hall of the Citadel ; coffee and sweetmeats were served ; pipes were smoked ; the ceremonies were duly performed. The civilians then withdrew to facilitate the marshalling of the procession while the inevitably vast crowds of sightseers were gathering in the bazaars to watch it pass through the streets from the Citadel.

The signal for the starting of the procession was at length given. A corps of Bashi-bazouks (Turkish Asiatic irregulars) were the first to appear, and janissaries followed them ; then came the Albanians, and, following these, the Mamelukes resplendent in their bejewelled robes and costly armour. A company of Turkish regulars brought up the rear.

From the platform of rock on which the chief buildings of the Citadel stand, the procession had necessarily to pass down a steep winding passage—cut through the solid native rock—which leads to one of the outer gates. High walls and buildings tower on either side. In orderly succession each corps and company of the glittering cavalcade made its way down this narrow lane. The janissaries eventually passed through the outer gate into the full view of the crowd waiting in the Square outside the walls of the Citadel, and then, suddenly, the gate was shut behind them and a murderous fusillade was poured into the ranks of the trapped Mamelukes from the lofty walls above them. At this moment, the Albanians, who were just inside the gate, turned on the Mamelukes while yet other troops attacked them from their rear. The lane at once became a confused mass of terrified, plunging and kicking horses and of men struggling for their lives. Though penned in like sheep, many of the Mamelukes fought like lions and fell, sword in hand ; others, with the single-hearted resignation of the Moslem, knelt down and committed their souls to Allah. The narrow lane soon became a veritable butcher's shambles. A river of blood poured down it, soaking everything, seeping under the closed leaves of the barred gate and far out into the Square beyond the Citadel walls. In this way the ghastly

### HIS SATANICAL PLAN

evidence of massacre was conveyed from the Citadel to the panic-stricken bazaars. The shops emptied themselves ; the stalls closed as if the Day of Judgment had arrived ; the waiting crowds made for home as if for their lives.

A single Mameluke, it is alleged, succeeded in spurring his horse through the crowd of assailants, reached the top of the lane, galloped to the parapet of the precipitous fortress wall, and with one supreme terrifying leap into space landed on the rocks some thirty feet below, the fall being broken by the horse's body. Of the four hundred and eighty Mamelukes who had unthinkingly accepted Mohammed Ali's invitation, this was the only one to escape the massacre alive.

From the moment the procession had begun to move, Mohammed Ali had paced up and down his room pallid and unbearably overwrought. Horses were already saddled on which to escape if his Satanical plan failed. When the first sound of the firing reached him he was inexpressibly relieved. At last it stopped. Then the heads of some of the victims were brought to him in evidence. They grinned at him through his window.

His Genoese doctor entered.

'All is over,' he said. 'A great day for your Highness.'

'Water ! Water !' was all that the Pasha could gasp.

Now followed a night of indescribable horror as the soldiery, searching for the remainder of the Mamelukes, burst into home after home, pillaging and murdering wherever they entered. In Cairo alone about four thousand Mamelukes are said to have been slain. A force despatched by Mohammed Ali to Upper Egypt continued this unparalleled man-hunt for years until most of the surviving Mamelukes had been driven into the deepest recesses of the forests of Central Africa.

Such was the end of this gang of picturesque miscreants who had terrorized Egypt for six hundred years. Only the wizardly bernesque splendour of their mosques and tombs on the outskirts of Cairo remains to recall the six centuries of outrage during which the inhabitants of the entire land of Egypt were the hapless victims of their unbridled lusts.

\*       \*       \*

Mohammed Ali was now the undisputed master of Egypt, and his dominating purpose soon became that of raising the country to a position of power and importance such as it had not known for centuries.

## THE 'PHARAOH' OF MODERN EGYPT

The well-being of the Egyptian people—foreigners to him—was of secondary importance. His three minimum needs were an invincible army, a powerful navy, and a well-filled Treasury. Not one of these desiderata being his as yet, he, a man of genius, set out to acquire them all in his own fascinating but, alas, Oriental way!

Perhaps it was the business experience that he had gained in his tobacco dealings at Kavalla upon which he now drew to build up Egypt's economy. That experience may have taught him that 'big business' was the best means of procuring national affluence and power. Beginning like Joseph in Genesis, by buying up the country's wheat crop, he then sold it on his own account to the British forces in the Mediterranean. This stroke of genius was followed, again as in Genesis, by a decree terminating all private rights in land and concentrating the entire agricultural resources of the country in his own hands. In this way he became the sole owner of the soil of Egypt. He could thus order the fellahin to grow such crops as he thought proper, could buy them up at his own price, and could sell them in the best market available.

The fact that such methods were anathema to English Whigs of the period, as well as to all shades of Liberal opinion, was natural enough; nor is it surprising that the people of England generally should feel none too favourably disposed towards a foreign ruler whose name had come prominently before them on the occasion when, in 1807, he had routed an utterly inadequate British force that had been sent to Alexandria to prevent any possible alliance between him and the French. All England, too, had been shocked by the news after that victory over the English of his triumphal ride through Cairo between avenues of British heads impaled on stakes along the main streets of the city, and of 'British prisoners being exhibited in chains', to be eventually sold as slaves to the highest bidders.

The Mamelukes on the other hand had won England's sympathy. They had put up a brave fight against England's most formidable foe, Napoleon! The accounts in the British Press, too, of their gorgeous apparel, their gold ornaments, their bejewelled pistols and daggers, their heroic fortitude in battle, had made a romantic appeal quite irresistible to the British mind. The result was that English public opinion—described by a cynic as 'the opinion that is always wrong!—was heavily loaded against Mohammed Ali—a fact of no small importance seeing that his policy was destined soon to embroil all Europe.

#### A MILITARY ACADEMY

But Mohammed Ali—sublimely unregardful of all foreign opinion—went steadily forward with his plans to restore Egypt's solvency, and that major miracle having in due course actually happened, he was ready to begin laying a foundation on which to build the all-sufficient State he had mentally planned.

His earliest effort in the direction of a 'new model' army provoked a vigorous rebuff from the undisciplined Albanian and Turkish levies then filling the ranks. Obey orders? Never! Breaking loose from a first attempt to drill them with the unanswerable Moslem shibboleth: 'There is no God but God', they at once proceeded to plunder the shops and warehouses of the Unbelievers in a spirit of scrupulous piety and then settled down to the systematic looting of the entire European Quarter.

Mohammed Ali, quick to perceive that personnel of this stamp could never produce the army of his dreams, next turned his thoughts to the Sudan, whose wealth of stalwart sons with their superb physique had been drawn upon from time immemorial for the manifold services of Egyptian slave-owners.

An expedition, therefore, equipped by Mohammed Ali, went south to explore the Sudan with orders to 'find gold wherever possible' and at all costs to send back slaves to Egypt to be trained as soldiers.

In this way the Sudan came into Egypt's possession.

To provide the necessary corps of officers for his new army, Mohammed Ali now founded a military Academy which he confided to the care of Colonel Sèvre, a French Waterloo officer who brought other officers from France to assist him. His first cadets consisted of Mohammed Ali's own bodyguard of three hundred young Mamelukes who had escaped the almost universal slaughter. It need hardly be said that Colonel Sèvre—a European—while training these Moslem cadets in the musketry class during the early days of the Academy, had to accustom himself to hearing bullets whistle past his own ears. He eventually became a Moslem and changed his name to Soliman Pasha. How many Europeans in Egypt realize that Soliman Pasha Street in Cairo is named after the gallant Frenchman who created Egypt's first up-to-date army?

Recruits for Mohammed Ali's new model army now began to arrive from the Sudan; and, unlike the Albanians, they submitted to discipline and learnt to drill; but, unfortunately for the Pasha, they completely failed to stand the strain of the conditions imposed on them and died off almost as quickly as they arrived.

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Mohammed Ali, therefore, as a last hope, now resolved to enlist Egyptian peasants, the hard-toiling fellahin who, during so many former centuries, had laboured with unquestioning docility to provide the luxurious surroundings of their successive Ptolemaic, Roman, Mameluke, and Turkish masters. That the fellahin could be turned into good warriors was an idea that, if it had ever occurred to anybody, would have been scouted as absurd. Mohammed Ali, however, now proceeded to call them up, and this he did in the only way that he could have been expected to do. No conscription law was passed. Dragged from their village homes, without the slightest regard to age, family or any other circumstances, they were sent straight off in chains to the barracks prepared for them.

How many of the stories about the early years of his autocratic rule which the author heard in the bazaars of Cairo during many years of residence in Egypt were true may be open to doubt. One of the possibly less credible was that the Pasha, hearing of certain parleying in the bazaars which in his opinion amounted to high treason, checked its further growth by ordering the chief of police to 'hang forty men in public regardless of whether they were implicated or not'. This draconic extreme seems to have been accepted as wise and reasonable in the Solomonian sense since it had the undeniable merit of proving effective. Another was that on complaint being made to Mohammed Ali by a baker in a provincial town through which he was passing that he—the baker—had been outrageously treated by a local dignitary, the Pasha, after verifying the facts, ordered the dignitary in question to be put into the baker's oven himself and baked. It is however a fact that in the archives of Abdin Palace at Cairo a circular issued by Mohammed Ali is still to be seen wherein it is stated that he, on learning that certain of his officials were not doing all they might to promote cultivation, was about to make a personal inspection, and that in any district where traces of slackness might be found, he would have a pit dug and all official delinquents buried alive together.<sup>1</sup>

But the problems that he faced in his desire to raise Egypt to the level of Europe can perhaps be realized by recalling the fact that one of the most familiar sights of Cairo that attracted the attention of Western visitors at this time was the Hospital of the Moristan. This was a charity attached to a mosque where patients could be

<sup>1</sup> Circular, Jumadi-us-sani 13, 1241, Abdin Archives. Cf. Dodwell's *Founder of Modern Egypt*, page 198.

seen in so filthy a condition as to be swarming with parasites—a contemporary said ‘stinking with filth’—and where the visitor, peering through a grating, could shudder at the sight of chained, naked, raving maniacs.

Steadily but slowly indeed the Pasha’s New Egypt came into being. The modern (so-called ‘perennial’) system of irrigation was introduced; the growing of long staple cotton (foundation of Egypt’s present wealth) and of sugar was begun. With the assistance of French engineers the first of Egypt’s immense Nile Dams (‘the Barrage’) was put in hand at the spot just north of Cairo where the Nile separates into the two arms forming the Delta. It was Mohammed Ali’s misfortune that this great work could not be used during his own lifetime, the reason being that, dissatisfied with the slow progress made by the French engineers, he insisted with characteristic uncontrollable impatience, that a thousand cubic metres of concrete *must* be laid every day whether it was possible or not! And so the mighty River seeped through such hastily laid foundations and the Dam remained useless until its defects were remedied during the British Occupation.

Lastly, and perhaps most important of all, by supporting the efforts of an English naval lieutenant, Thomas Waghorn, at a time when his plans for an ‘Overland Route to India’ were receiving scant encouragement in England or anywhere else, Mohammed Ali took the first practical steps towards restoring Egypt to her former position as the vital commercial link in the traffic between East and West—a position that had appeared to be lost beyond all recovery in the fifteenth century when Vasco da Gama opened the ‘Cape Route’ to India. Partly as a result of this discovery and partly on account of centuries of misgovernment, the once imperial city of Alexandria had dwindled till it had become a dirty, mean, ruinous little town housing fewer than ten thousand inhabitants. It was now that Waghorn, after failing to convince anyone in England that there could ever be a better route to the Far East than round the Cape of Good Hope, secured the support of this energetic Pasha of Egypt. Thus the dream of an ‘Overland Route’, the shorter route, to India became a reality, and Alexandria rose Phoenix-like as a modern town from the *disjecta membra* of its great Cleopatran predecessor.

The journey from Alexandria across Egypt to Suez in the earliest days of the ‘Overland Route’ was a feat to deter any but the hardiest of travellers, and the accounts left by those who used it provide a

## THE 'PHARAOH' OF MODERN EGYPT

striking picture of world-travel at that time. Passengers travelling by the Waghorn Route sailed first to Alexandria; thence they continued their journey in a native 'truck-boat' towed by horses by way of a new canal which Mohammed Ali in his wisdom had had constructed to give Alexandria direct access to the Nile—a gigantic operation that had not been achieved without forced labour and the use of the lash. A horn-blower was posted at the bows of the truck-boat to warn other craft using the canal of the approach of the travellers to India. On reaching the Nile, passengers and mail were transferred to Waghorn's *Jack o' Lantern*, which claimed to be the smallest passenger steamboat in the world, and was in fact so small that the changing of the position of any one of its ten passengers was enough to upset its equilibrium. Though satirised by a wag of the time as of 'three donkey-power', it actually developed six horse-power, but unfortunately it had the reputation of being the home of 'every existing species of creepy-crawly vermin'. After a day and night's journey of cramped, uncomfortable travel, passengers reached Cairo and were given time to visit some of its sights, and one of the 'attractions' specially advertised by the P. & O. Company when it took over the Waghorn transit during the early years of Queen Victoria's reign, was a visit to the Cairo Slave Market. Here, in a vast Square, almost nude negro women captured by the slave-raiders in the Sudan stood side by side with white Circassian and Georgian women bought by Constantinople slave-merchants for the harems of Egypt; and all were exposed together for sale in pens described by an eye-witness in 1842 as 'more fit for wild beasts than for human beings'. From Cairo, passengers and mail were conveyed across the desert to Suez by a service of English carriages along a specially constructed road provided with Rest Houses for refreshment—the ruins of some of them still exist—at eight halting-places. When adverse winds held up the return voyage from India, passengers disembarked at Cosseir on the Red Sea coast, where donkeys, camels and Arab servants were engaged by Waghorn's agent to convey them across the desert to Luxor. From Luxor they sailed down the Nile to Cairo in native boats which, however, were first sunk in the River—under the eyes of the travellers!—and there they remained under water for two or three days in the hope that the vermin would disappear, though even after this drastic treatment they still had to be washed once or twice a day with strong lashings of chloride of lime from stem to stern!

From conditions such as these, the Egypt of Mohammed Ali Pasha slowly but steadily won back the position it had held in ancient times as the wealthiest trading centre in the eastern Mediterranean. Order and justice at least of an elementary kind were established ; European merchants could now travel unarmed as safely as in their own countries and all this was in striking contrast to the conditions in every other part of the Sultan's dominions where no Christian was ever secure against insult or injury, and Mohammed Ali's government was the only one in the Middle East with which bargains could safely be made.

As year followed year, with Egypt's position becoming more and more stabilized and her army developing into a power on which Mohammed Ali felt he could rely, his ambition to become the sovereign ruler of the country grew continually stronger and stronger. But it was an ambition that introduced bewildering complications into the already sufficiently tangled problem then known as the 'Eastern Question'—a name given to the multitude of delicate issues, each with its separate threat to European peace, arising from the impending disintegration of the Turkish Empire.

And Mohammed Ali, knowing all this and more, bided his time !



Mohammed Ali had his first opportunity to put his 'fellahin' army to the test in 1822 when the Greeks were in revolt against Turkish rule. The insurgent Greeks had by then won almost complete control of southern Greece, and the revolt spread to the Islands. The Sultan, in these straits, turning to his most powerful Viceroy for help, offered to make over the Island of Crete to Mohammed Ali if he could bring it to submission. Mohammed Ali accepted the offer and two years later, in proof of his success, sent the Sultan a bag of human ears all ready for nailing to the Great Gate of the Seraglio in Constantinople. Two more years passed and then, in response to a further call from Constantinople, Mohammed Ali despatched from Alexandria a fleet of over sixty warships and a hundred transports conveying sixteen thousand well-armed and disciplined Egyptian troops under the command of his famous son, Ibrahim Pasha, to help to recover Greece from the insurgents. And this force surprised all critics by revealing that Egyptian peasants, despite their reputation for being the mildest mannered and least warlike of mankind, could, and did, under good leadership, display a wholly unexpected combative spirit. Victory then followed victory until in course of time

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the whole of southern Greece was in Egyptian hands. But the Powers, fearful lest the revolt should provoke a general European conflagration, agreed on a joint intervention, with the result that while the Egyptian and Turkish fleets were both lying in the Greek harbour of Navarino, a combined British, French, and Russian squadron also entered, with the intention of staging a joint demonstration. But some of the Turks, mistrusting the intentions of the newcomers, opened fire on a British boat's crew ; the British ships' guns answered ; the engagement soon became general, and the Egyptian fleet was completely shattered. Ibrahim and his army were obliged to return to Egypt, robbed of the fruits of their victories by the intervention of the three Powers, and the rewards promised to Mohammed Ali were withheld by the Sultan on the ground that the Egyptian help had been useless.

The resources of Egypt had been strained to the limit by the cost of this campaign, but Mohammed Ali nevertheless went forward unfalteringly with his plans for his 'new' Egypt. At his invitation French engineers, doctors, and surveyors were in Egypt to assist him ; factories were founded and hospitals and schools built (even though, according to a European who saw them, they were 'little better than barns') ; young Egyptians were being sent to France and England—most of them to France—to be educated ; and French industrialists were helping him to modernize and develop the entire productive economy of Egypt. Nor were the Egyptian population themselves being spared ! The fellahin, under the lashes of the Pasha's overseers, were made to work even beyond the limits of human endurance. It is said that twenty thousand of his unpaid labourers died during the construction of the Mahmoudia Canal. It is true, too, that many of his schemes miscarried owing to his limited knowledge of Western methods ; but he became recognized everywhere as the most active, capable, and progressive of all the Sultan's viceroys.

The result was in keeping with the traditional perversity of the East. The Sultan, not without reason, grew increasingly distrustful of his forceful vassal's intentions, and Mohammed Ali, well aware that his 'new' Egypt might at any time have to be defended by force, thought it might be as well for him to strike before the Sultan was ready to invade his borders.

In 1831, therefore, he ordered his army to march, and all Europe held its breath, for the Powers were now faced with a situation that

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might involve any or all of them in suicidal war. Ibrahim Pasha and his army entered Palestine ; Acre was carried and plundered ; Ibrahim continued his northward march ; the feeble Ottoman army being no match for the Egyptians, the whole of Syria was soon in Ibrahim's hands ; the threshold of Asia Minor was reached, and here Ibrahim paused. Reinforcements were now needed, and such is the paradox inherent in the Middle East that Mohammed Ali's Turkish (Bashi-bazouk) equivalents of recruiting sergeants now visited village after village in Egypt ; flogged the fellahin into submission and sent them in droves to Cairo to be trained to conquer their own Turkish fellow-countrymen ! The Egyptians, on the other hand, in whom no feeling of patriotism had ever existed, did all they could to evade service by blinding their right eyes, mutilating their right hands, or pulling out the front teeth necessary for the biting of the cartridges for their new muskets. Out of one gang of about six thousand men brought up for examination only two hundred and fifty-three could be passed as fit for service. The necessary number of recruits nevertheless eventually reached Ibrahim Pasha ; his army moved forward ; and in the very heart of Asia Minor fifteen thousand Egyptian fellahin met and routed fifty thousand Turks.

The Egyptian Army then continued to advance until it arrived within a hundred miles of Constantinople. At this point the Sultan in desperation appealed for the assistance of the British fleet, but the British Government, unable to spare a naval detachment, was obliged to refuse, and the Sultan, now in a panic, turned to Russia for help. A Russian squadron at once obligingly sailed into the Bosphorus ; thousands of Russian troops landed ; none but Russians were admitted to the Sultan's presence ; the Sultan became a Russian satellite !

England and France, aghast at this unnatural turn of the proceedings, at once dropped their feelings of mutual mistrust and took concerted action. Mohammed Ali was accordingly pressed to recall his army ; and the Sultan was persuaded to offer him the four Pashaliks of Syria.

Mohammed Ali now had control of territory extending from Equatorial Africa to the Taurus Mountains, and it appeared that the time was at hand when he would be able to strike off the shackles of the Porte and bring into being the independent and powerful Egyptian Empire of his dreams. He was now about sixty-five years old. His hair and beard were blanched but his eyes still blazed with all their

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wonted fires as he strode up and down his room in the Citadel clutching his hands nervously behind him, as his habit was when discussing affairs of moment with visitors, or reclining on his low divan. His habiliments included a red fez, a pelisse, trousers of the baggy Turkish type girt by a Cashmere shawl from which protruded the butt-end of a pistol and the jewelled hilt of a dagger ; and his bright red slippers were of the Turkish fashion with upturned toes.

A few years of uneasy quiet ensued in the course of which both sides were equally intent on their plans for settling the question of supremacy. A body of high-ranking German officers with von Moltke at their head arrived at Constantinople to train the Turkish army while Mohammed Ali continued to build up his Egyptian force with French help 'in the cause', as he assured the Powers, 'of peace' !

At last Mohammed Ali announced his resolve to declare his independence of the Sultan. The following year the Turkish army marched south and Ibrahim Pasha led his Egyptians northwards. The two forces met just beyond the northern frontier of Syria in June, 1839, and never before had the Turks been more utterly and hopelessly beaten, despite their German training, than on this occasion by Ibrahim Pasha and his invincible force of hitherto despised fellahin.

With the road once again clear for the advance of the Egyptian army to Constantinople, the British Government could no longer remain inactive. A threat as serious as this to the Ottoman Empire was a threat to the peace of Europe ; and Palmerston, convinced that the only way to prevent the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was to oust Ibrahim from Syria, succeeded in bringing about an agreement between Russia, Austria, Prussia, and Britain, by which Mohammed Ali, on the condition that he withdrew from Syria at once, should be granted the hereditary Pashalik of Egypt and the tenure of southern Syria for life. This offer was however accompanied by the threat of the loss of all his possessions if he procrastinated unduly, and a time-limit was given. France was indignant and threatened war. Mohammed Ali, feeling sure of French support temporized. For once he made a fatal mistake. The French Government vacillated ; the time-limit expired ; British and Ottoman forces blockaded the Syrian ports. Commodore Napier with a strong squadron appeared off Alexandria, and Ibrahim began to fall back towards Egypt. Mohammed Ali received Napier in his Palace of Ras-el-Tin, an edifice built near the site of the causeway which, in Ptolemaic and Roman

times, had connected the Island of Pharos with the mainland. Napier, according to local tradition, confronted the old Pasha with the ultimatum : ‘ If your Highness will not listen to my appeal against the stupidity of further resistance, I *must* bombard you. And, by God, I *will* bombard you, and plant my bombs in the middle of this very room ! ’

Mohammed Ali submitted, but the submission broke his heart. For the second time this proud old Oriental potentate had been robbed of the Empire that had been won by his own genius and the victories of his great son and his gallant Egyptian army. Now, a septuagenarian, with his life’s work necessarily done, his Egypt was once again no more than a Turkish province. It is true that the British Government, when all threat to the integrity of the Ottoman Empire had been removed, took the lead in inducing the Porte to confer on him the hereditary Pashalik of Egypt. He had thus lived to be the founder of a dynasty—the second Macedonian Dynasty—of Egypt ; but his Empire and his formidable power had vanished, for the *firman* granting him the Pashalik had limited the size of his army and forbidden the building of new ships, so that Egypt was prevented—so thought Palmerston and the Porte—from ever again threatening the peace of Europe.

With his health undermined, Mohammed Ali spent most of his few remaining years in his Palace at Shubra on the northern outskirts of Cairo, honoured and respected—one might almost say beloved—by the population of Egypt, both native and foreign.

It is true that, judged by European standards, his rule had been barbarous ; he had shown not the slightest regard for human life or human suffering ; his subjects had been flogged and driven to toil, unpaid, on his public works ; his concern had been for Egypt and not for the Egyptians. But his rule had nevertheless been far better than anything that any Egyptian could remember before. He was an Oriental and he had governed Orientals ; and not for centuries had there been a ruler of Egypt who could have written a circular such as that which Mohammed Ali issued in 1843. ‘ Know,’ he then said, ‘ that I will pursue the well-being of this land even at the cost of my life and the lives of my kindred.’ And his subjects knew that he meant what he said, for, primitive though the state of the country still was, he had achieved what would have seemed impossible fifty years before ; he had lifted Egypt out of the morass of misrule in which centuries of misgovernment had impounded it.

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The views of the British mercantile community can be inferred from the fact that in 1842 the Bengal Chamber of Commerce requested the British Consul-General in Egypt—naturally to his extreme embarrassment—to present the Pasha with an address expressing their appreciation of the dignified and impressive example which he had set to the nations of Christendom, during the war which had just been fought and in which their own country had opposed him. And in London a medal had been struck while the war was still being fought to commemorate the protection given by the Pasha to foreign merchants. It was inscribed with the words : 'To the friend of science, commerce, and order, who protected the subjects and property of the adverse Powers, and kept open the overland route to India ; 1840.'

Mohammed Ali died at Alexandria in 1849. His body was carried from the Palace to the new Canal that he had himself caused to be constructed, and thence by the Nile to Cairo. It was eventually deposited in a Tomb in the great Mosque built by himself on the highest point of the Citadel, the surrounding domes and the tall minarets of which still dominate the capital and give to this great Oriental city a character all its own.

CHAPTER 16

THE 'CANAL OF THE TWO SEAS'

FOUR years before Mohammed Ali died, Waghorn brought the Bombay mail to London by the Overland Route in the record time of thirty days. Five years after the Pasha's death, de Lesseps arrived in Egypt with a plan to speed up communication between Europe and the Far East still further by cutting a canal through the Isthmus of Suez.

De Lesseps already knew Egypt well, having held Consular posts in Alexandria and Cairo from 1832 to 1837. During that period, an unusually strong attachment had grown up between him and one of Mohammed Ali's sons, Prince Said, then a boy of nine. De Lesseps had taught this lad to ride, and had helped in many ways to form his young mind and it was to the livelier society of the young French Vice-Consul (then in his early thirties) that the boy-prince resorted as often as he could escape from the tiresome restrictions of his father's Palace.

It was during de Lessep's vice-consulship in Egypt that on one occasion while detained in quarantine at Alexandria he had endeavoured to lessen the tedium by reading a memoir on the subject of 'a canal of the two seas', compiled during the French Occupation of Egypt by one of Napoleon's engineers—Lepère—as a result of instructions given to Bonaparte by his Government. These instructions had read : 'The Army of the East shall take possession of Egypt. The Commander-in-Chief . . . shall have the Isthmus of Suez cut through, and he shall take the necessary steps to assure the free and exclusive possession of the Red Sea to the French Republic.'<sup>1</sup>

While de Lesseps was reading Lepère's memoir, travellers who had disembarked at Alexandria were being taken across Egypt to Suez by the Overland Route, and it was the reading of Lepère's work while this was happening that had inspired de Lesseps to strive to accomplish what Napoleon had hoped, but failed, to do.

De Lesseps had vacated his post as Consul at Cairo in 1837, but

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Schonfield : *The Suez Canal in World Affairs* (Constellation Books, London, 1952), page 11.

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during the long absence from Egypt that followed he had never ceased to dream of, to study, and to plan for a 'Two Seas' Canal, and the accession to the khedivial throne of his friend Prince Said in 1854 gave him the opportunity for which he had longed. He was then nearly fifty years old, living in retirement in France, and in his letter to the new Khedive, congratulating him on his accession, he announced his intention of re-visiting Egypt 'to pay him his homage'. Said Pasha, in reply, at once invited him to visit the country as his guest.

Much had happened since de Lesseps had last seen Egypt. Mohammed Ali had died and had been succeeded by Abbas I, who had abolished his father's monopolies. Of Abbas, no more need be said than that Lord Cromer described him as 'an Oriental despot of the worst type', with the comment that 'the stories of his revolting cruelty are endless'.<sup>1</sup> Abbas was eventually murdered in his Palace by two of his own slaves, after which Prince Said had inherited the Pashalik in accordance with the Turkish law of accession.

It was in 1854 that de Lesseps arrived at Alexandria in response to Said Pasha's invitation, and it was to a propitious omen while accompanying his host and a military force across the desert from Alexandria to Cairo that he assigns his first conviction that the Suez Canal would indeed be eventually built. He had left his tent one morning at day-break just as the rays of the rising sun were illuminating the clouds in the western sky, and then, suddenly, a rainbow of incomparable splendour appeared. His heart beat violently—so he himself confessed—because he 'saw in that unexpected, beautiful, and moving sight, a sign from heaven of a coming alliance between East and West'.

It was on that same evening as he sat side by side with the Pasha in his tent that he began to speak of his long-standing, overwhelming dream of a canal for connecting the Mediterranean with the Red Sea. The torrent of the Frenchman's enthusiasm—the outcome of years of the profoundest calculations and research—carried all before it. Said Pasha listened spellbound.

Upon their arrival at Cairo a reception of officials and foreign representatives was held, to whom Said Pasha made the sensational announcement that a canal was to be cut through the Isthmus of Suez and that Monsieur de Lesseps had been entrusted with the task of forming a company to undertake the work.

The next few years called for all the unlimited resources of courage,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt* (Macmillan, London, 1908), vol. i, page 19.

#### DIFFICULTIES OF DE LESSEPS

energy, and endurance that de Lesseps possessed. On reaching Constantinople, where he hoped to obtain the Porte's ratification of Said Pasha's firman, he found that the Sultan was under the influence of the British Ambassador, whose mistrust of foreigners in general and Frenchmen in particular was not only permanent but fundamental, and, moreover, the British Government were convinced that a canal of the kind advocated by de Lesseps would infallibly open up an 'Egyptian Question', the very last thing that they could desire. De Lesseps hurried back to Egypt, hoping against hope that Said Pasha could be persuaded to act on his own initiative, without waiting for his suzerain's approval. But on his arrival in Egypt, Said Pasha showed him a letter which he had just received from the Porte warning him of the danger of an attack by the British fleet if the canal plan should be pressed.

De Lesseps, upon this rebuff, left for France, whence, armed with letters of introduction to the Rothschilds and the Barings which he procured in Paris, he proceeded to London ; but there he found himself not only opposed by the Government but ridiculed by the Press. *The Times* protested that 'a single night of storm would engulf everything in the sand', and Lord Palmerston informed him that a canal through the Isthmus of Suez would deprive England, a maritime nation, of advantages which she had no intention of losing.

Nevertheless, by slow degrees, de Lesseps won merchants, bankers, and shipowners to his side, and two years later he travelled from end to end of England to collect signatures in favour of his scheme. But upon the question being raised in Parliament, Palmerston informed the House that 'Her Majesty's Government could not undertake to use their influence with the Sultan to induce him to give permission for the construction of this canal', the reason given being that the project was 'hostile to the interests of this country'.

At last de Lesseps, seeing that there could be no hope of assistance from any foreign government, paid another visit to Paris where he called upon Monsieur de Rothschild. He had Said Pasha's permission to float a company. Two hundred million francs were needed for his scheme (eight million pounds sterling at the rate of exchange at the time), and Monsieur de Rothschild was only too ready to supply this sum for a 'merely nominal five per cent interest'.

'What?' exclaimed de Lesseps. 'Make a present to you of £400,000? Not I! I shall hire a place for £50 and do the work myself.'

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He did. He found vacant premises in the Place Vendôme, opened an office, and the eight million pounds was subscribed. In order to make it possible for all the Western Powers to participate financially in the enterprise, blocks of shares were specially reserved for the various countries, but apart from France and Egypt, application for only a very few shares was received from most of them. About half the amount needed was subscribed by France and nearly a third by Egypt. A small number of shares was taken up in the Netherlands, Spain, Italy and a few other countries. Not a single share, it must be noted, was taken up by the British Government or by British investors.

Four years after that memorable morning of the propitious omen of the Desert Rainbow, de Lesseps met a small labour force on the sandy shore of the Mediterranean Sea a few miles west of the ruins of Pelusium. Selecting a pick-axe, de Lesseps drove it deep into the sand and shovelled away a spadeful. His great enterprise had begun. But the firman from the Sultan authorizing the construction of the Canal was still withheld while in England Palmerston still cherished hopes of preventing its completion, and the British Government continued to bring more and more powerful influence to bear upon the Porte. Even so, the digging continued, and from day to day as it proceeded the 'Egyptian Question' came continuously into nearer and clearer view.

In 1863 Said Pasha died—the man whose loyal co-operation had brought de Lesseps to the verge of his triumph; the man to whom de Lesseps had once remarked: 'Your name will live on when the names of the kings who built the Pyramids are forgotten.' It is true that Said Pasha had not lived to see the completion of the Canal, but already on the self-same spot where, four years before, de Lesseps had dug the first spadeful of sand, a new town had sprung up which bore the name of—Port Said!

\*       \*       \*

Said Pasha was succeeded by Ismail Pasha—'Ismail the Magnificent'—who was as determined as ever Mohammed Ali had been to raise Egypt to the status of a Great Power. It was he who had proposed to make the country a part of Europe rather than of Africa.

\*       \*       \*

In 1866, in spite of all Great Britain's objections, the Sultan's confirmation of Said Pasha's concession was given, and Ismail Pasha made

up his mind that the reception of the royal visitors whom he intended to invite to the inaugural ceremony should take place in a Cairo that would compare with any capital in Europe. Plots of land were therefore sold and special facilities for payment offered to all who wished to build, the result being that an extensive modern quarter began to rise on the fields beyond the mediaeval city. In this new quarter Ismail built the Abdin Palace, which he made his official Cairo residence, and, to the north and west of the Palace there rapidly came into being the imposing modern quarter that became known as the 'Ismailia Quarter', after its creator. The visitor could now leave behind him the mediaeval sights, sounds and smells of the Old City, and, on crossing a street, pass straight into the new, modern capital of the country.

But it was not only Cairo that was being prepared for the opening ceremonies. Half-way between Port Said and Suez the Canal passes through a lake in the Desert on the shores of which another new town was springing up that had also been named after the Pasha—Ismailia. And it was here at Ismailia that the celebrations were planned to reach their climax. Palaces, hotels, and kiosks alike were being built and embellished with costly furniture from France for the delectation of the most illustrious of the expected guests, and hundreds of elegant tents were also being provided and sumptuously equipped for the entertainment of the thousands of other guests who were expected to attend.

When the morning of the great occasion dawned—the 16th November, 1869—the sunbathed roadstead of Port Said was crowded with the beflagged ships of a dozen different nations, their decks packed with sightseers. Among these were the Emperor of Austria, the Crown Prince of Prussia, members of other reigning families, ambassadors, and eminent representatives of art, science, commerce, industry. At eleven o'clock the guns of the warships and shore batteries began to boom and the French Imperial Yacht, the *Aigle*, with the Empress Eugénie on board, moved slowly towards the entrance of the Canal. The music of a score of military bands mingled with thundering salvos and the hooting of sirens. It was an impressive moment, and so great was the emotion of the Empress Eugénie that her eyes were dimmed with tears. On shore, three large pavilions had been erected—one for the most illustrious guests, one for the Moslem hierarchy, and yet another with an altar for Christian worship and thanksgiving. The Sheikh-ul-Islam intoned a Moslem prayer; and Monseigneur Bauer,

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the Empress Eugénie's Almoner, made an eloquent speech in which he described de Lesseps as a second Columbus. Banquets and festivities followed which lasted throughout the day and far into the night ; and early on the following morning a procession of forty-eight ships, led by the *Aigle*, left Port Said in single file and sailed down the Canal towards Ismailia. At about the same time a small flotilla of government vessels left Suez and sailed northwards. At sunset the two fleets met at Ismailia, and while thousands of guests were cheering themselves hoarse, pressmen hastened to telegraph to the far corners of the earth the news that at long last the union of the two seas had become an accomplished fact.

Under the soft and glowing brilliance of ten thousand lanterns the Pasha and his guests sat down in palace, kiosk, and tent to the most sumptuous banquet that even French cooks could devise and the Pasha's purse provide. Then, while bands played and fireworks soared, toasts were drunk to the 'future of Egypt' and the 'progress of civilization'.

Next day the royal flotilla sailed on to Suez, and the entire length of the Canal had thus been traversed. The 'Egyptian Question' had therefore simultaneously also come into being. As Sir Frederick Bruce had foreseen, 'all the coasts of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea' were now 'nearer to the Far East than England' was, and, as Ernst Renan said in his answer to the speech of de Lesseps when elected a member of the French Academy : 'The Isthmus cut becomes a strait, a battle-field. A single Bosphorus has hitherto sufficed for the troubles of the world ; you have created a second and much more important one. In case of naval war it will be of supreme interest, the point for the occupation of which the whole world will struggle. You have marked out the field of the great battles of the future.'

## THE GATHERING OF THE CLOUDS

**A**T this moment of climax Ismail Pasha would have been a suitable subject for a portrait by one of the great Dutch painters—a figure ‘like those of Rembrandt of the Rhine, *half darkness and half light*’. A certain ugliness of carriage and almost imperceptible brusqueness of manner were more than balanced by an irresistibly fascinating personality. Dressed in a black frock-coat of the fashionable Oriental cut then known throughout the Middle East as the Stambouli, he usually discussed affairs of State seated upon a divan in the national cross-legged Turkish posture. A gleam of red showed in his beard and in the hair protruding beneath the crimson fez worn low at one side of the head. But despite an appearance by no means prepossessing, he nevertheless embodied a stateliness difficult to define but immediately felt. His prodigal hospitality won the hearts of all. But it was this very tendency to prodigality that entoiled him in the cobweb meshes of the moneylenders and led finally to the financial collapse which forced England into her unwilling occupation of the Nile Valley.

Ismail Pasha was the son of Ibrahim Pasha and the grandson of Mohammed Ali, and it was from these illustrious ancestors that he inherited the loftiness of spirit that could not brook the rôle of a mere provincial Viceroy. From the day of his accession he strove continuously, with a fatal disregard of cost, to make Egypt one of the greatest countries outside Europe. The irrigation system was improved, schools were built, new canals dug, the railway system, first introduced during the reign of Abbas I was extended; external evidences of European civilization were introduced one after the other. His motive was personal ambition. ‘He thirsted for power’, wrote an Egyptian historian; ‘he wanted a grand capital; he wanted everything that could bring him up to the level of the great European monarchs.’<sup>1</sup> He paid three visits to Constantinople, each costing a fortune, in an endeavour to obtain more adequate recognition of his

<sup>1</sup> M. Rifaat Bey: *The Awakening of Modern Egypt* (Longmans, London, 1947), page 154.

position from his suzerain. On one occasion he casually presented the Sultan with the steam yacht that had brought him to the Golden Horn ; upon another he no less casually gave him the dinner-service used for the banquet at which the Sultan had just been entertained. And this was a diamond-studded service of pure gold. The lavish largesse which he distributed during his repeated visits reached the spectacular total of millions of pounds—an immense outlay which however secured him two personal advantages : firstly, the hereditary title of Khedive, and secondly, an alteration to the Law of Succession which permitted the khedivial throne to pass from father to son in his own family, instead of, as hitherto, to the eldest surviving male descendant of Mohammed Ali. Henceforward, therefore, the Turkish Viceroy of Egypt must be referred to as the Khedive.

Ismail's extravagances mounted rapidly to a figure far beyond any power of the Egyptian Treasury to pay. Loan succeeded loan and increasingly onerous terms were inevitably exacted, bringing him nearer and nearer to the swiftly advancing crisis, while he continued to enjoy his ever-brightening dreams of an Egypt that so soon, he felt, was bound to become one of the very greatest of all the world's great kingdoms !

His first large loan, coming from the well-known firm of Frühling & Goschen, barely sufficed to cope with the extravagances of a few months and had to be followed by others at dangerously short intervals. Some of these loans were from Bischoffsheim & Goldschmidt, some from Oppenheim & Nephew, others from banks who, between them, advanced million after million until he became known to them as the 'impecunious millionaire'.

Yet his expenditure grew by continually increasing strides and at last—in November, 1875—confronted by an absolutely empty Treasury and with bankers and financiers alike afraid to advance a single piastre further, he stood on the very verge and brink of bankruptcy.

It was at this critical moment that he remembered the shares that he held in the Suez Canal Company, and news soon reached England that a group of French financiers had offered to purchase them. British politicians had by this time come to realize that the Canal was of immense importance to England, and Disraeli, now Prime Minister was eager to seize any opportunity to acquire an interest in it for Great Britain. When, therefore, it was learned that the French group had failed to raise the sum needed by the Khedive, an emergency meeting

## ROTHSCHILD'S AID

of the Cabinet was at once called and it was resolved to make an immediate offer for the shares. A few days later the reply came from Cairo that Ismail Pasha would accept nothing less than four million pounds and that the offer would remain open for no more than two days.

The Cabinet was in a quandary, for Parliament was not in session, nor was it due to meet before February. There was, as it happened, only one man in all England—Lord Rothschild—who could advance four million pounds at a moment's notice, but even if he were willing to lend it, there remained the unpleasant possibility that, on reassembling, Parliament might refuse to vote the necessary credit !

An urgent Cabinet Meeting followed. Disraeli's private secretary anxiously awaited their decision in an ante-room. An eternity seemed to follow. Then the door was pushed ajar. Disraeli peeped through.

'Yes,' was all he said.

The secretary hurried to New Court where Lord Rothschild was finishing his dinner.

'Four million pounds,' gasped the secretary, bursting into the room.  
'Immediately !'

Rothschild laconically asked : 'What security ?'

'The British Government.'

'You shall have it,' was the terse reply.

The shares were bought, the credit was duly voted by Parliament, and thenceforth the financial stability and orderly government of Egypt became matters of the most intimate concern of the British Government. 'If this,' wrote Monsieur de Mazade in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, 'is not taking territorial possession of Egypt, it is a first step. England can no longer abandon her client.'

\* \* \*

Whatever construction Great Britain's detractors may have put upon this purchase of a considerable number of the Suez Canal shares, the British Government's action had been dictated solely by the fact that it was essential for them to secure a voice in the management of a vast commercial enterprise, the proper regulation of which was of grave importance to England's position as a maritime nation.

To the Khedive himself the sale of the bonds brought no more than momentary relief, for the Egyptian Treasury had become a bottomless pit into which all the gold that was poured disappeared for ever. The

methods of collection and the scale of the disbursements of Egypt's revenues could not possibly endure such strains as Ismail now imposed upon them, and the fact that he was riding for a fall became daily more obvious. And yet—and yet!—his rake's progress continued unchecked.

The crash came when, with his Treasury still empty and every available State security heavily mortgaged, he had no alternative but to suspend payment of his Treasury Bills. Then, menaced by powerful French interests, he was compelled to submit to the extreme humiliation of permitting foreign interference in the internal affairs of Egypt. By khedivial decree a European 'Commission of the Debt' was instituted, composed of Commissioners appointed by France, Austria, and Italy to act as representatives of the bond-holders. Great Britain, however, refused to appoint a Commissioner to safeguard the interests of her own investors on the grounds that British subjects who invested their money abroad did so at their own risk,<sup>1</sup> but although they may have thought that by their abstention they would avoid entanglement in Egypt's affairs, the British investors refused to be left in the lurch. They convened a bond-holders' meeting in London, and at this meeting Mr. Goschen was requested to proceed to Egypt with Monsieur Joubert (representing French interests) to see what—if anything—could be done to improve the position.

It was this 'Goschen Joubert Mission' that marked the beginning of the end of Ismail's dreams. A settlement—which Ismail was powerless to resist—was imposed which provided not only for the continuance of the foreign Commission of the Debt but also for the appointment of two European Controllers, one of whom was a Frenchman to control Egypt's expenditure and the other an Englishman to supervise the collection of her revenue, an expedient known as the Dual Control. Thus Egypt, though still remaining a Turkish province, henceforward became also subject to the supervision of other foreign Powers.

The attitude of the British Cabinet still remained one of the most painful indecision. They declined to accept any responsibility for the European appointments made—though weakly admitting that 'they had no objections to offer'—and continued to refuse to nominate a British Commissioner of the Debt to join the representatives of France, Austria, and Italy. The result was a deadlock which was only ended by the adoption of Mr. Goschen's suggestion that the Khedive might

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, pages 12 and 37.

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himself offer the post to a certain Major Baring. The Khedive accepted this suggestion, and its adoption was one of the turning-points in the story of Egypt and the Middle East, for Major Baring accepted the post and arrived in Cairo in March, 1877, to begin the great work by which he, as Lord Cromer, eventually earned his high reputation as ‘The Maker of Modern Egypt’.

It will be convenient to refer to him from this moment onwards as Lord Cromer.

★ ★ ★

On commencing his work as British Commissioner of the Debt, Cromer discovered that the Government’s own employees had remained unpaid for several months and that, in spite of the army of tax-collectors who were preying upon the population, not a single piastre was forthcoming with which to pay even the salaries of the Commissioners of the Debt themselves.

By 1878 the taxation of the people had reached a level beyond all endurance, and considerations of common humanity demanded the suspension of the interest on the Debt soon to become due. French official opinion however was diamond-hard—Egypt *could* pay and ought to be *made* to pay! And that was what was done! It is declared that even the jewellery of the ladies of Ismail’s harem was requisitioned to make up the necessary sum, and an English resident has left a shockingly vivid description of the torture of the fellahin who were taxed to the last straw of their crops. ‘The fact,’ says Lord Cromer, ‘that many of the coins were strung together to be used as ornaments bore testimony to the pressure used in the collection of the taxes.’<sup>1</sup>

The fateful hour had now struck when, as Lord Cromer wrote, ‘it was impossible for anyone to ignore the pitiable condition in which the people of Egypt were placed’,<sup>2</sup> and one of the greatest of Egypt’s innumerable crises was rapidly approaching.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, page 38.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, page 39.

## THE SHADOWS BEFORE

**S**TONG and ever-stronger pressure was now put upon Ismail Pasha to allow another European investigation into the state of Egypt's finances, and he, detesting as he did all this foreign prying into his affairs, did his utmost to prevent it. Against the massed might of High Finance, however, he was powerless, and in the end, under threat of deposition, he agreed to the institution of the now historic Commission of Inquiry with Sir Rivers Wilson as chairman and the four European Commissioners of the Debt—French, Austrian, Italian, and British—as members. It will be seen that Great Britain was not the sole Power concerned with Egypt's bankruptcy as has so often been assumed.

The Commission began its sittings in the spring of 1878, and 'many a weary hour,' says Lord Cromer, 'did we pass in the broiling heat of an Egyptian summer afternoon, endeavouring to unravel some of the most astounding financial operations in which any Government in the world has ever been engaged'.<sup>1</sup> Gradually, however, the intolerable grievances of the Egyptian people were laid bare : the corruption of the officials—serving under conditions which made it impossible for them to be other than corrupt<sup>2</sup>—and the whole iniquitous system of government, with Ismail Pasha himself exposed as the principal instrument of all the country's misfortunes. 'Everything,' says Sir Valentine Chirol, 'went into his bottomless pocket. As a variant of Louis XIV's "L'état c'est moi," Ismail, might well have adopted as his motto "L'état c'est ma poche";'<sup>3</sup> and the Commission inevitably came to the conclusion that their only course was to 'place some check on the arbitrary power of the Khedive'.<sup>4</sup> Henceforth, they said, he must be made to submit to Ministerial control.

The story of the remaining years of Ismail Pasha's reign throws into high relief the fact that when a country's rulers spend more than the

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, page 50.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. The Report of the Stephen Cave Mission.

<sup>3</sup> *The Egyptian Problem* (Macmillan, London, 1920), page 32.

<sup>4</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, page 57.

country can afford, whether as a result of sheer extravagance or even in support of the noblest causes, the most certain predictable result is the loss of a measure of national sovereignty, followed by the humiliations that any such loss entails. This is what now happened in Egypt. Ismail Pasha read the Commission's recommendations and, after a show of resistance, gave reluctant consent to the measures designed to curtail his hitherto unchecked despotism. But his high spirits remained undaunted, and he was determined to outwit the Powers at the first opportunity. This came—or so he thought—when a seething mob of infuriated officers who had been placed on half-pay in the cause of national economy surrounded the Prime Minister (an Armenian Christian) and Sir Rivers Wilson as they were driving to their offices, rough-handled them, and, with shouts of 'Down with the dogs of Christians,' ejected them from their carriages, and locked them up. Ismail Pasha promptly repudiated all responsibility for public tranquillity unless he was given his proper share in the government of the country,<sup>1</sup> and proceeded to form a new Cabinet composed entirely of Ministers whom he could use as pawns to be moved as he wished.

One by one the abuses of the past began to return and catastrophe was obviously impending.

Lord Cromer's sympathies by this time lay far more with the Egyptian taxpayers, ground to earth by intolerable fiscal burdens, than with the foreign creditors whose interests it was his duty to protect. So long as there had appeared to be any hope of the country's administration being reformed he had been content to remain in Egypt, but now that a satisfactory settlement seemed as far off as ever, he decided to 'cut his connection with the bondholders'<sup>2</sup> and resign his appointment.

In the spring of 1879 he left for England, in the complete but utterly erroneous conviction that he had severed his connection with the Land of the Pharaohs once and for all, though he felt certain, all the same, that Great Britain could not indefinitely continue her policy of non-intervention in Egypt. Indeed, as long before as March, 1878, he had placed it on record that, in his opinion, the British Government would be obliged to step in at last, whether they liked it or not.<sup>3</sup>

And very soon they were so compelled. It was the Iron Chancellor who spurred them into action. Germany, which connoted Austria, had hitherto interfered but little in Egyptian affairs, but Bismarck,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, page 76.

<sup>2</sup> The Marquess of Zetland, op. cit., page 72. <sup>3</sup> Idem.

with German creditors now restive, suddenly announced that Ismail was governing in 'open and direct violation of international engagements', and warned him that the German Government would hold him 'responsible for all the consequences of his unlawful proceedings'<sup>1</sup> The other Powers, already well aware that no satisfactory solution of the Egyptian problem would be possible without a change of ruler, gave Bismarck their support.

On the 26th June, 1879, while a group of high officials were enjoying a comfortable conversation in Abdin Palace, a telegram composed in the Turkish language was handed to the Master of Ceremonies, who was one of the group. This telegram was addressed to '*the ex-Khedive, Ismail Pasha*'. Stunned by the mode of address, the Master of Ceremonies handed the telegram to the Keeper of the Seals, insisting that it was *his* duty to deal with a message of such obviously overwhelming importance. But the courage of the Keeper of the Seals was no more equal to the task of presenting such a telegram to the ex-Khedive than the Master of Ceremonies, and he also refused to have anything to do with it. It so happened that at that identical moment the Prime Minister, Cherif Pasha, entered the room and to him therefore the telegram was handed. For an instant's duration the nerve of Cherif Pasha quailed, but, rallying his courage, he mounted the stairs and entered the khedivial chamber. Impetuously Ismail tore the telegram open to read : 'The difficulties which have for some time arisen in the internal and external affairs of Egypt have attained considerable gravity, and the continuance of this state of things would have results dangerous for Egypt and for the Ottoman Empire . . .'

With the most complete sang-froid and without a trace of emotion, Ismail Pasha read the sentence of his deposition. Then, turning quietly to Cherif Pasha, he gave the order : 'Send for my son, His Highness Prince Tewfik, at once.'

Cherif drove as rapidly as he could to the Prince's Palace ; but already at the moment of his arrival he found Tewfik entering his own carriage, for he, too, had received a telegram from the Grand Vizier ; and this ran : 'His Imperial Majesty, the Sultan, has named you by Imperial *iade* Khedive of Egypt and the Imperial *firman* will be delivered to you with the customary ceremonial.'

Cherif entered the Prince's carriage and they drove to Abdin Palace together. Ismail rose from the divan as his son entered and advanced towards him. Raising the Prince's hand to his lips he said simply :

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, page 135.

'I salute you, my Khedive.' Then, kissing him on both cheeks and gently remarking that he hoped he would be more fortunate than his father had been, he retired into the adjoining harem.

A few days later Ismail Pasha left Cairo for Alexandria *en route* for Naples. On reaching Alexandria he boarded his State yacht and many Europeans and Egyptians came on board to pay their respects. It was then that, for the first time, he showed signs of emotion. Abruptly turning away with tears in his eyes, he hurried to his cabin and closed the door.

The guns in the forts and on the English battleships in the Harbour boomed out their farewell salute as the yacht sailed out into the deep, unchanging blue of the Mediterranean.

Ten years had passed since, under the stimulating splendour of ten thousand lanterns, to the music of innumerable bands, and surrounded by the glittering conclave of royal and noble guests from Europe, Ismail had celebrated the linking of the Mediterranean with the Red Sea at the place which bore and still bears his name. And the toasts which he had then drunk were in honour of the 'Future of Egypt', and the 'Progress of Civilization'.

★ ★ ★

The firman of the investiture of Tewfik Pasha was read with great state and ceremony at the Cairo Citadel on the 14th August, 1879.

The Anglo-French 'Dual Control' was almost immediately re-established, and Lord Cromer was offered the post of English Controller by Lord Salisbury, the Conservative Foreign Secretary.

Cromer, a Liberal, was no admirer of England's new Premier, Lord Beaconsfield, whose foreign policy he had watched for some time past with considerable and growing apprehension,<sup>1</sup> but the Egyptian prospect, with Tewfik Pasha as Khedive, opened up new and unprecedented opportunities, and hence, after some hesitation, he at length accepted the proposal and returned to Egypt.

On arriving there he found that the blackest imaginable storm-clouds were gathering over the country. All classes were sullenly brooding over the burden of taxation which by this time had become so intolerable that, throughout its length and breadth, the very land itself had become enmeshed in the web of the usurers, for so complete was the ruin caused by the demands of the Government's tax-gatherers that the fellahin, in order to pay their taxes, were obliged to borrow from

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Marquess of Zetland, op. cit., page 73.

Levantine moneylenders, who, in the full knowledge of their victims' helplessness, were able to extort interest at sixty per cent per annum !<sup>1</sup> The peasant thus found himself in the grip of a demoniacal power from which there appeared to be no hope of escape, and the blame for the situation fell wholly upon the European Commissioners of the Debt who were by now believed by one and all to be ruling the country for the sole benefit of the foreign bondholders.

From day to day the storm-clouds gathered size and blackness, and, unfortunately for the new Khedive, the feeling of resentment was not confined to the peasantry, for in the army the Egyptian officers were angered beyond all endurance by the favouritism shown to their Turco-Circassian colleagues. No officer of purely Egyptian stock could hope to command a unit or succeed to the staff on his merits ; and the thousands of officers who had just been placed on half-pay were almost all of pure Egyptian blood, whereas most of the Turkish officers had been retained on the active list. With the rank and file also murmuring, the greater part of the army was seething to the point of mutiny.

To this highly explosive situation was added another menacing element. The recent influence of Europe and the introduction of a measure of modern education had created a small class of young Egyptians with a new outlook. They were strongly critical of the favoured position enjoyed by Europeans in general and of the country's foreign-controlled financial policy in particular, as well as of the khedivial preference for the Turco-Circassian survivors from Mameluke times who had established themselves in a superior position and looked down upon the native Egyptians. Nationalist newspapers were now published—though their circulations were small and their influence negligible—and the slogan 'Egypt for the Egyptians' began to be heard with continually increasing emphasis.

In this electric atmosphere Lord Cromer began his new duties as British Controller (with Monsieur de Blignières as his French colleague) but, after serving in this capacity for only a few months, he was offered a position in India and decided to accept it.

For the second time, therefore, he left Egypt to take up new duties elsewhere, and it was during this second period of absence that the nationalistic storm broke over Egypt with its utmost fury.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Henry Windsor Villiers Stuart : *Egypt after the War* (John Murray, London, 1883), page 52.

## THE STORM BREAKS

**G**RADUALLY the opinion had gained ground in Egypt that all the ills and indignities from which the country suffered were due to the presence of foreigners, and in September, 1881, Colonel Arabi—best known as Arabi Pasha—who had by this time become the accepted leader of the native Egyptian junior officers, marched a surprise force of two thousand five hundred men and eighteen cannon into the large square in front of Abdin Palace, and then, as a first step in an anti-foreign campaign, called upon the Khedive to dismiss his Cabinet and appoint Ministers nominated by the Army !

If the Khedive had rejected this demand out of hand, and ordered the troops to disperse, there might never have been a British Occupation of Egypt. But although Sir Auckland Colvin, who had succeeded Lord Cromer as British Controller, used his utmost endeavours to persuade him to act, the Khedive's heart failed him and he yielded —to Arabi ! From that moment Egypt was in the hands of a mutinous army.

By the end of 1881 it was Arabi Pasha and not the Khedive who ruled the country, and with the vernacular Press industriously heaping fuel upon the fires of easily justified discontent, the Europeans began to fear an eruption of incalculable dimensions while the soil under their feet grew ever perceptibly hotter.

It was a situation that needed careful handling, but Gladstone had no constructive policy, whereas Gambetta, the masterful French Premier, knew his own mind, and it was his firm opinion that as Europe, and especially France and England, had placed Tewfik Pasha on the throne in order to ensure the stability of Egypt, it was their plain and inescapable duty now that Tewfik's power had been usurped by a mutinous officer, to bring Egypt under Anglo-French control—by armed intervention if necessary.<sup>1</sup>

It was the strong will of Gambetta that brought this dangerous situation to a head. To inspire Tewfik Pasha with confidence in the

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, page 216.

support of France and England, he drafted a 'Joint Note', the contents of which he suggested should be telegraphed to Cairo. This Joint Note assured the Khedive that the security of his throne was the direct concern of both the French and the British Governments, who were resolved 'to guard by their united efforts against all cause of complication which might menace the order of things established in Egypt'. Gladstone obligingly approved the draft, though with the all too characteristic reservation that the British Government 'must not be construed as committing themselves to any particular mode of action, if action became necessary',<sup>1</sup> and it thus became the lot of a Gladstone Liberal Government to hamstring Great Britain's im-memorial policy of doing everything in the world to avoid becoming too deeply entangled in Egypt's internal affairs.

The situation became even more fraught with incalculable possibilities when the Chamber of Notables, a body hitherto without political authority, claimed the right to vote the Budget without heed-ing the representations of the European Controllers—a defiance of European interests that pointed hazardously in the direction of foreign intervention—and in May, 1882, the French Government, thoroughly alarmed at the course events were taking, took the momentous step of suggesting that an Anglo-French squadron should be sent to Alexandria.

The British Government expressed the desire that in the event of any squadron at all being sent to Egypt, the remaining Powers, includ-ing Turkey, should be invited to have their flags represented as well,<sup>2</sup> but the French Government was in no mood to accept any reservation, with the result that a combined French and British fleet was despatched to Egypt, and, on arrival, anchored off Alexandria.

A plethora of sinister rumours now filled the air. Europeans left the provinces in search of safety only to find that the position in the towns seemed to be equally insecure. In Alexandria the position came to be desperate. Europeans were hustled in the streets and spat upon. A Sheikh went about crying out, 'O Moslems, come and help me to kill the Christians,' and the British Consul-General warned his Government that a collision might at any moment occur between the Moslems and the Christians.<sup>3</sup> It was, in effect, the powder-barrel of the Great Conspiracy awaiting the enkindling spark !

Suddenly, at Alexandria, on Sunday the 11th June, the tornado broke

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer: *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, page 223.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, page 268.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, pages 282 and 287.

loose. The majority of the Europeans had attended the morning service as usual without incident. But while they were in the act of discussing their midday meal a Moslem and a Maltese came to blows outside a coffee-house. The Maltese stabbed the Egyptian. Infuriated Egyptian onlookers fell upon the assailant. Europeans came to his rescue. Rioting began. And before any warning could be given the scum of the city were careering unopposed through the streets with shouts of 'Death to the Christians!' At almost the same moment disorders broke out in other quarters where deliriously excited hooligans rushed through the streets and wherever Europeans were met they were struck down and battered to death with clubs.<sup>1</sup> Shots were fired by Europeans from their housetops at the mob below, while the Bedouin in the streets who had armed themselves with long guns fired at fleeing Europeans. Of the police, some joined the rioters and some encouraged their countrymen to do so, while the Europeans crowded into their Consulates for protection and remained there with gates locked and guarded. The British Consul, whose duties had taken him into the streets, was stunned by a club. When he regained consciousness he found himself surrounded by a threatening mob whilst a courageous Egyptian officer was doing his utmost to protect him from the blows that were being showered upon him. An officer and two men ashore from the British fleet were among the killed, their deaths causing the most intense indignation on the part of the crews. The bodies were taken as usual out to sea for burial, and officers and men alike clamoured for revenge. They felt that a grave insult had been offered to the British flag.

For four and a half hours this manifest 'Reign of Terror' continued. Then Arabi intervened. His soldiers marched, and 'as they marched', says Judge Royle, 'the mob gradually fell back and then disappeared as if by magic; the tramping, shouting, and yelling suddenly ceased, and there was silence in the streets save for the groans of the wounded'.<sup>2</sup>

The total death-roll must certainly have been greater than any figures that could be proved.<sup>3</sup> One witness spoke of having seen cartloads of corpses thrown into the sea during the night. But there was no way of arriving at the exact number of victims; nor was it possible

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Idem, page 287.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Royle: *Egyptian Campaigns* (Hurst & Blackett, London, 1900), page 53.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, pages 54 and 55.

to explain how it happened that the riot broke out so suddenly in several places at approximately the same moment and then became general.

An uneasy night followed. The European population remained indoors, some in the shelter of their own home but many at their Consulates. Detachments of Egyptian soldiers stood sentry with fixed bayonets at the corners of the principal streets, surrounded by the wreckage of houses and shops ; others stood on guard at the Consulates. With the first rays of dawn, all who could made for the warships in the Harbour and soon every street leading to the quays was packed with unfortunate individuals who were at first insulted and cursed, though when the excitement had died down they passed unmolested. The writer distinctly recalls a vivid description given him by an Alexandrian friend—an Italian lady—who remembered being lifted as a small child into a sailing boat and taken to a ship lying at anchor in the Harbour. She watched the never-ending succession of small craft plying to and fro, all heavily loaded with panic-struck Europeans, from dawn till dusk.

Business in Alexandria came to an immediate and complete standstill. Shops were shut, doors barred and padlocked. The number of people rendered destitute reached the staggering figure of thirty thousand in Alexandria alone. ‘It is impossible to conceive the collapse and ruin which have so completely overtaken the country’, was the report that went from the acting British Consul-General to Lord Granville.

From Alexandria and Cairo the disorders spread to the provinces, so that both the French and the Greek Governments were soon compelled to send transports to evacuate their subjects *en masse*. On the trains from Cairo and the interior numbers of passengers were compelled to travel on the steps of the carriages and even on the roofs. Foreign ships-of-war arrived and now twenty-six vessels flying the flags of ten nations lay off Alexandria.

A moment had thus come when England and France could no longer avoid taking action of some sort. Neither country, however, was disposed to interfere without a mandate and they therefore decided to call a Conference of the Powers. Turkey refused to take part, but the Conference began sitting on the 23rd June. Neither better nor worse than many other such bodies, the delegates sat and talked, and talked and sat again, until by the 2nd July they had hammered out an utterly inane agreement to the effect that if the Porte refused to restore the

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Khedive’s authority by sending troops to Egypt, the Conference should have the right to express an opinion as to what should be done at the opportune moment.<sup>1</sup>

By this time both the Austrian and the German Governments were ready to come to an arrangement with the insurgents; and even the French, in spite of their responsibility for the despatch of the ‘Joint Note’, spoke about the possibility of patching up the Egyptian question by making terms with Arabi.<sup>2</sup> But Gladstone had at long last made up his mind and was now in no mood to allow Arabi to defy all Europe. He had now formed the opinion that no satisfactory or durable arrangement was possible without the overthrow of Arabi Pasha and the military party in Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

Arabi Pasha’s troops had meanwhile strengthened the defences of Alexandria, and the garrisons of the forts had been reinforced, and Admiral Seymour, under instructions from the Home Government, now informed the Egyptian Commandant that if the threat to his fleet implied by the work on the fortifications were not discontinued, the earthworks would be destroyed and the batteries, if they opened fire, silenced.

All the Powers were informed of this new development.

The French Government, now holding views that were precisely opposite to those of their predecessors who had instigated the ‘Joint Note’, instructed their Admiral at Alexandria *not* to associate himself with any action that might be taken by his English compère.<sup>4</sup> The reason that he gave for this change of view was that the course proposed would be an act of war ‘which could not be resorted to without the consent of the Legislature’, and that if it became necessary for the French Government to apply to the Chamber for sanction, they did not feel sure of obtaining it.<sup>5</sup>

It is on the emergence of difficulties like this that a dormant strain of unexpectedness in the English character occasionally shows itself, surprising friend and foe alike, and often giving a new and entirely unlooked-for twist to the world’s destinies. This now happened, as it had happened more than once before and may well happen again. The recent course of events in Egypt had profoundly shocked the English people. Indignation meetings were held throughout the country. The patience of the Government and of the public was

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, page 291.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, page 293.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, page 294.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Judge Royle : *Egyptian Campaigns*, page 61.

exhausted. Lord Salisbury, in a scathing indictment of Gladstone's policy, declared that 'British subjects had been butchered under the very guns of the Fleet, which never budged an inch to save them !' The gravity of this charge reflected the feelings of the entire nation. The time had at last come, it was universally felt, when the joint pledge given by France and England to assist the Khedive against his rebellious army must take the form of the promptest action. If France refused to act, England must act alone. The feelings of the people at Home were shared by the men who manned the guns of the Fleet at Alexandria. 'Ever since the murder of an officer and two men of the fleet on the day of the riot,' says Judge Royle, 'a good deal of dissatisfaction was expressed at the continued inaction of the naval force, not only by the seamen, but by the officers as well.'<sup>1</sup>

On the 9th July, Admiral Seymour telegraphed to the Admiralty that unquestionably Arabi Pasha had further strengthened the fortifications and that more guns were being mounted, and on the following day he notified the Egyptian Commandant that if certain forts, including those commanding the entrance to the Harbour, were not temporarily surrendered for the purpose of disarming, he would be compelled to open fire. To this the Commandant replied that the forts were in the same state as when the Anglo-French squadron first arrived apart from some urgent repairs that had had to be made.

At daybreak on the 10th July, Admiral Seymour informed the foreign Consuls at Alexandria that he would commence action within twenty-four hours unless the forts on the isthmus and those commanding the entrance to the Harbour were surrendered. The foreign ships in the Harbour then got up steam. The merchant-ships were the first to put out to sea and the men-of-war followed. The scene was impressive. Ship after ship sailed slowly past the English flagship as it lay bathed in the setting sun, and the Admiral's band played the appropriate national anthem for each ship that passed. With this concluding demonstration of international courtesy, the ships of the foreign navies steamed away, leaving Great Britain to cope with the unanswerable 'Egyptian Question' alone.



The next day—the 11th July, 1882—dawned without a cloud in the sky. The rising sun gilded the domes and minarets of Alexandria and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Judge Royle : *Egyptian Campaigns*, page 63.

#### BOMBARDMENT BEGUN

lighted up the acacia trees in the great Square of Mohammed Ali. The *boabs* (the 'keepers-of-the-doors') throughout the city stretched their stiff limbs and lit their cigarettes. Heavily veiled women went about selling milk. The soft padding sound made by a passing camel and the clatter of a donkey's hooves occasionally disturbed the otherwise deep and unbroken early-morning silence. Then the clock of St. Catherine's struck seven. But as it struck, the entire population was startled by the boom of a cannon.

The bombardment of the forts had begun.

## THE HINGE OF FATE

**T**HREE were about fifteen forts for the defence of Alexandria and they extended for several miles along the coast.<sup>1</sup> The bombardment began by the firing of a single shell into the recently armed works at Ras-el-Tin. The Admiral then signalled to the Fleet : ‘Attack the enemy’s batteries’ ; and immediately the guns thundered. The forts, which showed up distinctly in the early morning sun, replied with salvo after salvo, and the rejoicing in the crowded cafés in the city was exuberant when the rumour that two ironclads had been sunk and five more disabled was followed by the open assertion that only three English warships had been left afloat. All such rumours were however disproved by the fact that the bombardment continued, except for a few intervals, throughout the day. And the Egyptian gunners in the forts withheld the fire with a steadiness and courage beyond all praise. ‘No soldiers’, said General Stone, an American officer serving as the Khedive’s Chief of Staff, ‘ever stood so firmly to their posts under a heavy fire as did the Egyptians under the fire of twenty-eight ships during ten hours.’

Late in the afternoon the cannonade slackened. Soon after five it ceased. The forts of Alexandria had been silenced !

Once again there began an exodus—not, this time, confined to Europeans. A vast stream of Egyptians escaping from the city thronged the streets leading to the open country and the railway station, for although it was only the coastal forts that had been attacked, and although only a rare, occasional shell had reached the city, the population were struck with a panic-terror.

In the afternoon of the following day a military evacuation began.

And now there arose once again on all sides the familiar cry : ‘Death to the Christians,’ a cry accentuated by the sound of the

<sup>1</sup> For the information of those readers who know Alexandria, the forts were : west of the city, Marabout, Adjemi, Marza-el-Kanat ; south-west, Mex Citadel, Mex Old Fort, Mex Lines ; south of Alexandria, Kamaria, Omuk Kubebe, Saleh Aga ; north, the Lighthouse Fort, the Lines of Ras-el-Tin, Ada, Pharos, Silsileh.

breaking open of doors and the crash of fractured window-glass, menacing sounds which culminated in scenes of the wildest disorder during which the city was systematically looted by its own *canaille* ! Staggering through the streets, the looters carried off the costliest furniture snatched at dagger's point from the wealthiest houses. Sumptuous clothing, ornaments, jewellery, valuables of every description were seized by the rioters. Egyptian and Turkish women were robbed or raped as they fled from the city. When all valuables had been taken, paraffin was deliberately poured upon the remainder of the property and left blazing. Flames then swept the entire city throughout the remainder of the ghastly day and continued through a yet ghastlier night during which no sound could be distinguished beyond the roaring of the fire and the savage shouts of the incendiaries. Paraffin-soaked cotton dumped in houses, and paraffin-soaked furniture soon completed the work of arson, and in cases where it was impossible to force an entrance, paraffin-soaked bedding piled outside doors and left ablaze at least gave the assailers the assurance that none of the inmates was likely to escape with his life.

A dense mushroom of smoke overshouded the city as well as the neighbouring countryside, and by the following morning the European Quarter resembled nothing so much as one vast unending shambles of blazing and gutted houses. At most some fifteen hundred Europeans still remained in the European Quarter, the majority of them sheltering in hospitals, banks, consulates, and schools. From time to time these Europeans also were threatened by the wreckers, but although the fires were gradually closing in on them, they momentarily expected the arrival of landing-parties from the English ships which they felt sure would be sent to fight the fire and restore order in the city. Two ironclads did indeed once approach one of the forts and send boats ashore, but after spiking the nearest guns they sailed away again, disappointing all hopes of rescue. Hour after hour the danger of further mob violence increased, but throughout this emergency no landing party arrived. The reason which Gladstone gave to the House of Commons for this inaction was that the landing of an armed force would have involved 'the assumption of authority upon the Egyptian Question' and would thus have been 'grossly disloyal in the face of Europe and the Conference'.

Early in the morning of the 14th July, a group of about eighty people who had taken refuge in the Anglo-Egyptian Bank decided to attempt to reach the ships. Leaving the comparative safety of

the Bank building, they placed the women and the children in their midst, with the men around them, and made their way through the deserted but still blazing streets, joined from time to time by others who were facing similar dangers. Reaching the quays, they succeeded in breaking through the dock-gates and were able to row out and seek safety with the Fleet.

A few hours later, however, the Admiral decided that the landing of troops could no longer be avoided, and by the end of the day eight hundred men had been put ashore, with Gatling guns and ammunition.

On the 18th July, European and Egyptian refugees began to return to their homes.<sup>1</sup>

Villiers Stuart, who saw the ruins of Alexandria a few months after this, and who had also been in Paris after the siege and seen the havoc wrought by the Communists there, records that the French proletariat were 'inexperienced bunglers' whose performances paled into insignificance in comparison with the high-level refinements of the experts of Alexandria.



The condition of the provinces was now one of complete anarchy. Large towns in the Delta such as Tantah, Damanhour, and Mehalla, were plundered and the European inhabitants massacred.<sup>2</sup>

Arabi withdrew his army to a position a few miles from Alexandria, whence he issued a Proclamation stating that 'irreconcilable war existed between the Egyptians and the English',<sup>3</sup> and on the 22nd July, Gladstone informed the House 'that we should not fully discharge our duty if we did not endeavour to convert the present interior state of Egypt from anarchy and conflict to peace and order . . . We shall,' he said, 'look during the time that remains to us to the co-operation of the Powers of civilized Europe, if it be in any case open to us, but'—and the House cheered wildly when he added—'if every chance of obtaining co-operation is exhausted, the work will be undertaken by the single power of England'.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, the Conference of the Powers, which was still sitting, was informed that 'Her Majesty's Government would be glad to receive the co-operation of any Powers who were ready to afford it'.<sup>5</sup> The French Government, notwithstanding an eloquent warning by

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, page 297.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, page 301.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, page 300.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, page 308.

Gambetta of the danger of breaking the Anglo-French alliance, declined to act. Clemenceau, with obvious suspicions of the intentions of Germany, objected to the French forces being 'scattered over Africa', instead of being where he thought they ought to be—in France.<sup>1</sup>

As no other Power made any offer to co-operate, Great Britain found herself obliged to act alone; although Monsieur de Freycinet admitted that 'England had never desired to intervene *manu militare* in Egypt', and, indeed, had 'done everything in her power to avoid intervention'.<sup>2</sup>

A force numbering some twenty thousand men was now placed under the command of Sir Garnet Wolseley, and Alexandria began to fill up fast with British soldiers as, day by day during the first weeks of August, fresh detachments disembarked.

At this period the Europeans were flocking back to Alexandria in large numbers.

The two strategical points to be held by any army defending the Egyptian Delta from invasion from the north are Kafr-el-Dawar, a few miles from Alexandria, and Tel-el-Kebir, about thirty miles west of Ismailia. Wolseley decided to advance into Egypt by way of Tel-el-Kebir, and on the 18th August, 1882, the British transports with their escorting ironclads sailed out of the Harbour of Alexandria and steamed eastwards. Port Said was occupied without difficulty and the British force disembarked at Ismailia.

The position at Tel-el-Kebir chosen by Arabi to withstand Wolseley's attack was on the crest of a low range of desert hummocks. Nearly nine miles of earthworks were thrown up by the Egyptians with extreme rapidity, but of the twenty-five thousand men who manned them not more than five thousand were trained soldiers, the rest being no more than farm-labourers with muskets in their hands which they did not know how to use.<sup>3</sup>

Wolseley established his headquarters at Kassassin, about twenty miles west of Ismailia, and eventually decided upon the delivery of a night assault on Tel-el-Kebir.

That night-march was vividly described by General Sir Edward Hutton (who took part in it as a Major) to a friend and pupil of his

<sup>1</sup> Idem, pages 302 and 303.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. B. de Guerville: *La Nouvelle Egypte* (Librairie Universelle, Paris, 1905), page 78.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Windsor Villiers Stuart of Dromana, M.P.: *Egypt after the War* (Murray, London, 1883), page 97.

who recorded it in his diary while the facts were still fresh in his mind and related it to the writer as nearly as possible in General Hutton's own words. 'On the night of the 12th September,' said General Hutton, 'when the British force had reached a position within a few hours of the enemy's earthworks, Sir Garnet and his staff made a personal reconnaissance and then decided to storm Arabi's entrenchments with fixed bayonets. A naval officer, Wyatt Rawson, was selected as guide. Although the stars were bright the night was pitch-black,' and in General Hutton's opinion 'a march under similar circumstances in battle formation was without precedent.' In the impenetrable darkness of that moonless Egyptian night, Rawson went unhesitatingly forward. 'Complete silence was commanded ; orders passed from rank to rank in whispers ; and Rawson, with the whole army entirely dependent on his knowledge of the stars, continued to press calmly and unhesitatingly forward. As the first streaks of dawn appeared some shots were heard—fired by Arabi's pickets ! Rawson had brought the brigade to the exact spot at exactly the right moment—as dawn was breaking !'

'Our men,' continued Hutton, 'fixed bayonets, and a deep hush of expectation fell upon us all. Then came a sudden blaze of light and a hurricane of grape-shot swept through the British ranks and over their heads. They wavered, but only for a moment. Sir Garnet sounded the "advance", and immediately the whole line as far as the eye could see, with heads down as though to avoid bullets, broke into a run, not knowing what might be before them. There was an onrush of men as they charged towards the Egyptian earthworks and Hutton lost sight of Rawson who, the leading man of the whole Brigade, naturally became the first target of the enemy's fire. But he had not lived in vain, for the Egyptian army was taken completely by surprise. Springing to arms, dazed and bewildered, they returned the fire as best they could, but in less than half an hour Arabi's army had ceased to exist.'

Arabi Pasha was in bed when the first shots were heard and did not even have time to get his boots on. 'He was the first to flee,' said an old Egyptian eye-witness to de Guerville, 'and, followed by his broken army, he continued to run until he reached Cairo, where, as soon as the advance guard of English cavalry appeared, he promptly surrendered.'

The Egyptians who fled with Arabi were, however, only 'the farm labourers with muskets in their hands which they did not know how

to use'. They were not soldiers. The small number of trained troops in Arabi's force at Tel-el-Kebir fought with a gallantry that scarcely any fighting force in the world could have surpassed. The masses of dead left in the trenches were silent witnesses to the heroism with which these troops had fought. 'So earnest were the Egyptian artillerymen,' said General Alison, 'that they were actually bayoneted from the rear while still working their guns.' And 'the Egyptian Guard regiment,' says Villiers Stuart, 'fell back fighting sullenly, that hardest thing of all to fight—a losing battle.' There was a line of works at right angles to the main entrenchments. 'Taking advantage of this, the Egyptians,' continued Villiers Stuart, 'rallied at every re-entering angle, at every battery, at every redoubt. They met our men bayonet to bayonet again and again.'

The Battle of Tel-el-Kebir was lost, but not the nation's honour.



There happened to be the right man on the spot in Egypt to carry out the hazardous exploit that crowned Wolseley's lightning victory. Captain Watson of the Royal Engineers—later Colonel Sir Charles Watson—who had served with Gordon in Equatoria, who spoke Egyptian Arabic, who knew Cairo well, was now at Tel-el-Kebir as a member of Wolseley's Intelligence Department. It was in this way that he learnt—as he himself wrote—that there was 'a considerable probability, unless the British advanced rapidly, that the city of Cairo would be burnt, not by Arabi's soldiers, but by what were known as the "bad people"—a local euphemism for the rascal-element of Cairo, corresponding to the similar element at Alexandria who had destroyed the European Quarter there.

It was the foreknowledge of this danger to Cairo that determined the historic ride to the capital by a small body of British troops. From the Cavalry Division commanded by General Drury-Lowe (under whom the pursuit of the fleeing Egyptians was chiefly carried out) a column of some twelve hundred men—Dragoons, Bengal Cavalry, and Mounted Infantry—was detached and ordered to make for Cairo with the utmost speed. Captain Watson accompanied them as Intelligence Officer.

On reaching the village of Bilbeis,<sup>1</sup> Watson endeavoured to carry

<sup>1</sup> It will be remembered that it was at Bilbeis that that other Royal Engineer, Captain Lacey, had arrived eighty-two years before with the momentous dispatch from Lord Elgin to the Turkish Grand Vizier.

out the orders that had been given him to secure the railway station and the telegraph and post offices, but it was only with difficulty that the column could make its way through the streets because of the immense crowd that had come out to welcome the British Army !

General Lowe joined this cavalry vanguard at Bilbeis and the following morning, before sunrise, they struck across the Desert for Cairo. By the late afternoon they could see, clearly defined against the shimmering sky, the two minarets of the Mohammed Ali Mosque rising high above the Cairo Citadel—the goal of their ride.

An hour later the Abbassia Barracks (a familiar memory to the British and Dominion troops of the First World War) became visible in the distance. These barracks are situated about two miles from the centre of Cairo, and, as the British force drew nearer, the Egyptian soldiery could be seen swarming ant-like around them, marking out and digging the trenches with which it was their apparent intention to protect the approach to Cairo.

General Drury-Lowe ordered the column to advance by echelons of squadrons from the left, making as great a show as possible with the small number of men he had under his command, and at last a halt was called. Colonel Stewart with a few officers, including Captain Watson, and an escort of fifty men, then rode forward to reconnoitre.

Suddenly, to their unspeakable amazement, a squadron of Egyptian cavalry emerged from the barracks and rode towards them, every man carrying a white flag or some recognizable substitute tied to his carbine !

As the sun was setting in a riot of blazing colour, Stewart and his escort of fifty men went on to meet the advancing Egyptian squadron and eventually halted. Then, in the intervening space between the main body of the British force and the Abbassia Barracks, Stewart and Watson were seen to be in conversation with some Egyptian officers who had ridden ahead of their squadron. After a little while Stewart and his men moved on towards the Barracks, and Watson, galloping back to the main body, gave them the astounding intelligence that ten thousand men had surrendered to their twelve hundred, and, in obedience to the orders given them, were about to pile their arms.

Night was closing when, in an obviously apprehensive mood, the Governor of Cairo, accompanied by the Commander of the Police and the Commandant of the Cairo Citadel, reached Abbassia and were granted a brief interview with General Lowe. They were informed firmly that the Citadel must be surrendered, and, in spite

## WATSON'S INITIATIVE

of all objections, were given plainly to understand that they had no option in the matter. At last, resigning themselves to the decrees of Kismet, they returned to Cairo.

'He who holds the Citadel holds Cairo : he who holds Cairo holds Egypt.' Watson knew this old Egyptian saying, but he also knew that, although the surrender of the Citadel had been promised, it was not yet in British hands, and when on the morrow the Egyptians, with returning confidence and the discovery in the full light of day that the capitulation of the city had been made to a handful of cavalry, anything might happen. Therefore, although there were about six thousand Egyptian troops garrisoned in the Citadel, it was decided that Watson should endeavour to take possession of it that night.

On his asking what he was to do about the small fort on the high desert plateau commanding even the Citadel itself, he was told to use his own discretion !

Watson's outstanding characteristics were, like Gordon's, his invincible faith, belief in prayer, and scorn of death. He therefore found no difficulty in setting forth on an expedition which, if it failed, would probably be condemned as foolhardy. He felt assured that, provided he took all necessary precautions, he could safely leave the result to the Higher Power.

He decided not to enter Cairo by the nearest gate, as this would entail the danger of riding through crowded streets and attracting widespread attention. So he chose a lonely track outside the walls which led to a small and little-used gate standing almost in the very shadow of the Citadel.

Taking five officers and eighty-four N.C.O.s, with men of the 4th Dragoons under Captain Darley, and four officers and fifty-four N.C.O.s, with men of the Mounted Infantry under Captain Lawrence making a total force of no more than a hundred and fifty men—he set off at eight o'clock. Awaiting them, protected by the Citadel's massive walls, were six thousand Egyptian troops. Watson's small party also included an Egyptian officer who had been sent to them by the Khedive and had accompanied the column from Tel-el-Kebir, and three of Arabi's officers who were told that their future depended entirely on the way they obeyed every command that was given.

Watson rode at the head of the column. It was very dark and visibility was reduced to vanishing-point by the clouds of dust raised by the horses' hooves. The tomb-mosques of the once all-powerful Mameluke Beys were passed unseen. Stumbling over the wreckage

of ruined buildings and avoiding the deeper holes as best they could, each file taking the utmost care never for an instant to lose touch with the file ahead, at last, after a difficult and hazardous journey of several miles, they saw the walls of Cairo looming out of the darkness immediately above them. By some most fortunate chance the little gate leading into the city was open and unguarded. Watson led his party through and up the steep, narrow street leading to the Citadel. The houses on both sides were enveloped in almost impenetrable darkness except where, from time to time, a small, solitary oil-lamp illumined a little shop from which men looked out at the British soldiers with expressions of incomprehension.

The walls of Cairo's mighty Citadel are pierced by two main gates, the New Gate and the Azab Gate, from each of which a lane leads for some distance into the interior of the fortress. The two lanes meet at the Middle Gate, beyond which lie the barracks, stores, fortifications, mosques, courtyards, and parade-grounds which take up the greater part of the immense area covered by Saladin's colossal fortress.

At a short distance from the New Gate, at which a strong guard was found to be posted, Watson halted his little force. The Egyptian guard could hardly believe their eyes when Watson approached them accompanied by Arabi's officers. Watson instructed the guard to inform the Citadel's Commandant that he wished to speak to him immediately. After an interval the Commandant appeared as requested, in the company of several officers. Watson quietly informed him that he had brought a British force to garrison the Citadel, and instructed him to hand over the keys of the gates, to parade the entire garrison immediately, to march them out of the Citadel, and to accommodate them in the barracks at Kasr-el-Nil which lay between two and three miles distant on the Nile bank.

Argument and remonstrance followed, but the Commandant was made to feel that no option remained but to accept the inevitable. He therefore sent for the Keeper of the Keys, who brought them in a bag and handed them over to Watson.

And now the stillness of the night was suddenly broken by the loud, piercing notes of a bugle, which was followed by another, and another, as the 'assembly' was sounded first in one part of the Citadel and then in another, while the garrison, not knowing what had happened, rose from their beds and hurried to the parade-ground.

To conceal the smallness of his own force, Watson kept it in the

lane leading from the New Gate to the Middle Gate, but the orders that he gave to the Commandant were to march the Egyptian garrison through the Middle Gate and down the slope leading to the Azab Gate so that the two forces could not possibly meet.

The Egyptian troops, behaving with the most admirable discipline, fell in and marched down the slope in perfect order, while Watson, standing at the Middle Gate, was able to watch them marching through it, deeply impressed by their soldierly bearing and the excellent order kept, despite the encumbrance of the huge mob of camp-followers, women, and laden camels and donkeys straggling out with them. For more than two hours the Egyptians streamed through the Middle Gate and thence down the lane to the Azab Gate, and it was past midnight by the time that the six thousand had left.

Now, at length, Watson was able to give orders to his hundred and fifty men to march in and occupy the Citadel.

This midnight's task, however, had not yet been completed. The fort on the desert heights above the Citadel had still to be taken over and occupied. Watson himself could not possibly yet leave the Citadel, and none of his officers even knew where the fort was; whilst the men and their horses were so completely exhausted that they were unfit to make any further effort. But, in an inspired moment, Watson summoned the last of the officers of the departing Egyptian garrison as he was in the act of passing through the Middle Gate, and told him that he would be 'very much obliged' if he would go up to the fort on the Mokattam Hill, send the garrison to join their comrades in the Kasr-el-Nil Barracks, lock the gate, and bring him the keys of the fort.

'Very good, sir,' said this officer, who went off at once.

In the meantime, while the Egyptian garrison which had evacuated the Citadel was marching through the streets of Cairo *en route* for the Nile-side barracks, as many as could do so slipped away under cover of the night and made for their homes, whence the news—as Watson had anticipated—spread far and wide that the Citadel had been taken 'by the British Army'!

Now that he had entered the Citadel, Watson set himself to explore, with the aid of an ancient lantern, the labyrinthine purlieus of the vast and forbidding fortress. He took with him Captain Lawrence and two Egyptians as escort. Sentries were posted at the different gates, and a final visit was paid to the Commandant in his own quarters.

#### THE HINGE OF FATE

The main task thus completed, Watson took his leave of Lawrence, whom he left in charge. At this very moment the Egyptian officer who had been entrusted with the evacuation of the fort on the heights arrived and reported that everything had been done in accordance with the orders received.

Watson thanked him and accepted the keys.

Accompanied by one of Arabi's late officers, Watson now carried out the last remaining order that had been given him. This was to ride through the streets of Cairo, not omitting the most dangerous, to obtain information for a full report on the state of the capital.

In this way the British Occupation of Egypt began.

## THE BRITISH OCCUPATION

**T**HE European population of Alexandria went wild with delight as soon as it became known that Arabi Pasha's army had been routed. All business was suspended, processions of Europeans preceded by bands paraded the streets between the burnt-out buildings shouting 'Viva Inghilterra', and throwing their hats into the air. Enthusiasts broke away and flung their arms round the necks of astonished British sentries on guard at different points.

So, with the presence of British soldiers to guarantee the maintenance of law and order, the remainder of the foreign population flocked back to Egypt. No longer, they thought, need they fear mob-rule, rebellion, massacre. The merchant, the manufacturer, the investor, would now enjoy a sense of security never experienced before. A petition in favour of a permanent British Occupation was signed by nearly three thousand Europeans of various nationalities, and ever since then speculation has been rife as to what any other Power would have done if it had found itself in undisputed possession of the land which Napoleon had described as 'the most important country in the world', and which Mohammed Ali had believed must so certainly be coveted by England that the Duke of Wellington would sooner or later make up his mind to seize it.

The British Government of the day, however, had no such intention in mind. But, having muddled their way into the country, they could not withdraw their troops until the position had been stabilized. And this would take time, for there were grievances to be redressed, there was an indolent and corrupt administration, a climax of misery amongst the fellahin, a ruinous and inequitable taxation. And the power of the bondholders hampered all efforts at reform. Even a Liberal Cabinet could therefore see that the foundations of competent and honest administration had to be laid before a British withdrawal could be contemplated, if only to avoid further bloodshed. A few experienced British officials were therefore at once brought from India, the Straits Settlements, and elsewhere to organize a Civil Service and to reform the Tribunals.

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At this juncture the grandfather of a friend of the author offered to travel throughout the entire length and breadth of the country in order to obtain first-hand information to assist those on whose shoulders fell the immense task of construction and reconstruction. This was Henry Windsor Villiers Stuart of Dromana, one of the earliest British Egyptologists, a man who knew the language and the people and was ideally fitted for his self-imposed task. His offer was accepted, and he spent the first winter of the British Occupation in travel from province to province, first in the Delta, then in Middle Egypt, and finally in Upper Egypt, interviewing all classes of the population—officials, landowners, sheikhs, village elders, tax collectors, and, most important, fellahin—in twenty-six different villages and towns.

Almost exactly three months after Watson's capture of the Cairo Citadel, Villiers Stuart left Cairo on board a small Government steamer to commence his inquiries in the Delta, and on the evening of the first day made fast to a high bank overhung by a wide-branching acacia tree not far from a large village. The scene was typical of the Delta—the broad River, the high bank, the flat plain, the giant acacia—and the roar of the escaping steam quickly brought all the notables of the place to the bank. Readers to whom Egypt is an unvisited country must endeavour to imagine the scene as the dark-complexioned Egyptians in their robes and turbans looked down from the embankment that loomed high above the deck, their figures standing out clear-cut against the skyline. To the accompaniment of a babel of excited conversation a fire was kindled; *chibouks* and cigarettes were lit; and the greater part of the night was whiled away in gossip. In the morning a deputation of village elders headed by the Sheikh came aboard to pay their respects to their English visitor, and under an awning on the promenade deck coffee was served, cigarettes were handed round, and the first question was asked and answered.

‘Why is the country so poor?’

The answer never varied in any one of the villages in which this question was asked: ‘Because taxes are extorted by the Government without pity. Our sheep are distrained; our land is sold; our only recourse is to a foreign moneylender.’

‘Who are the foreign moneylenders?’

‘Greeks, Syrians, Jews, Armenians. They are the greatest rogues in Egypt and are the cause of all our misery. They take full advantage

to trade upon our ignorance ; they exact money on account ; they give no receipts ; they deny that they have ever received the money ; they force the debtor to produce sureties ; in the end they sell up not only the debtor's land but that of the surety as well.'<sup>1</sup>

'Why did so many side with Arabi Pasha ?'

'Because he promised that our debts to the Christian usurers should be cancelled if he succeeded and that the moneylenders would be banished.'

'Is there a National Party in the country ?'

'Not that we know of. It was the Military Party that raised that cry.'

The first moneylender on whom Villiers Stuart called was the son of a Syrian who had married the daughter of one of Napoleon's soldiers ; his wife was an Armenian ; the maid who waited on them was a coal-black Sudanese slave-girl who had been captured by a slave-hunting expedition.

The European houses of the so-called Christian usurers were invariably the most impressive in the village. Their walls were usually stained cream-colour, pale blue, or rose pink ; they had bright green Venetian shutters ; and were a striking contrast to the crude mud-brick dwellings of the rest of the inhabitants. At one such house, in the absence of the Greek owner, the steward showed Villiers Stuart the vineyard, gardens, and farmlands as well as the stables with their camels, buffaloes, and horses. And, as soon as the steward was out of earshot, the villagers told him that all the farmlands surrounding the moneylender's mansion had once belonged to Egyptians. The old village Sheikh, with the characteristic courtly air of the better-class provincial Egyptian, then invited him to enter his own poor home. Apologizing for the surroundings, and offering him a long-stemmed pipe, he told him how the usurers had surrounded the fellahin with so complicated a network of debt that the unfortunate peasants had long since given up all hope of comprehending the intricacies of their financial position.

During these investigations, Villiers Stuart interrogated not less than two hundred people in all walks of life and in all parts of the country, and not only did he record all that they told him but he tested

<sup>1</sup> This, and all other information in connection with Villiers Stuart's investigation, will be found in his book, *Egypt after the War* (Murray, London, 1883). The reader is referred to pages 21, 30, 40, 52, 53, 54, 59, 60, 64, 155, 156, 249, 253, 465.

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the truth of their evidence by looking into everything personally, and collecting and comparing with one another the assertions made before basing any conclusions upon them.<sup>1</sup> The result was that he was convinced that the feeling in the provinces was one of friendliness towards the British. In not a single instance was nationalism mentioned as a motive for the Arabi revolt, and whenever questioned on this point, it was invariably stated that the plea of nationalism was limited to the military party and had originated with them. In Cairo and Alexandria, however, it was different. There, as a result of the European control of Egypt's finances which had begun in Ismail Pasha's time, foreign officials in large numbers had displaced Egyptians, and for this reason the Egyptian student-class had hotly embraced the Nationalist cause. It should, however, be realized that the proportion of Englishmen among these foreign officials was at this time very small.

Villiers Stuart's conclusions were published in November 1883, and his summing up is therefore, at this moment in Egyptian affairs, of outstanding interest. It was : 'England has now a magnificent opportunity. It will be her own fault if she has not noble fruit to show of which she may be proud. But as yet she has only laid a few bricks of the foundations for the new edifice. Were she at this stage to withdraw, she would deserve the sneers and scorn of the civilized world ; and would be in the contemptible position of the man in the parable who began to build and was not able to finish.'<sup>2</sup>

Gladstone had begun to build, but was reluctant to finish. Already on the 3rd January, 1883—a year before Villiers Stuart's words appeared in print—Lord Granville had addressed a circular to the Powers in which he had expressed himself in these terms : 'Although for the present a British force remains in Egypt for the preservation of public tranquillity, *Her Majesty's Government are desirous of withdrawing it as soon as the state of the country and the organization of proper means for the maintenance of the Khedive's authority will permit it.*'<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, however, the reorganization of the Egyptian Army could not be delayed, for the rebellion and the consequent disbanding of the Egyptian Army had left Egypt with no means of defending her frontiers, and therefore—in view of the contemplated early withdrawal of the British force—Sir Evelyn Wood was entrusted with the

<sup>1</sup> Op. Cit., page v.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, page viii.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, page 340.

#### THE MAHDI DECLARES HIS MISSION

task of building up an entirely new Egyptian Army. Twenty-six British officers were appointed to assist him, and one of these was a certain Captain Kitchener of the Royal Engineers, of whom we shall hear a great deal more hereafter.

Gladstone took one other important step. He abolished the Dual Control, and, to the annoyance of the French, the duties were taken over (it was expected for the time being only) by a British Financial Adviser.

The position of the British in Egypt was now entirely unprecedented, and most exceptional qualities were obviously needed of anyone chosen to represent Great Britain at Cairo. Fortunately for Egypt and for England, Gladstone offered the post of British Agent and Consul-General to Lord Cromer, who accepted it, and arrived at Cairo on the 11th September, 1883.

The destiny of Egypt was however at that moment being rough-hewn not so much by the politicians, diplomats, and high priests of Finance who bulked so largely in the public eye in London, Paris, and Cairo, as by a religious zealot in the sun-blistered Sudan named Mohammed Ahmad, who called himself a Dervish and who was afterwards known as the Mahdi.

\* \* \*

In the days when Ismail Pasha had been looking to International Finance to save him from bankruptcy, Mohammed Ahmad had been dwelling in a subterranean den that he had scooped out with his own hands on a solitary island of the White Nile in the district of Fashoda. In this remote and inhospitable terrain he had grown lean—and dangerous—from many years of maturing austerity. In his boyhood he had studied under the leader of a Dervish sect at a school attached to the shrine of a Moslem saint and had eventually earned a high local reputation as a mystic. Suddenly, in 1881, he took the title of el-Mahdi, or Moslem Messiah, who, as forecast by Moslem traditionalists, was destined to arise and overshadow the whole earth with his sanctity and justice. His divine mission, as he declared, was to establish the long-heralded reign of universal Islam and universal law; to become the undisputed ruler of the Sudan and the leader of a Holy War which was to sweep before it the Governments both of Cairo and Constantinople. The final stage of his mission was to convert the whole world, and all who refused to accept his decrees, whether pagan, Christian or Moslem, were to be exterminated.

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Under the influence of early skirmishing successes of his adherents against Government troops, many of the unlettered Sudanese decided to accept his claim. Later came the fantastic reports that he was no mere mortal man ; that he had lived on earth before and had now returned to live again among men after having seen the glories of heaven. Fanatical Islamites flocked to his standard ; and these were soon joined by whole tribes who, having been inveterate slave-hunters, wholeheartedly resented the Government's attempts to suppress what to them were their ' lawful occasions ', and were only too glad to join the rebel force.

With each passing day the situation became more and more ominous and at last it was clear beyond doubt that the Egyptian Government was faced by a formidable rebellion which would tax their military and financial resources to the utmost.

The British Government, already far more deeply committed in Egypt than it had ever intended to be, at once made it clear that England absolutely refused to be drawn into Sudanese affairs, so that the only apparent course open to the Egyptians—since the British Government had disbanded their army and had not yet had time to train a new one—was to re-enlist about ten thousand of Arabi's men. These were accordingly mobilized and eventually arrived at Khartoum. In response to an urgent appeal from the Egyptian Government, several British officers joined the staff of the Sudan Army, one of whom, General Hicks—best known as Hicks Pasha—had just retired from the Bombay Army and was eventually appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Sudan with the rank of General of Division. The British Government, however, made it clear that they were ' in no way responsible for the operations in the Sudan or for the appointment or actions of General Hicks '.<sup>1</sup>

Egypt had neither men nor money for a campaign of the magnitude needed to deal with the new situation ; and the Egyptian Government should have authorized Hicks to withdraw from the remoter parts of the Sudan and to stand on his defence in full strength in Khartoum itself. But the Cairo Government, in the plenitude of its unwisdom, decided upon the full re-conquest of the Mahdi-held Sudanese province of Kordofan—the vast, sun-scorched territory that lies to the west and south of Khartoum.

Hicks, with the clearest appreciation of the appalling risks that such an attempt would entail, was nevertheless reluctant, gallant

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, page 364.

officer that he was, to appear to shrink from any undertaking, however dangerous, and gave a qualified expression of willingness to undertake the campaign.

The British Government, though made fully aware by their local representatives of what was likely to happen, took no practical steps of any sort to restrain the Khedive, and the result was that in September, 1883, Hicks's army of ten thousand men left their camp at Omdurman and marched to meet their doom. The force included ten European officers and was accompanied by the correspondent of the *Daily News* and the artist of the *Graphic*. Hicks himself joined them at Duem, a hundred miles south of Khartoum. From Duem they marched westward towards El Obeid, the capital of the province, which meant the crossing of an arid, waterless region, the driest tract even in the Sudan, in which temperatures would have ranged from 105 to 115 in the shade, if any shade could have been found. A few agonizingly insufficient water-holes provided so scanty a dole of water that camels, horses, and men, overpowered by the heat and the suffocating thirst, fell dead in their tracks at ever shorter and shorter intervals.

From the outset, Hicks Pasha's force had been infiltrated by Mahdist spies, and his chief guide maintained constant communication with the enemy.

A report of the 3rd October was the last information ever received from Hicks. Week succeeded week without a word of news leaking through from anywhere. Anxiety in Cairo—and in Westminster—deepened. Attempt after attempt was made to get into touch. Attempt after attempt failed.

In November a few scraps of news began to filter through. Two messengers reached Duem with letters from the scene of the final battle. A Copt, disguised as a Dervish, who claimed to have seen the fight, arrived at Khartoum. A camel-driver followed. Then came a Greek merchant who had escaped from El Obeid, and later, an Arab boy who had served with Hicks's army.

By degrees the main facts became known, and, though the information collected differed in some relatively unimportant details, there emerged a picture vivid enough to make the blood run cold.

The hot, barren plateau across which the Egyptians had marched had been insensibly succeeded first by bushes, then by underwood, then by forest, and, thirty miles south of El Obeid, Hicks and his army were deliberately misled and ambushed by Mahdist trickery.

#### THE BRITISH OCCUPATION

Then the Dervishes—some say commanded by the Mahdi himself—launched a continuous series of assaults from all sides by a force which not only outnumbered the Egyptians by many thousands but included upwards of five thousand men, with rifles and ample ammunition, who had had some training under Arabi. The Egyptians, handicapped by the total exhaustion of their water-supply—down to the very last skin—held out for three days, but on the morning of the fourth day the grim struggle ended.

Within a mile of the large pool for which the thirst-tortured troops had so vainly sought and fought the last stand was made. League-long hosts of Dervish spearmen burst upon them from every quarter at once and one side of their square was swept away like chaff before the wind. Seeing this, the other three sides of the square faced inwards and the Egyptians continued stubbornly to hold their ground until the incalculable myriads of the Dervish host bore down upon them, and, with rifle and spear, annihilated them. Hicks—revolver in one hand, sword in the other—supported by the few remaining survivors of his European staff, led a last desperate charge. He was at once unhorsed, and his staff fell fighting around him, man after man. The heroic leader himself fought on to the very last. Three times he emptied his revolver into the Dervish hordes. Then he took to his sword. But not for long. A Dervish spear-thrust stretched him lifeless on the ground and Hicks Pasha and his army had ceased to exist.



Lord Cromer had arrived in Egypt to take up his new duties as British Consul-General just three days before Hicks Pasha had started on his ill-fated expedition. The situation that confronted him on arrival was one of undeniable delicacy. Theoretically his duties in no way differed from those of the Consuls-General of the other Powers. But since he represented the Power in military control of the country he could not avoid being held accountable for public order as well as for the solvency and stability of the country.

This anomalous position was not however expected to be of long duration, and day now followed day while the Cabinet hopefully awaited news from the man on the spot that all necessary steps were being taken to extricate them from the position into which their inept handling of the Egyptian situation had led them. But what came was the news of the annihilation of Hicks Pasha's army, followed

by further reports that Egyptian garrisons in various parts of the Sudan, who had hitherto held out in hopes of relief by Hicks, were now making their own terms with the Mahdi, whose power, augmented beyond all possible calculation by the defeat of Hicks, was sweeping like a tidal wave over the entire Sudan. At last Khartoum and a few outlying garrisons in the Red Sea region alone held out.

In the face of this new peril the interests of the bondholders dwindled to vanishing-point. No one could now say at what point in the Nile Valley the triumphant progress of the rebels could be arrested. With the Egyptian Treasury drained to the last coin and no army worthy of the name, the only way for Egypt to regain the Sudan was for English resources to be drawn upon. But Gladstone refused absolutely to be diverted from his declared policy by the threat of a 'mob of savages' in Africa. He considered his paramount work to be in England, and Lord Cromer was therefore instructed that nothing should be done which could possibly throw upon the British Government the responsibility of operations in the Sudan.

The only practicable course open to the Egyptians was therefore to withdraw their troops and officials from the Sudan and leave it to its fate; and to do what they could to defend Egypt itself from invasion by the Mahdi. But the merest suggestion that Egypt should abandon the Sudan would have wrecked the career of any responsible Egyptian Minister, and hence, when the British Government did recommend this course, it was impossible to persuade Cherif Pasha to take it. Nothing, said Cherif, would induce him to abandon the thousands of Egyptians scattered throughout the length and breadth of that vast province to the miseries of Mahdi rule. 'I am sure I am right,' he told Cromer, 'Time and posterity will judge between me and Mr. Gladstone in this matter.'

The Gladstone Ministry was therefore at last confronted with an unpalatable but now inescapable dilemma. They must either govern Egypt themselves, at any rate for a time, or withdraw from it at once. A thrice unwelcome message was therefore despatched to Cromer instructing him that the Egyptian Government must be made to understand 'that in important questions affecting the administration and safety of Egypt, the advice of Her Majesty's Government must be followed, so long as the provisional occupation continues. Ministers and Governors must carry out this advice or forfeit their offices.'

Cherif Pasha at once decided to forfeit his office, and tendered his resignation to the Khedive.

#### THE BRITISH OCCUPATION

Lord Cromer—dealing with the *impasse* in his own masterly manner—paid a personal visit to the Khedive and informed him (though he was far too prudent to report the fact officially to the Home Government !) that if no Egyptian could be found who would form a Ministry, he would take the Government into his own hands—a bayonet-like thrust that went home, and Nubar Pasha formed a Ministry.

But although Nubar Pasha and Lord Cromer both agreed with the British Government that the evacuation of the Sudan was essential, no suggestion had yet been made as to how this exceedingly difficult and dangerous operation could be carried out. Egypt's own resources were utterly inadequate for an operation of this magnitude and yet Gladstone refused to sanction the use of British or Indian troops or British money.

The British public was becoming daily more anxious about the position. The nation's honour was at stake. Sir Samuel Baker, in a vividly descriptive letter to *The Times*, depicted the tragedy that was likely to occur if an inadequately organized attempt was made to conduct thousands of helpless women and children across the Mahdist-infected Desert between the Sudan and Egypt. The *Morning Advertiser*—a Liberal newspaper—in an article that was typical of the general attitude of the entire British Press, wrote : ‘If disaster, and probably massacre, should overtake the column of refugees from Khartoum, there would be an outburst of indignation throughout the civilized world’; and the same newspaper probably voiced the opinion of almost every section of the British public when, on the 12th January, 1884, it asserted : ‘It is not too much to say that all England has been looking for the employment of General Gordon in the present crisis in Egypt.’

It was on that same day that Lord Wolseley, then Adjutant-General, sent a telegram to Gordon asking him to call and see him at the War Office.

## GORDON

**G**ENERAL GORDON has been well described as ‘a man without counterpart in history’.<sup>1</sup> In England he was at this time honoured mainly for his exploits against the Taiping rebels in China, a campaign that had won him a name for the splendour of his deeds such as could only be surpassed by romance. Small wonder that the people of England had taken him to their hearts and that their affection had shown itself in the adoption of the sobriquet of ‘Chinese Gordon’. He was only thirty years old when in 1863 he had entered on the command of the small force then opposed to the rebels in China; but there, always in front when a position had to be stormed, and carrying no other weapon than a slender cane, he had led his army from victory to victory until, after more than a score of brilliantly planned and ordered battles, the completeness of the triumph of his ‘Ever Victorious Army’ was finally established.

His features were those of a man endowed with rare strength of mind; his forehead was broad and lofty, his mouth resolute; and the serene, steadfast gaze of his blue-grey eyes revealed him as possessing ‘that peace which the world cannot give’. A Christian gentleman, brave, high-minded, without a single sordid trait or thought, he was utterly impervious to all the seductions of money or fame, and of him it was well said that ‘God’s guidance and government were the strongest and greatest realities of his life’.<sup>2</sup> That certain writers should have found difficulty in accommodating their thoughts to those of this noble and unique spirit is hardly surprising.

His connection with Egypt and the Sudan began in 1872 when Ismail Pasha was Khedive. During the summer of that year, while serving as English member of the Danubian Commission, he paid a visit to the British war cemeteries in the Crimea, and, passing through Constantinople on his way back he met, by destiny, Nubar Pasha,

<sup>1</sup> Lieut.-Colonel E. W. C. Sandes: *The Royal Engineers in Egypt and the Sudan* (Institution of Royal Engineers, Chatham, 1937), page 125.

<sup>2</sup> W. E. Forster in a speech in the House of Commons on the 10th March 1884.

the Armenian Prime Minister of Egypt, who was at that moment looking for a man to take part in pioneer work in Central Africa. It was as a result of this chance meeting that, twelve months later, Ismail Pasha offered him the post of Governor of Equatoria (the southern area of the Sudan) which had just been vacated by Sir Samuel Baker.

It should be borne in mind that Great Britain's connection with the Sudan did not begin with Baker and Gordon. Other Englishmen had already discovered the (hitherto only rumoured) Great Lakes and solved the immemorial mystery of the sources of the Nile : the sources of those two mighty rivers, the Blue Nile and the White which unite at Khartoum to form the world's most wonderful river, the Nile, without whose waters Egypt, an almost rainless country, would disappear and become a desert. To James Bruce goes the honour of re-discovering, in 1770, the source of the Blue Nile—first glimpsed by the Jesuit traveller, Pedro Paez, in 1615—and the story of his adventures was so incredible that it led to his veracity being questioned by his contemporaries, though subsequent explorers proved it to be true. To Speke and Burton goes the credit of discovering Lake Tanganyika (in 1857) and to Speke (this time alone) of reaching and naming the Victoria Nyanza after adventures beyond belief. Again, in 1860, this time accompanied by James Augustus Grant, Speke discovered the source of the White Nile at its point of escape from the Victoria Nyanza. And the exploration of Sir Samuel Baker, accompanied by his heroic wife, reached its climax with the discovery of the Albert Nyanza. Baker records how, thrilled by his first sight of this great Lake, he 'went down to the water's edge, drank a deep draught, and thanked God most sincerely for having guided him'. The discovery of the Albert Nyanza was a remarkable feat and in 1869 Ismail Pasha appointed Sir Samuel Baker to the post of Governor of the Equatorial Nile Basin.

When Gordon arrived at Cairo in February 1874 to take over the governorship of Equatoria in succession to Sir Samuel Baker, the Mahdi was no more than an obscure fakir leading a life of prayer and fasting on Abba Island in the White Nile, and seven more years were still to pass before he emerged from this retreat as the Expected One and announced the coming Holy War.

The camp that had been established during Mohammed Ali's reign at the place where the Blue and the White Niles meet—and which was later to become the Khartoum of Kitchener—had grown

‘THE MISERY OF THESE LANDS’

by the time of Gordon’s first visit in 1874 to be a sprawling agglomeration of mean-looking Oriental houses with a large and somewhat pretentious residence for the Governor-General, Ismail Ayoub Pasha, who, in full-dress uniform, his breast ablaze with decorations, welcomed Gordon as he stepped ashore from a small steamer on the 13th March of that year with guns booming a salute and a band playing.

After spending a week in the Palace as the guest of Ismail Ayoub Pasha, Gordon continued his southward journey towards Equatoria, the Province into which he was then about to attempt to bring order and justice and to lay the foundations of civilization. It was a miserable province with only two trades, the one in ivory, the other in human beings. For this was the haunt of the slave-trader who sold his wares to the wealthy families of Egypt and those other countries in the Middle East where African slaves were considered indispensable, the women as servants, the men as eunuchs.

As the little steamer proceeded slowly up the great river and as mile upon mile carried Gordon farther from the last traces of civilization, the full magnitude of the colossal task he had accepted was borne upon him. ‘No one can conceive the misery of these lands’, he wrote.

Gondokoro, the headquarters of his province—a thousand miles from Khartoum—was reached in twenty-four days, but, on arriving there, he found that Egypt, so far from ‘possessing’ Equatoria, merely occupied two forts which were situated so far apart that it took the garrisons several weeks to communicate with one another, and from neither of which could the Khedive’s representatives venture for as much as half a mile except at the risk of their lives because the Egyptian officials were known to be in league with the slave-hunters and the native population inevitably regarded all comers as their foes.

Such was the province to which Gordon had been appointed Governor. Amid the jungle of stunted trees and giant grasses there was but rarely a human being or a domestic animal to be seen, for flocks, herds, men, women, even children, had all alike fallen into the clutches of slave-hunters. Seven-eighths of the population had already passed into slavery, and so destitute were those who still remained that many were ready to exchange their own kin for cattle and grain. Under the reign of terror established by the slave-hunters entire villages had been abandoned; vast areas had passed out of cultivation; once-fertile districts had become silent, uninhabited and

uninhabitable wastes. The tracks of the slave-gangs were lined with unburied corpses, skeletons, and skulls ; and the demand for slaves exceeded the supply, notwithstanding incessant tribal wars that were waged by native chieftains in remoter regions for the sole purpose of capturing fellow Africans of other tribes and selling them to Arab slave-dealers.

With characteristic contempt of danger, Gordon travelled about the pestilence-haunted swamps, often alone, always unarmed, covering immense distances on foot, indifferent alike to sweltering equatorial heat or torrential tropical downpour. Mixing with the people he settled tribal disputes, harried slave-hunters, and liberated slaves by the hundred. And the stories of his innate kindness and nobility of heart circulated from mouth to mouth throughout the country, developing into an enduring body of striking traditions.

One by one the little band of European helpers whom he had engaged to assist him succumbed to the deathliness of the climate, but Gordon worked on, exploring, mapping, building forts in this 'dead, mournful spot', where a heavy damp dew penetrated everywhere. 'It is', he wrote, 'as if the Angel Azrael (the Angel of Death) had spread his wings over this land. You have little idea of the silence and solitude. I am sure that no one whom God did not support could bear up.'

By the end of 1876 he had mapped the White Nile to within a short distance of the Victoria Nyanza, built a chain of forts along the upper reaches of the river, brought steamers up the cataracts and through the sudd and launched them on the Albert Nyanza, organized Government Districts, established friendly relations with the King of Uganda, and brought peace among the tribes.

On the other hand there remained, still, a dark side to the picture, for although he had dealt a heavy blow to the slave-trade, he had been forced to the conclusion that the complete suppression of this inhuman traffic was beyond the power of any single Englishman, because the Khedive's officials were themselves hand in glove with the slave-dealers. His eyes were opened to this fact almost immediately after arriving at Gondokoro by the discovery that the Khartoum authorities, instead of paying the troops in Equatoria with money, were in the habit of sending them consignments of young slave girls. This was the first of the endless cases of official complicity that emphasized the hopelessness of his task. Finally, when it became all too clear that even Ismail Ayoub himself was placing every possible

impediment in the way of his work, he told the Khedive in the most uncompromising terms that he would continue to serve him only on the one indispensable condition that Ismail Ayoub should be removed and that he himself should be entrusted with the supreme authority over the entire Sudan. To this the Khedive agreed, appointing him Governor-General with full power of life or death over officials and population of territory equal in size to the combined areas of the British Isles, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Scandinavia.

Gordon's camel rides through the wilds of the Sudan in his life-and-death struggle against the slave-traders amazed both friend and foe alike. Bestriding a camel famous for its speed, he more often than not outpaced his escort, appearing alone and single-handed when and where he was least expected.

Here, in this paradise for slave-hunters, caravan after caravan crossed a bone-strewn wilderness, each driving before it a further quota of newly captured slaves, all displaying the extremity of human misery, many of them perishing from hunger and thirst under the torrid rays of the African sun. 'I am not good at description,' Gordon wrote, 'but you can scarcely conceive the misery and suffering of these poor slaves. Some of them are mere skeletons. No female child, however young, passes unscathed by these scoundrels. No one who has a mother, or sister, or children could be callous to the intense human suffering which these poor wretches undergo. I declare, if I could stop this traffic, I would willingly be shot this night.'

Gordon eventually resigned his post, partly owing to his need for rest after the extreme physical exertion he had endured, and partly because he had come to the conclusion that he could not do his duty to the people of the Sudan under Tewfik Pasha's Government.

The full story of his wonderful work in the Sudan could not possibly be compressed into a parenthetical chapter, but the few facts given here will show how it was that a London newspaper should have asserted in January, 1884, that it was 'not too much to say that all England was looking for the employment of General Gordon in the present crisis in Egypt'.

## THE DEVIL'S BREW

GORDON received Lord Wolseley's telegram on Sunday, the 12th of January, and went to the War Office on the following Tuesday. Wolseley then told him that the Government might within a very short time need his assistance in the solution of the Sudan crisis and asked whether he would be prepared to go there 'to enquire into the condition of affairs'.

As it happened, Gordon was at this moment making final preparations for a journey to the Congo on a mission with which the King of the Belgians had entrusted him, but it was obviously his duty to give priority to the needs of his own Government, and he assured Wolseley that he would be only too ready to leave immediately for the Sudan if the Government requested him to do so.

The following day he left for Brussels without knowing whether his duties would take him to the Congo or to the Sudan, but a telegram from Wolseley called him back to London almost immediately.

In the correspondence that had been passing between the Ministers it had been assumed that the whole question of the Sudan would be discussed at the next Cabinet Meeting, but, as Gordon was on the point of leaving for the Congo, instantaneous action was essential, and Granville therefore arranged for the four Cabinet Ministers who were then in London—Lords Hartington and Northbrook, Sir Charles Dilke, and himself—to meet Gordon at the War Office as soon as he reached London.

There is no official record of this vitally important meeting, but letters written by Gordon immediately after its conclusion show that he left it with the distinct impression that he had been asked not merely to 'enquire into the condition of affairs' but actually to carry out the Egyptian evacuation of the Sudan. There was, however, a conflict of recollections. Sir Charles Dilke, for instance, minuted immediately after the close of the meeting that Gordon had been instructed to 'collect information and report' and, this being what he was himself convinced had happened, he never ceased to

#### GORDON LEAVES FOR KHARTOUM

declare that Gordon eventually went far beyond any authority that had been given to him.

The instructions actually handed to Gordon by Lord Granville (in his own handwriting) were that he was to report on the situation in the Sudan, to consider the best mode of evacuating the interior of the country, to pay special attention to the steps to be taken to counteract any stimulus to the slave trade that might be expected to result from the Egyptian withdrawal, to report through Lord Cromer to Her Majesty's Government, and 'to perform *such other duties* as might be entrusted to him' by the Egyptian Government through Lord Cromer.

Then, as if there were not already misunderstandings enough to add to the difficulties of Gordon's task, Lord Hartington, who had been deputed by Lord Granville to send an account of the meeting to Gladstone, introduced a further complication by omitting from his report all mention of any 'other duties'.

Gordon now cancelled his plans for the expedition to the Congo, and, after a hasty good-bye or two, dined with a brother-officer and paid one more farewell call, the last words of which, characteristically enough, were spoken as he was walking up and down his friend's nursery with a child in his arms. Then, on the evening of the very day of the War Office meeting, he arrived at Charing Cross Station with nothing more than a kit-bag and a bare sixty seconds to spare. Among those awaiting him on the platform was Colonel J. H. D. Stewart, who had been selected to accompany him and who had a few friends and relatives to see him off. Lord Wolseley carried Gordon's kit-bag to his compartment ; Lord Granville took his ticket ; the Duke of Cambridge opened the carriage door for him to enter ; Gordon and Stewart took their seats ; the train steamed out ; and Gordon, 'with every confidence and trust in God', began the long and fatal journey from which neither he nor Colonel Stewart was to return.

Cairo was reached on the night of the 24th, and on the following day Lord Cromer, acting on the authority given by Lord Granville, handed Gordon a document which set out the 'other duties' which the Egyptian Government desired to 'entrust to him'. These included the withdrawal of the garrisons and civilians from Khartoum and other beleaguered towns and the setting up of a form of government to administer the country after the evacuation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bernard M. Allen : *Gordon and the Sudan* (Macmillan, London, 1931), page 244, and Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, pages 444-6.

#### THE DEVIL'S BREW

Khartoum was by this time seething with a degree of excitement that approached panic. This was not surprising, for already in the previous November, Colonel Coetlogon (an officer of Hicks Pasha's army who had remained at Khartoum) had told Sir Evelyn Wood that Khartoum could not be held. 'In two months' time', he had then telegraphed, 'there will be no food. All supplies are cut off.' Nevertheless, when news reached Khartoum that Gordon was on his way to the Sudan the effect was electrifying. Memories of his heroic deeds in the past now filled once more the minds of the people, and Frank Power, *The Times* correspondent, who was acting British Consul at Khartoum, wrote to his mother : 'The fellows at Lucknow did not look more anxiously for Colin Campbell than we are looking for Gordon . . . He, though severe, was greatly loved during the five years he spent here.' And soon afterwards, on receiving further news by wire from Cairo, he again wrote : 'Gordon leaves Cairo to-night and will be in Khartoum in eighteen days. The shortest time on record is twenty-four days, but Gordon (sword and Bible) travels like a whirlwind.'

A bare forty-eight hours after their landing at Port Said, Gordon and Stewart were ready to leave Cairo for the Sudan, accompanied, for a part of the journey only, by General Sir Gerald Graham, an old comrade of Gordon's both in the Crimea and in China.

A small group of friends and officials gathered at the station to see them off, and as the train steamed out of the station Cromer's heart, as he himself has left on record, 'was heavy within him', knowing as he did that all Gordon's resources would be needed for the task he was setting out to accomplish.

At Assiout—railhead of the line to Upper Egypt at that time—the party left the train and continued the journey upstream in a small steamer, and Korosko—where Graham had to part company with Gordon—was reached six days later.

It is here that the Nile makes a sudden turn to the westward and then curves in an easterly direction, with the result that the river's course at this point forms an immense loop, and the journey to Khartoum can be shortened by leaving the steamer and striking across the desert, the Nile being reached again at Abu Hamad after a journey of two hundred and fifty miles across a desolate and waterless wilderness.

A more uninviting landing-place could hardly be found on the entire surface of the globe. The Nile is here closely hemmed in by

## KHARTOUM

rugged hills, destitute of vegetation, and a lonely track winding between these arid heights leads into the heart of Africa. Graham and Gordon here had their last talk together and the scene was indelibly engraved on Graham's mind. Gordon's strong, curly hair was beginning to be streaked with grey, and Graham noticed that time had traced its furrows across his forehead and round his mouth. Yet, for all his fifty-one years he could ride as fast and far as ever, and was still able on camel-back to outstrip any other rider. But the time for parting had come, and Gordon and Stewart, mounting their camels, said good-bye. A handsome young Arab, a son of the Sheikh of Berber, rode beside them 'on a beautiful white camel'. At the head of the caravan rode another son of the same Sheikh. Both these young Arabs were armed with great cross-hilted swords ; both bore rhinoceros-hide shields. Stewart carried a revolver. Gordon was unarmed. The place was wild and desolate to the very last degree. Graham climbed one of the highest of the arid volcanic hills and thence watched Gordon's caravan threading its way along the sand of the valley until it turned out of sight and was hidden by one of the hills. ' Sadly I returned to the steamer ', wrote Graham, ' and I felt a gloomy foreboding that I should never see Gordon again.'

On the 18th February Gordon's steamer was sighted by the ever-anxiously waiting inhabitants of Khartoum. The entire population turned out to welcome him. On landing he made his way to the Palace through a deliriously excited crowd that engulfed him and hailed him their ' Father ', the ' Saviour of the Sudan ', and their ' Sultan '. In the white-heat of fervour the men crowded round him, kissing his hand, while the women threw themselves upon the ground to kiss his feet.

That night the town broke into a blaze of illumination ; fireworks were let off ; and universal rejoicing continued till long past midnight.

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Khartoum is situated on the Blue Nile, a short distance upstream from the point where its waters unite with those of the White Nile to form the great river known to us as the Nile. It stands on the triangle of land separating the Blue Nile from the White Nile just above their actual confluence. The Blue Nile, flowing from east to west, protects the town on the north, and the White Nile, flowing from south to north, safeguards it on the west. The south side, in

Gordon's time, was defended by a fortified line extending in the form of a four-mile arc from river to river.

At this time the town presented a blend of faded grey, flat-roofed houses above which rose the minaret of the mosque. The narrow, revoltingly unclean main street, bordered mostly by mud-houses plastered with cow-dung, became an open sewer in the rainy season. Besides the mosque, the town contained the Austrian church, a Coptic school, a hospital, a prison, and some coffee-houses. Between the town and the White Nile stretched a sandy plain, devoid of tree or bush.

The Palace, facing the Blue Nile, was a long two-storeyed building, the upper rooms of which were reached by the never-to-be-forgotten *outside staircase*. The garden at the back was bordered by tall palm-trees and was connected by telegraph with the fortifications, which, however, were far too long to make defence possible by any force that Gordon might be able to assemble.

Gordon, however, had no intention of relying upon force, his orders being to 'withdraw garrisons and civilians without loss of life if possible'. It was for this reason that he told the population in his opening speech : 'I come without soldiers but with God on my side. I will not fight with any weapon but justice.'

The titanic task of withdrawing the eleven thousand civilian residents was begun instantaneously, and simultaneously Gordon directed his attention to the other duties he had been given, particularly to that of setting up a form of government to administer the country after the withdrawal. To insist, however, on the carrying out of this directive was to demand an impossibility by any device that would be approved by the people of Great Britain. For to withdraw the troops and government staff would leave a vacuum that could be filled only by the appointment of a Governor who possessed a degree of personal magnetism strong enough to withstand the utmost beguilements of Mahdiism, and no such man could be found in the whole of the Sudan whose appointment was likely to be tolerated by the people of England. There was one man, and one only, who, in Gordon's opinion, had the power to rally the tribes and rule the Province after he himself had gone back to England, and that was Zobeir, the ablest and most ruthless of all the slave-traders. He alone was both respected and feared throughout the whole of the Sudan ; and his capacity for government was far beyond that of any other man in the country.

Gordon, however, knew that it would be no easy matter to convince Liberal England that a slave-trader would be a desirable ruler of the Sudan.

Zobeir was at this time in Cairo 'under surveillance'; but before being detained in Cairo he had been the Sudan's most outstanding figure. He was no mere slave-trader. He was a born leader of men with an insatiable craving for power, and during the Khedivate of Ismail Pasha his influence had grown to such an extent that it had come to eclipse even that of the Khedive himself over a large part of the province. In order to exploit to the utmost the popular conception of his power, Zobeir had bombastically provided himself with an escort of chained lions, and had surrounded himself, according to the great German traveller, Schweinfurth, by a court that was 'little less than princely in its details'. So secure had he felt his position to be that he had refused to pay tribute to the Khedive, and had even attacked and annihilated the small Egyptian force sent to bring him to book. In an over-confident mood, however, he had 'trusted his head in the lion's mouth' by going to Cairo to lay a complaint before the Khedive in person, and on this occasion Ismail Pasha had taken no small pleasure in arranging that he should not return to trouble the Sudan.

Gordon, convinced that Zobeir was the only man capable of pacifying the tribes and making the way clear for the evacuation, now urged that, despite his indefensible past, Zobeir should be allowed to return to the Sudan and remain there to keep order after his own departure. 'To withdraw,' he said, 'without being able to place a successor in my seat would be the signal for general anarchy throughout the country, which, though all the Egyptian element was withdrawn, would be a misfortune and inhuman.' As to the objection that Zobeir had been a slave-trader, Gordon knew only too well that once the withdrawal of the Egyptian troops and governing classes had been completed there would be no way of suppressing the slave-trade whether Zobeir was in the Sudan or not unless the supply of negroes could be cut off at its source in the Congo region, and this Gordon hoped to do.

Cromer telegraphed Gordon's request to London and supported it, with the natural and inevitable result that humanitarians of all shades and complexions all over England, and foremost the members of the Anti-Slavery Society, were filled with a frenzy of indignation at the bare thought of a slave-trader being appointed to rule the Sudan.

Meanwhile the change wrought in Khartoum by Gordon's arrival was at once immediate and incredible. 'It is wonderful', wrote Power, 'that one man could have such influence on two hundred thousand people.' The charm of Gordon's personality had indeed made as deep an impression on Power as it had done on the indigenous population.

Within a week of Gordon's arrival in Khartoum, however, a series of fatal misunderstandings developed between him and the Home Government. The first of these arose out of his despatch of a small steamer up the Nile under the command of Colonel Stewart to distribute appeals for a policy of peace among wavering tribes. Not a shot was fired. But Gordon's unfortunately worded report on this 'armed demonstration' was construed by the Cabinet in London to mean that he had begun offensive operations against the Mahdi, and from that moment every proposal that Gordon made was similarly misunderstood and negated, while the situation in the Sudan became graver in consequence from hour to hour.

It was on the very day that Gordon sent his armed demonstration up the Nile that the Cabinet's reply to his proposal to appoint Zobeir was delivered to him. 'Public opinion', it said, 'would not tolerate the appointment'. Gordon's telegraphic reply bluntly informed them that without the strong native ruler for whom he asked there would be no alternative but to 'smash up the Mahdi' if the invasion of Egypt itself by the Mahdist host was to be prevented. But his choice of the words 'smash up the Mahdi' misled the Cabinet into thinking that he had committed himself, or was at least suggesting a war of aggression to end the Mahdi's pretensions, an impression that received apparent corroboration from the almost simultaneous arrival of a further telegram from him requesting permission to retain three thousand Sudanese troops temporarily to police certain Sudanese towns still held by the Egyptians. The Home Government at once assumed that these Sudanese troops were for 'smashing up' the Mahdi; and so the whirlpool of misunderstanding grew ever broader and deeper and more completely out of control. Dilke went so far as to declare that Gordon 'was completely throwing over the evacuation policy . . . We are evidently dealing', he continued, 'with a wild man under the influence of that climate of Central Africa which acts upon the sanest man like strong drink.'

Utterly unaware of the high feeling mounting against him at home, Gordon at Khartoum continued his unremitting efforts to complete

‘I SHALL BE CAUGHT IN KHARTOUM’

the withdrawal as stipulated ‘without loss of life’, and the refugees reaching Egypt spoke of him with the most extreme devotion and gratitude. It was however clear to Gordon that the success of his mission was bound up in the question of prestige, and great though his own influence was throughout the length and breadth of the Sudan, he was convinced that he now needed unmistakable evidence that he had the might of England behind him, and therefore, while continuing to press for the employment of Zobeir, he also asked for very small token forces of British or Indian troops to be sent to the key-points of Wadi Halfa and Berber.

But no troops came.

Lord Cromer, at Cairo, invariably gave him all the support that he could, though Gordon—separated from Cairo by an immense distance, much of it trackless and waterless desert—began to feel that he was receiving no support at all, and on the 1st March, he concluded a further request for the despatch of troops and for the appointment of Zobeir with a prophetic hint of oncoming tragedy. ‘I will do my best,’ he said, ‘to carry out my instructions, but I feel a conviction that I shall be caught in Khartoum.’

The fatal *dénouement* was rapidly approaching. The Gladstone Government was under fire from the humanitarians on its own benches as well as from the Opposition. On the 3rd March, Lord Randolph Churchill from the Conservative benches asked Gladstone ‘whether he would give a pledge to the House that General Gordon shall not be permitted to wage war on the Sudanese tribes at the head of two thousand Bashi-bazouks’, and a Liberal member moved the Adjournment ‘as a protest against the slaughter of Arabs . . .’

On the 11th March, Gordon, in his ramshackle, bare-walled, burlesque of a ‘Palace’ overlooking the Blue Nile, sat down to write two painfully significant and poignant messages. To his sister he wrote: ‘This may well be the last letter I send you, for the tribes have risen between this and Berber and will try to cut our route . . . What I have to do is to submit my will to His, however bitter may be the events which happen to me.’ To Lord Dufferin he wrote: ‘I expect every hour to hear the telegraph is cut. . . . We are always *just too late*.’

At the moment when these messages were being penned in far-off Khartoum, the destiny of the Sudan was being discussed at a Cabinet Meeting in London which Gladstone had been forbidden by his doctor to attend.

## THE DEVIL'S BREW

The Government were in no doubt about the strength and vehemence of public opinion, ill-informed though it was, about the appointment of Zobeir, and it was impossible for them to ignore the fact that it was on the ebb and flow of public opinion, however unbalanced and out of touch with the facts it might be, that their own term of office depended.

At the conclusion of the meeting Lord Granville was commissioned by the Cabinet to report their views to the Premier.

Eventually he returned to rejoin his colleagues.

'He thinks it very unlikely that *we* can make the House swallow Zobeir,' he told them, 'but he feels pretty sure that *he* could.'

The telegram which they then dispatched to Cromer told him that they did not consider the arguments against the employment of Zobeir to have been satisfactorily answered ; and that 'Her Majesty's Government are not prepared to send troops to Berber'.

These decisions, duly received by Cromer, never reached Khartoum. On the following day, four thousand Dervishes swept down the Nile and arrived at a point nine miles below Khartoum. Cutting the telegraph wires, they pitched camp on both sides of the River and thus effectually prevented all ascending boat traffic from reaching Khartoum. An 'iron curtain' had now fallen, shutting Gordon off from the rest of the world, a curtain never to be raised during his lifetime. From that day onward Gordon's only means of communication with civilization was by the use of small slips of paper on which were written closely penned messages that could be concealed in the robes of any friendly Arab prepared to risk his life by carrying them. A few such missives did reach their destinations, but some fell into the Mahdi's hands.

Within the next twenty-four hours Dervish forces, converging from all directions, took up positions on every side of the doomed city.

The siege of Khartoum had begun.

'A B A N D O N E D '

CROMER's anxiety was now acute. He was still in telegraphic communication with Gordon's agent at Berber, for although communications were cut between Berber and Khartoum, they were still intact between Berber and Cairo ; and as a result of the news he now received from Berber he told Whitehall that their most serious problem was no longer that of the evacuation but 'how to get Gordon and Stewart away from Khartoum'.

It was now that Queen Victoria, who, from the first had followed Gordon's mission with the deepest concern, decided that the time had come to end political dalliance. 'Gordon is in danger,' she telegraphed to Hartington. '*You are bound to try to save him. You have incurred a fearful responsibility.*'

The Cabinet met to consider Cromer's dispatch. This made it perfectly plain that a small force *ought* to be sent to the Sudan if it was 'at all a possible military operation', and Gladstone, who was once again absent, sent them a message to the effect that if an expedition were confined to the one object of securing Gordon's safety he would not absolutely refuse to sanction it. But the Cabinet, not daring to face military risks which they foresaw, instructed Cromer to inform Gordon that his requests must be refused.

Cromer, doing everything humanly possible to stem the tide of fate, now sent Granville the telegram into which there first crept that word of sinister augury—'abandoned'. Beginning by saying that he very much doubted whether it would now be possible to communicate the Government's message to Gordon, he continued : 'In any case I cannot reconcile myself to making the attempt to forward such a message without again addressing your Lordship. Let me urgently beg Her Majesty's Government to place themselves in the position of Gordon and Stewart. They have been sent on a most difficult and dangerous mission by the English Government . . . If they receive the instructions contained in your Lordship's telegram of the 25th they cannot but understand them as meaning that they and all with them are abandoned . . . But, having sent Gordon

to Khartoum, it appears to me that it is our bounden duty, both as a matter of humanity and policy, not to abandon him.'

The Queen, whose indignation at the policy of her Government went beyond all words, immediately got into touch with Gladstone. On this occasion she herself employed the unpleasing word. 'If only,' she said, 'for humanity's sake, for the honour of the Government and the nation, he must *not* be abandoned !'

A few days later a message from Power appeared in *The Times* in which the word 'abandoned' also appeared. It ran : 'We are daily expecting British troops. We cannot bring ourselves to believe that we are abandoned by the Government.'

It was now that Gladstone, having recovered from his indisposition, resumed his place in the House of Commons and a tumultuous ovation greeted his entry into the House. But in the evening a member, in moving the Adjournment, presumed to remind him that the word 'abandoned' had been used by Mr. Power in his report to *The Times*. Gladstone—master of parliamentary tactics that he was—saw only an opportunity to flay the Opposition and he used it. Taunting the Right Honourable gentleman for having accepted the opinion of Mr. Power 'as virtually equivalent to an official declaration of policy', he sternly reminded the House that the recent debates on the subject of Gordon were 'out of all proportion to the pressure and urgency of the question' and had 'the effect of offering immense obstruction to important public business'.

His oratory, as usual, swayed the House and delighted his colleagues. 'He had been ill,' said Sir William Harcourt, 'and they thought they could play tricks with the sick lion but they were mistaken. He just put out his paw and there was an end to them. It was a wonderful scene. I have never seen the like of it in my political life.'<sup>1</sup>

Very different from the 'wonderful scene' enacted in the security of the House of Commons were the scenes in Khartoum and in the Mahdist camps in the heart of the Sudan where Europeans whose fate depended on men such as Gladstone and Harcourt were held in captivity. Among these were missionaries—priests and nuns—and Rudolf Slatin, the gallant Austrian officer appointed six years before by Gordon (when Governor-General) to serve in the Sudan and who had been forced to surrender at El Obeid after the annihilation of Hicks Pasha's army. In the Mahdi's vast main camp two hundred

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, April 17, 1884. Quoted by Dr. Bernard Allen in *Gordon and the Sudan* (Macmillan, London, 1931), pages 327-8.

thousand fanatics—men and women—and their children, were living, as were the European prisoners, in tiny, roughly-constructed maize-stalk huts. Every Emir's camping-place was known by two flags planted near the entrance and beside them lay the war drums which were beaten day and night almost without intermission. There was no attempt at cleanliness ; dead donkeys lay about unburied ; behind each hut was an immense pile of filth and the whole of this huge assembly of people lived in the midst of an ever-increasing heap of rotting impurities. The stench was sickening ; the din intolerable. The European captives, continuously insulted, frequently threatened with spears, clubs, and sticks, existed in agonizing uncertainty of their fate. ‘The enormous camp’, wrote one of them, Father Ohrwalder, ‘presented a wonderful spectacle, more especially at night, when almost everyone had his own cooking fire, and the whole plain resembled a sea of fires which were lost in the distant horizon.’

In Khartoum, Gordon scanned the horizon continually from the flat roof of the Palace in the direction of Berber in the hope that some news of the expected British token force would arrive. Instead there came one day an Arab who had succeeded at the risk of his life in evading the Mahdi's investing troops and who brought a letter written by Cromer, not to Gordon himself but to his agent at Berber. This message ran : ‘It is not intended to send a British force to Berber.’

From that moment all Gordon's immense energies were thrown into the task of preparing to meet the assault which he now knew to be inevitable. He at once proceeded to armour-plate some little steamers which he jestingly called his ‘penny steamers’. ‘Small though they were,’ says Watson Pasha, ‘and quite unfitted for military service, Gordon, with his usual power of utilizing unpromising materials, turned them into regular war-vessels,’<sup>1</sup> to such good purpose that each of them acquired a defence-value equivalent to two thousand soldiers. At the same time he showed the full advantage of his Royal Engineer training in the manufacture of an immense number of land-mines that could be fired by fuses either singly or in groups. These produced terrific explosions whenever a Dervish attempted to approach the ramparts, and the result was that the enemy soon became reluctant to go anywhere near the town defences.

Gordon's duties were however by no means confined to his work as Commander-in-Chief. He had to be Governor, Judge, Admiral,

<sup>1</sup> *Royal Engineers Journal*, October 1, 1888.

and Chief Engineer. And he had also to be Banker, Economist, and Commissariat Officer. There was nothing too small to be referred to him, and from him every imaginable order originated. On horseback or on foot he paid continual visits of inspection to every part of the fortifications ; he superintended the laying of the mines and entanglements in person ; he critically watched the progress of all repairs. And yet, somehow, he contrived to 'have quiet times in spite of all work', waiting for Divine guidance. 'One day of his work and bother', wrote Power who lived in the Palace and was therefore writing from personal experience, 'would kill any other man ; yet he is so cheerful at breakfast, lunch, and dinner . . . It is only his great piety that carries him through.'

In London, Gladstone, in his voluminous perorations, continued to maintain that 'there was no military or other danger threatening Khartoum', but there was nevertheless increasing evidence of rapidly growing anxiety throughout the country. On Gladstone's appearance at the opening of an Exhibition in London he was hissed ; at a meeting convened to protest against the 'abandonment' of Gordon, the old St. James's Hall in Piccadilly was packed to suffocation ; a clergyman attracted widespread attention by asking that prayers for 'General Gordon in imminent peril in Khartoum' should be said in all the churches. And on the 12th May the Opposition moved a Vote of Censure. As before, Gladstone used all the arts of his unrivalled oratory to smother the Opposition. 'Would *you* be prepared here and now to send an army to Khartoum ?' he asked. 'Look dumb !' he taunted them. 'What would the sending of an army really mean ? It would mean a war of conquest against a people struggling to be free. Yes,' he repeated in his fiercest tones, glaring at the Opposition benches, '*and rightly struggling to be free !*'

Two weeks later, Berber, the key-town in any scheme of evacuation, fell to the Mahdi, and its garrison as well as five thousand of its inhabitants were deliberately butchered.

But the siege of Khartoum continued and Gordon's little Egyptian-manned 'penny steamers' still brought the supplies that alone enabled the garrison to hold out, but they now had to plough their way upstream and down through an unceasing and ever-increasing hail of bullets.

In England the nation's anxiety continued to grow and at last the crisis came. Then Gladstone could no longer conceal from himself the fact that the Government was tottering, and—though still con-

vinced that he was not doing the right thing—he yielded, and asked Parliament to sanction preparations for a relief expedition.

A sum of money was voted. And the command of the expedition was given to Lord Wolseley.

A few days after Parliament had voted the funds for the Relief Expedition, the Mahdi ordered his followers to make a general advance. His headquarters were then about two hundred and fifty miles from Khartoum. Father Ohrwalder described the scene : 'The whole population, like a swarm of bees, accompanied the Mahdi on the same road that Hicks had taken, through pathless districts at a time when the rainfall was heaviest. But in spite of all obstacles, fanaticism was more pronounced than ever. There were upwards of 200,000 people, and at Shirkelel the cavalry numbered 4,000.'<sup>1</sup> Among this great throng was Slatin, hoping against hope that some chance might come to escape and re-join Gordon. 'Every Emir', he wrote, in his account of the advance, 'was enjoined to collect his men and order them to prepare for the march . . . There was no hanging back on the part of the people, whose fanaticism knew no bounds and who were well aware that treasure and plunder generally fell to the share of the faithful followers. The consequence was that the Mahdi's summons brought about a wholesale immigration of the entire population such as had never before been seen in the Sudan.'<sup>2</sup>

After a march of three or four weeks the Mahdi's host reached the cultivated region bordering the Nile, and, leaving the desert behind them, advanced towards the river. Here the Mahdi called a halt, and, pointing to the Nile, declared to his followers : 'God has created this. He will give you its waters to drink, and *you shall become the possessors of all the lands along its banks.*'

'This speech', wrote Slatin, 'was greeted with shouts of joy by these wild fanatics.'

After a halt of two days the ever-growing hordes moved on, 'creeping forward', says Slatin, 'like a great tortoise, so swelled were we by the thousands upon thousands who were now joining daily from every part of the Sudan'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sir Reginald Wingate : *Ten Years' Captivity in the Mahdi's Camp*, from the original manuscripts of Father Joseph Ohrwalder (Sampson Low, London, 1893), page, 142.

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Slatin : *Fire and Sword in the Sudan* (Arnold, London, 1896), page 305.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., page 317.

‘ABANDONED’

From time to time the Mahdi would order a halt and, surrounded by huge, excited throngs, would deliver inflammatory harangues which raised the hysterical excitement of his followers to frenzy.

The peril of Khartoum now reached fresh heights, and the long, unrelieved tension began to show its effect on Gordon. His greying hair grew white. He began to look old. Only his undaunted spirit ‘drove his tired body forward and inspired his motley force with some of his own courage’.<sup>1</sup> Early in September he decided to send Stewart to Cairo to make known the fate that threatened Khartoum, entrusting to him his cipher-keys and other official papers. Power and the French Consul accompanied him in a small paddle-wheeler the *Abbas*, and Berber was passed in safety, but although Gordon had foreseen every contingency, Stewart assumed too soon that all dangers were passed, and when the steamer struck a rock in mid-stream the sailing-boats which Gordon had provided for just such an emergency had already been sent back. Stewart and his companions went ashore and were set upon and murdered, while Gordon’s cipher-keys and papers were discovered and sent to the Mahdi.

With every passing day it became more difficult to hold Khartoum. Gordon’s little steamers, pitted and pock-marked with bullet holes from stem to stern, still continued, under the handling of their gallant Egyptian crews, to bring in supplies, but Dervish batteries were now established on both banks of the Nile and the day was obviously approaching when this would no longer be possible.

\* \* \*

Wolseley reached Egypt in September, and the British troops already in Egypt were reinforced so that, in all, Wolseley had fourteen thousand men under his command, seven thousand of whom were intended to form the eventual ‘Gordon Relief Expedition’.

<sup>1</sup> *The Royal Engineers in Egypt and the Sudan*, page 140.

## THE RACE AGAINST TIME

AT Khartoum, three Arabs reached the Palace on the 20th September bringing letters from the outside world. One of these—addressed to Stewart—was from Kitchener (then Major Kitchener) and had been written from Dongola, which lay a long way to the north of Khartoum. Kitchener had been sent to this place to open up communications and secure the allegiance of the neighbouring tribes. His letter read : ‘Can I do anything for you and General Gordon ? I should be awfully glad if you would let me know. The relief expedition is evidently coming up this way, but whether they will go by Berber or attempt the direct route I do not know.’

The Relief Force was evidently coming up this way ! So help could indeed be expected at last !

More messages came from Kitchener and these put fresh heart into the stubborn defenders of the town. ‘A few words about what you wish to be done would be very acceptable,’ he wrote. And as a signal that something unusual had transpired, a salute of 101 guns was fired from the ramparts ; notices embellished with pictures of British and Sudanese soldiers were hastily prepared and exhibited ; the thrice-welcome news that British troops were at last on their way spread with lightning speed from one end of the town to the other ; and the following day was one of public rejoicing.

The race against time had begun, and Gordon, hard-beset though he was, took every possible chance to facilitate the advance of the Relief Force. He expected it to leave the Nile after reaching Korti—as, in fact, it did—and then, to avoid one of the River’s most troublesome detours, to cross the desert and rejoin the Nile at Metemmeh, which is about half-way between Berber and Khartoum. Three of his steamers were therefore armed with two guns and prepared to carry a small force of infantry to Metemmeh, while the commander of this small flotilla, Nushi Pasha, an outstandingly gallant and capable Egyptian officer, was instructed to place himself at the disposal of any British authority he might encounter.

In the main Dervish camp Slatin watched the Mahdi's enveloping horde growing daily and hourly to more and more formidable dimensions until it reminded him of a giant devil-fish thrusting out its tentacles in all directions and drawing ever nearer to Khartoum.

A day's march from the beleaguered town a halt was called. It was evening, and while the camp was being pitched Slatin—who was now endeavouring to pretend for obvious reasons that he had been converted to Islam—was summoned to the Mahdi's presence. The Mahdi, a tall, broad-shouldered handsome man, was of light brown colour, powerfully built, with a large head and sparkling black eyes. He wore a short quilted *jibba*, perfumed with sandalwood and attar of roses—a perfume that was very celebrated amongst his disciples and supposed to equal, if not to surpass, that of the dwellers in Paradise.

Slatin found the Mahdi sitting with three other Dervishes.

'I have sent for you,' he said, 'to order you to write to Gordon and advise him how to escape the certainty of defeat. Tell him that *I am the true Mahdi*; and that he must surrender the garrison to save his soul. Say that you yourself have joined his enemies; that the certainty of victory is ours; and that you tell him this *to avoid useless bloodshed*.'

Slatin remained silent, wrapped in thought. Both he and the other Christian prisoners were convinced that the Mahdi was prepared to do almost anything to avoid an assault on Gordon and his defenders.

'Answer!' shouted one of the Dervishes.

'O Mahdi,' answered Slatin after prolonged reflection, 'if I write to Gordon that you are the true Mahdi he will not believe me. If I threaten to fight him with my own hands, he will not be afraid of that. I shall say that he is not strong enough to fight against you who are ever victorious, and, as he has no hope of help from anyone, I will be the intermediary between him and you.'

'I agree,' said the Mahdi. 'Write!'

So Slatin returned to what he called his 'quarters'. He had no tent; that had been torn to ribbons by a myriad mishaps on the long desert march. A few strips of hair-cloth stretched across sticks were his sole defence against the blaze of the torrid Sudanese noon, though now, beneath the cooler, star-lit sky, there was no necessity for shelter. Sitting cross-legged upon the roughest of rough divans under the open cope of heaven, clad in the patched *jibba*—indicative of poverty—which was the Mahdist uniform, he was indistinguishable from the thousands of Dervishes surrounding him. In such plight, in the deep-

ening gloom, by the glimmer of a battered Arab lantern, Slatin composed two letters to Gordon. One was in French, but a second, longer one, was in his own German tongue. In these he stated the reasons that had forced him, under such terrible duress, to accept for the time being the Moslem faith. But he declared that in spite of this he desired nothing in the world so ardently as to serve Gordon in the defence of Khartoum. 'I am ready', were his words, 'with you or under you for either victory or death.' At the same time he wrote to Hansal, the heroic Austrian Consul who had refused to seek safety in flight, imploring him to do everything in his power to assist him to return to Khartoum.

Early next morning Slatin took these letters to the Mahdi, who ordered him to despatch them to Khartoum at once. In the Mahdi's presence he handed them to a boy who mounted an ass and rode off with them. They reached their destination on the evening of the same day, but Gordon was not of a nature to brook apostasy in any form or degree and the boy returned next morning empty handed. He had reached the Fort of Omdurman, he said, and the letters had been sent to Gordon in Khartoum, but, after waiting at Omdurman for a short time, the Commandant had told him to return because there was no answer.

During the boy's absence, a body of Arabs from Berber had brought all the documents and correspondence salvaged from the *Abbas*, so that the Mahdi now had Gordon's own report of the daily occurrences in the city, as well as his telegrams and cipher-key. Thus he now had full particulars of the city's food stocks, the number of its guns, and the amount of its ammunition.

Slatin now received another command to appear before the Mahdi. This time he was ordered to write a letter giving the facts about the *Abbas*, a disaster which, the Mahdi triumphantly declared, would compel Gordon to surrender. Slatin returned to his 'quarters'. Seated on his *angarrib*, or couch-divan, he wrote under the flickering light of the battered old lantern: 'I have fought twenty-seven battles for the Government against the Rebels and have only been beaten twice. I have therefore done nothing dishonourable—nothing which should hinder you from sending a reply so that I may know what to do.' He then gave Gordon the news which the Mahdi hoped would induce him to surrender. And in a pathetically hopeful postscript he added: 'If you can understand that I have done nothing contrary to the honour of an officer, or that should hinder you from

replying, I beg you to give me a chance to defend myself so that you may yet judge me in accordance with the truth.'

Soon after this letter was written a message came from Hansal, asking Slatin to meet him at the fort of Omdurman. Slatin took the letter to the Mahdi.

'Do you wish to meet this man?' inquired the Mahdi.

'I am ready to comply with your orders,' replied Slatin. 'My services are invariably at your disposal.'

'Then prepare yourself,' said the Mahdi. 'I will let you know later what I have decided.'

It was black night when Slatin crept back to his 'quarters' and lay down to wait in a mood of mingled hope and anxiety for the Mahdi's decision. After an interminable interval a messenger summoned him to the presence of the Khalifa, the Mahdi's second-in-command—the man on whom the mantle of the Mahdi eventually fell. Binding his turban hastily round his head, Slatin rose, and, putting on his belt, was escorted to a stockade enclosing an infinite number of small shelters, each covered by a separate awning and surrounded by a low fence of maize-sticks. Slatin was led to one of these shelters where several Emirs, seated cross-legged in a circle, were engaged in earnest debate. Behind them stood armed Arabs. But there was no sign of the Khalifa who was alleged to have sent for him and Slatin felt instinctively that some mischief was impending.

At length one of the Emirs turned towards him.

'I have received orders to make you a prisoner,' he said. 'I do not know why.' He then pointed to one of the darkest shelters and added: 'Go to that tent!'

On reaching the place indicated Slatin was commanded to sit upon the ground. Chains were brought out. Two large iron rings connected by a thick iron bar were slipped over his feet and riveted with hammer-strokes. An iron ring was placed round his neck. To this was attached a length of iron chain, the links so contrived that he could only raise his head with the utmost difficulty.

He was now ordered to lie down upon a palm-mat and left under the guard of two soldiers.

An hour later, men carrying lanterns approached his tent and Slatin saw that the Khalifa himself formed the centre of the group.

By an effort of the utmost difficulty Slatin raised himself to his feet. 'Do you resign yourself to your fate?' asked the Khalifa.

'I can but obey your orders,' replied Slatin.

#### THE MAHDI'S TERMS

'Your correspondence with Gordon has filled us with suspicion,' said the Khalifa.

'It was the Mahdi himself who ordered me to write,' said Slatin.

'But did you write only what he commanded?' inquired the Khalifa.

He turned on his heel and walked away with his companions.

The last glimmer of the lanterns was swallowed up in darkness and Slatin was left alone with his thoughts. There was no sleep for him that night.

Dawn brought daylight but no relief from his ordeal. The sun rose high in the superheated heavens, and Slatin, weighed down by the intolerable burden of his chains, excoriated from head to foot by the infinite torment of flies, sat in stoical silence surrounded by looks of implacable hostility, and began to finger his beads and move his lips in the orthodox Moslem manner. But it was no Moslem formula that he uttered. It was the Lord's Prayer of the Christian, which he repeated again and again. He had received little religious instruction in his youth, but having seen others undergo what he himself might now be compelled to suffer, he felt the need for spiritual support as he had never felt it before.

It may appear incredible but it is an indisputable fact that the Mahdi was still deterred by Gordon's amazing and still unabated prestige from ordering a general assault on Khartoum, and hence in the hope that it might yet be averted, he made one more appeal to Gordon. This letter, which Gordon received on the 22nd October, began as follows : 'In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praise be to Allah, the Bountiful Ruler. Blessing to our lord Mohammed, with Peace. This from the servant who trusts in Allah to Gordon Pasha of Khartoum : May Allah guide him into the path of virtue. Amen.' Here followed the minutest details of all that had been found in the wrecked *Abbas*.

'Notwithstanding this,' the letter ended, 'if you will return to Allah, the Most High ; if you will accept the Faith ; if you will surrender to His order and to that of his Prophet ; if you will accept Us as the Mahdi, you must send us a message to that effect both in your own name and of all who are still with you. Lay down your arms and give up all thought of resistance. In that case I will send you a Safe Conduct . . . If you do not do so . . . remember that Allah the Most High is powerful and can destroy you as he has destroyed others.'

The gist of Gordon's reply was, 'I am here like iron.'

He nevertheless knew that the sand in the hour-glass was escaping grain by grain. Day after day—and many times each day—did Gordon ascend to the roof-top of the Palace and scan the northward horizon in the hope of seeing one sign of the help that never arrived. Yet, as Father Ohrwalder wrote after being rescued : 'If the English had appeared at any time before the Mahdi delivered his attack, he would have raised the siege and retired.' And Slatin has said that 'if but one steamer with a few English officers had reached the town' this is all that would have been necessary.

Gordon's efforts to keep up the spirits of the population now excelled all that could be expected of human endeavour. Deprived of the companionship of Stewart and Power, he turned to the writing of his Journal for relaxation. Night after night, notwithstanding days of toil such as few men have ever exceeded, he sat down to compose pages of vivid description of the tragic period through which he and all the inhabitants of Khartoum were passing, interspersed with his own shrewd observations of men, and humorous, satirical touches. Now and again, though rarely, he made short, pointed references to the Home Government. 'The Mussulman year 1302 begins on the anniversary of Trafalgar,' he wrote on the 10th October. 'England expects (does not even say "thank you") you will do your duty.' Three days later he made this prophetic entry : 'We are a wonderful people. It was never our Government which made us a great nation ; our Government has ever been the drag on our wheels. It is, of course, on the cards that Khartoum is taken under the nose of the Expeditionary Force, which will be just too late ! The Expeditionary Force will perhaps think it necessary to retake it . . .' but 'England was made by adventurers, not by its Government, and I believe it will only hold its place by adventurers.'

Three weeks after these words were written a steamer was sighted approaching Khartoum from the direction of Metemmeh and Gordon took it for granted that it must be bringing news of the long-awaited help from Home. The steamer proved to be the little *Bordein*. She was one of the flotilla under Nushi Pasha's command at Metemmeh and she did indeed bring news of the Relief Expedition, but it was to the effect that it was still separated from Khartoum by a distance of some hundreds of miles. Its passage was impeded by cataracts and rapids ; at some places the great river was one long, thundering, and apparently interminable torrent, at others a placid surface concealed

an ‘undertow’ that ran with mill-stream velocity. Small wonder that the boats conveying the Expedition—even though specially designed—were battered out of recognition and a substantial number reduced to splinters.

The *Bordein* did however bring news from the outer world. The envelope of one of the letters—from Sir Samuel Baker—was decorated by an official endorsement: ‘*Communications avec le Sudan interrompées*’, on which Gordon dryly remarked in his Journal: ‘I should think communications were “*interrompées*” !’ There was even a telegram from Wolseley, but it had to remain unread because Gordon’s cipher-key had been captured. There were letters, too, from Kitchener, H. M. Stanley, and Gordon’s sister.

Gordon sent the *Bordein* back to Metemmeh with a letter to Wolseley telling him that Khartoum was completely invested on the west, south, and east sides; and advising him to approach the city from the north and to cross the desert to Metemmeh where steamers were awaiting his arrival.

This letter contained, in addition to the advice mentioned, a grave warning: ‘We can hold out for forty days with ease; *after that it will be difficult.*’

Meanwhile, in the early hours of the day that had followed the Mahdi’s receipt of Gordon’s scornful rejection of his demand to surrender, the great war drums in his camp began to throb for the last general advance of his main army on Khartoum. In a moment the Arab host was aflame to its uttermost limits with a fury of fanatical excitement. As by a single impulse tents were struck, baggage was packed and loaded on camel-back, and the order to march given. The final assault on the infidel stronghold had begun. Slatin, prevented from walking by the weight of his irons, was hoisted on to the back of a sturdy Sudanese donkey. The massive iron neck-chain, eighty-three links in length, was wound round and round his body from end to its bittermost end like some huge boa-constrictor. He was only prevented from falling by two men walking on each side who held him up. If any former acquaintance ever happened to pass him the atmosphere of terrorism made speech impossible.

In the afternoon a general halt was ordered. From this spot Slatin saw once again the familiar palm-trees of the Palace garden at Khartoum, and his one and only thought now was how to escape from the rebel camp in order to join in the city’s resistance.

The advance recommenced next morning, and a great military

encampment for the Mahdi's main army was installed outside Omdurman, which was at this time a native village on the left bank of the White Nile. An old and tattered tent was allotted to Slatin, and closely encircling the tent-ropes was a fence of thorns.

Gordon's Egyptian troops still held the Fort of Omdurman. This was vital because its fall might well mean the end of Khartoum. On the arrival of the Mahdi's main army the fort was at once brought under the hottest siege-fire from every quarter, and on the 12th November an assault of the utmost fury was launched against it. Gordon now had only two steamers left to assist him in the defence of Khartoum—all the others had been sent off to meet the Relief Force at Metemmeh—but these two now made Egyptian history. To back up the fire of the Khartoum forts they went into action at once, and round after round of shot and shell from these little vessels greeted each successive wave of Dervishes as they thronged up to the Omdurman fort. One of the steamers ran aground, but the other, the little *Ismailia*, continued to give indomitable support, steaming up and down the river through the shell-splashed waters though repeatedly staggering from the effect of direct hits. Before night-fall she had five shell-holes and no less than two thousand bullet-marks in her sides.

At the end of this day's epic encounters Gordon made this entry in his Journal : 'No Royal Navy vessels could have behaved better than the *Ismailia* to-day ; she passed and re-passed the Arab guns upwards of twenty times when any one well-placed shell would have sunk her.'

Despite all this bravery on the part of Gordon's Egyptian crews, however, the Mahdi's troops succeeded in piercing the fortified lines connecting the fort with the River. This meant that, in future, no supplies or ammunition would be able to reach the fort from Khartoum, and the garrison's days were therefore numbered.

About a fortnight later—on the 25th November—a wisp of smoke like a man's hand was seen rising from the River far away to the northward. Surely this must be Nushi Pasha's flotilla returning at last with the long, awaited Relief from Home ! Gordon, basing his opinion on the information received from Kitchener that British troops had reached Dongola on the 1st November, and knowing that a small lightly equipped force—all that was needed—could cross the desert from Debba to Khartoum in six days, had fully expected the Relief Force to arrive by about the 10th November. Ascending to the rooftop as he had so often done before, he now watched the drifting smoke

draw nearer. The Dervish guns boomed louder and louder, but when through wreaths of cannon-smoke a small vessel came gradually into view it was seen to be alone—a single small steamer battling its way through the inevitable storm of bullets.

The *Ismailia*, her own repairs barely completed, put out at once to draw as much as possible of the rebel fire, and these two small Egyptian-manned vessels were soon seen heroically running the gauntlet of the murderous fusilade. At last they both fetched up at the quay outside the Palace. 'If any officer of the Expedition is on board,' was Gordon's laconic comment in his Journal while watching the fight, 'he will know what it is to be in a "penny boat" under cannon fire!'

The new arrival was the *Bordein*. But no officer of the Relief Expedition was on board. She brought a letter from Nushi Pasha reporting news brought by an Arab messenger that the British troops had not yet passed Ambukol, which was approximately two hundred miles away. She also brought a message from the British Government which, if Gordon had had his cipher-key, would have told him of the 'interest taken by Her Majesty's Government in his safety'! Other correspondence included letters from Kitchener, from Sir Samuel Baker, and from Gordon's old and valued friend, Sir Charles Watson. Gordon's Journal reads: 'The relieving force is at Ambukol, which is LIVELY!'

The end was now hourly approaching. Women came to Gordon crying for food for their starving children. On the 10th December his Journal admits: 'Truly I am worn to a shadow with the food question; it is one continual demand.' On the 13th a still more ominous entry reads: 'If some effort is not made before *ten days' time* the town may fall. It is inexplicable, this delay.' But Sunday, the 14th December, 1884, dawned, still without any indication of relief, and Gordon made his last valedictory entry: It reads: 'NOW MARK THIS. If the Expeditionary Force—and I ask for no more than 200 men—does not come in ten days, the town may fall; and I have done my best for the honour of my country. Good-bye. C. G. Gordon.'

The following day the last volume of Gordon's Journal was entrusted to the officer in command of the *Bordein*, and this little vessel that had performed so many valiant deeds then steamed away from Khartoum on yet one more daring and desperate voyage to Metemmeh.

'IT WILL BE JUST TOO LATE'—  
GORDON

**T**HE day on which the *Bordein* left Khartoum for Metemmeh with the last poignant entries in Gordon's Journal marked the close of the period of forty days up to which Gordon had told Wolseley that he could 'hold out with ease'. It was also the day on which Sir Herbert Stewart with a small advance guard reached Korti, the point where the Relief Force was to assemble. Lord Wolseley arrived at Korti the following day, and, by Christmas, the greater part of the Relief Force was concentrated there.

On the 30th December an Arab brought Wolseley a verbal message from Gordon. It was : 'We are besieged on three sides . . . We want you to come quickly. You should come by Metemmeh or Berber. Make by these two roads. Do not leave Berber in your rear ; keep enemy in front, and when you have taken Berber, send me word.'

To act on Gordon's advice, Wolseley at once made plans to send one column round the wide bend of the River to take Berber, and another, across the desert, avoiding the bend, to reach the Nile again at Metemmeh, a hundred and forty miles from Korti as the crow flies. The route to be followed by this second column was by way of some water-filled hollows lying in a crater-like depression of the desert about half-way between Korti and Metemmeh, and known as the Gakdul Wells. It was decided to establish a depot for ammunition, provisions, and stores at these wells.

At three o'clock on the afternoon of the day on which Gordon's message arrived, Sir Herbert Stewart with a thousand officers and men mounted on camels, with other camels carrying baggage and stores struck across the undulating plain towards Gakdul. The length of the column extended for about a mile, and at its head rode Major Kitchener.

On the 2nd January this column reached Gakdul, which was described by Sir Charles Wilson as 'a regular frying-pan' where 'the rocks get heated up and there is no breeze', and where 'at 2 a.m., a hurricane comes down from the hills and nearly pulls the blanket off

#### BATTLE OF ABOUKLEA

one'.<sup>1</sup> Owing to the small number of camels available, the column was now obliged to return to Korti to collect the remainder of the stores, leaving a few men behind to guard the walls and establish the depot.

At length Stewart was ready to resume the march to Metemmeh, and Kitchener, to his extreme chagrin, was instructed to return to Korti. When Stewart reached the Wells of Abou Klea it became evident that the enemy in the neighbourhood were in unexpected force. The British column bivouacked at nightfall and skirmishing began the following morning.

The British force, advancing slowly in square formation, had its front and flanks protected by skirmishers. The hills on either side swarmed with enemy spearmen and snipers, and suddenly out of the closest cover, there rose into sight an immense new body of Arabs whose shouts were likened by an eye-witness to the roar of a stormy sea. Led by their Emirs with all their banners flying, this new force charged the British. The skirmishers hastened to regain the shelter of the square, but, hasten as they would, their doing so caused a lull in the British fire and at that identical moment the square was broken. Every Dervish that broke into it, however, fell dead and, by one supreme act of valour, the square was re-formed, and soon afterwards the rebels, despite their utmost disregard of life and their numerical superiority sullenly withdrew, leaving behind them on the field of battle a number of dead all but equalling the total force under Stewart's command.

At Omdurman, Slatin in his battered old tent in the Mahdi's camp was living in a permanent state of tension between the extremities of hope and despair. News had reached him that a British force was advancing up the Nile, but reports of its progress gave little hope of its reaching Khartoum in time to rescue the garrison. At last, however, came the amazing news that a British force of less than two thousand men had met a rebel army of eleven thousand at Abou Klea and had inflicted upon them an all but incredibly great defeat. The Mahdi and his principal Emirs at once met in earnest and anxious consultation and the Mahdi at first decided to retreat into the innermost recesses of the Province of Kordofan. If one Englishman could hold Khartoum against overwhelming odds for a whole year, what would happen upon the arrival of a British army? But in the end the Mahdi was dissuaded.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Charles Wilson : *From Korti to Khartoum*, pages 12 and 13.

'IT WILL BE JUST TOO LATE'—GORDON

In Khartoum itself the situation, already all but hopeless when the *Bordein* left for Metemmeh, had since grown increasingly desperate with every hour that passed. Troops and population had been reduced to a diet of the flesh of donkeys, dogs and cats, and even to palm-tree pith. So great was the universal distress that Gordon had issued a proclamation permitting all civilians who wished to do so to leave the city. Many left. But fourteen thousand people remained who had to be fed out of the last, rapidly diminishing famine rations. Many of the population died of actual starvation. Corpses rotted in the streets because no one had the strength to bury them. Dysentery and enteric followed promptly in the wake of famine, and many of the troops became too weak to man the fortifications. This was but part of the price that was being paid for the irresponsible dallying of the Home Government. Yet not a day passed without Gordon keeping up his round of the hospitals, or visiting distressed people in their homes. 'None of us can realize', wrote Father Ohrwalder afterwards, 'how heavily his responsibilities weighed upon him', and 'even to this day all who knew him never cease speaking of his kindness'.

But now the defence of Khartoum was rendered even more impracticable by the rapid subsidence of the Nile inundation, and as the waters receded a sandbank appeared in the White Nile about three hundred yards from its eastern shore, opposite the end of the fortifications; only a narrow strip of shallow water separated this sandbank from the land and it was now seen that a portion of the parapet at this point had been swept away by the flood-waters of the Nile. Here lay a way to Khartoum unprotected by mines, entrenchments, or entanglements.

On the morning of the 26th January, 1885, Gordon noticed unusual activity in the enemy camp and knew that the supreme moment had arrived. From time to time he ascended to the roof-top and scanned the horizon to the northward. But no steamer was visible. The day passed and sunset followed. Then night set in. For a time the moon, which had just passed its first quarter, shed a soft lustre on the tents of the illimitable Mahdist camps. Then the moon sank and the Egyptian Darkness began. And now the Dervishes, creeping imperceptibly out of their tents like a new Egyptian plague of reptiles began to glide in a silence as of the dead towards Khartoum. At this moment a general bombardment broke from the Mahdi's guns and under cover of this the rebels flung their immense weight against

the fortifications, some attacking the eastern extremity of the lines near the Blue Nile, others making for the partially destroyed defences near the White Nile. The enfeebled defenders who tried to cover this gap were quickly overpowered and the Mahdi's army then swarmed through the place where entry had been forced, swept along the inside of the rampart, and attacked the defenders from the rear.

Gordon was on the Palace roof-top with the small guard of native African troops who were quartered with him, and when he found that the rebels had entered the works, he ordered his men to pour as hot a fire as they could in the direction of the onrushing myriads.

The companies on guard at two of the gates of the ramparts, half-starved though they were, fought with magnificent determination, and when it was seen that their foes were inside the lines, they were led by their gallant officers, Mohammed Ibrahim Bey and Bakhit Betraki Bey, into the plain between the fortifications and the town. Here they resisted the onslaught with outstanding heroism until they were overwhelmed by the crushing weight of the rebel numbers.

We must continue in the words of Father Ohrwalder : 'Like a pent-up stream suddenly released, over fifty thousand wild Dervishes, with hideous yells, rushed upon the fourteen thousand inhabitants of Khartoum. . . .'

'To the Palace !' 'To the Church,' the Dervishes shouted. 'To the Palace for Gordon !' 'To the Church for the gold—for the priests—for the nuns !'

The mob broke into the Palace gardens. The servants in the basement of the building were at once butchered.

The sun was now rising red above the horizon.

Gordon, the end being obviously at hand, came down from the roof-top. In his white Pasha's uniform, his sword at his side, revolver in hand, he stood at the top of the outside staircase leading from the upper storey to the garden, alone, and the first rebel who arrived plunged a spear with the utmost force into his body. He fell and was dragged down to the Palace entrance, where the whole company of fiends, emboldened by the fact that there was now nothing to fear, hacked away at the prostrate body till the last vestige of life had expired.

The night of horror following on Gordon's murder was one which no pen could describe nor mind imagine. The lives of none but slaves and younger women were spared. From end to end the town

'IT WILL BE JUST TOO LATE'—GORDON

ran with blood—of the men and women Gordon had given his life to save.

\* \* \*

In the camp surrounding the village of Omdurman the night of Sunday, the 25th January, 1885, had passed, for Slatin, with hour upon hour of extreme anxiety. Would the attack on Khartoum bring him freedom or lifelong slavery? Just before dawn there reached his ears a deafening roar as from the discharge of thousands of rifles and guns. A few minutes passed and then all was again quiet but for an occasional rifle-shot. Slatin was puzzled. Could this possibly have been the long-awaited assault on Khartoum? But a little later there fell upon his ears such a clamour of frenzied and exulting shouts that they could not be mistaken for anything but the hysterical yells portending an Arab victory.

His guards left him in their impatience to hear the news, and Slatin was crawling out of his tent to follow them when a group of Dervishes approached. One of them carried a blood-soaked cloth in which something was wrapped, and behind this man followed a crowd of weeping people who had once lived under Gordon's rule. Struggling to his feet against the weight of his chains, Slatin rose, and as the man who carried the bundle reached him, he unrolled it, and the unrolling revealed the head of Gordon.

Summoning up all his reserves of self-control, Slatin gazed, shocked out of all speech. Every well-known and well-loved detail of Gordon's features was distinct.

'Is not this the head of your uncle, the Infidel?' asked the man who held the head.

'What of that?' answered Slatin as calmly as he could. 'He was a brave soldier who fell at his post. He is happy to have fallen. His sufferings have ended'.

\* \* \*

The survivors of Stewart's Relief Column, after the long trek across the desert from Abou Klea to Metemmeh, had their first glimpse of the Nile on the morning of the 19th January when they were about four miles from Metemmeh. Dervishes were swarming in the neighbourhood and defences had to be hurriedly prepared. Stewart was struck by a bullet in the mouth and the wound proved fatal, and since Colonel Burnaby—one of Gordon's staunchest friends—lay dead in

## WILSON'S ADVANCE

the desert near the Wells of Abou Klea, the command of the column fell to Sir Charles Wilson of the Royal Engineers. The defences were quickly completed and Wilson then drew up the troops in square formation, left the wounded and stores in the defended position, and pressed on to the Nile the same afternoon. The River was reached a few miles above Metemmeh just after nightfall, and the exhausted men, quenching their thirst from the River, 'dropped to the ground like logs'; even the camels were almost too weak to crawl to the water.

Dervish tom-toms throbbed ominously throughout the night!

Next day Wilson consolidated his position; and on the 21st, while reconnoitring in the direction of Metemmeh, four steamers were seen sailing towards him, all flying the Egyptian flag. They were a part of the flotilla under the command of Nushi Pasha which Gordon, nearly four months before, had sent from Khartoum expecting them to be joined by the British Relief Force within a month. The original three vessels which Nushi Pasha had taken from Khartoum had been joined by others, and, since the 30th September, their crews had been in continuous action against the rebels. Every day the steamers had been damaged by direct hits, and shell-holes had had to be patched up under heavy fire; time and again the crews had landed and silenced Mahdist batteries, often after desperate hand-to-hand encounters; and stores had had to be replaced at increasingly heavy odds. From first to last the chivalrous spirit of the officers and men of this flotilla had evoked Gordon's profoundest admiration.<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the British soldiers caught sight of the Egyptian flags flown by these steamers a mighty cheer went up, for it was proof that they had been sent by Gordon. Not less was the relief felt by the Egyptians on board them when, after all their hard fighting, and waiting, for a hundred and twelve days, the look-out announced that English troops were at last in sight. 'We hoisted our flags', wrote Nushi Pasha in his Journal, 'and the music on board began to play.'

<sup>1</sup> In an article entitled 'The Campaign of Gordon's Steamers' which appeared in the *Royal Engineers Journal* of October 1, 1888, Sir Charles Watson wrote: 'Probably all concerning these steamers that many English people know is that when Sir Charles Wilson arrived at the Nile with English troops after the Battle of Abou Klea, he found some steamers waiting for him. But why the steamers were there, or how long they had been there, is not generally known; whereas the fact is that they had been waiting for nearly four months, during the whole of which time their crews had been constantly fighting the Arabs, often in great danger, and suffering great privations from want of the necessities of life.'

'IT WILL BE JUST TOO LATE'—GORDON

Gordon's Journal was handed by Nushi Pasha to Sir Charles Wilson. It included that last ominous entry written the day before the *Bordein* left Khartoum : 'In ten days *the town may fall* ; and I have done my best for the honour of my country.' Nushi Pasha also gave Wilson two letters that had been written by Gordon. One was addressed to the Chief of Staff and contained these words : 'The state of affairs is such that one cannot foresee further than five to seven days, after which the town may at any time fall. I have done all in my power to hold out, but I own I consider the position extremely critical, and I say this without any feeling of bitterness to Her Majesty's Government but merely as a matter of fact.' The other letter was to Sir Charles (then Major) Watson, whose devoted friendship had meant more and more to Gordon with the passing years. To Watson he wrote : 'I think the game is up, and send Mrs. Watson and yourself and Graham my adieux. We may expect a catastrophe in or after ten days.' This letter was left open so that the Officer Commanding the Relief Expedition could read it.

These messages were read by Wilson on the 21st January. Two days were then spent in overhauling the worn-out machinery of the steamers and in reconnoitres made as a result of reports that large Dervish forces were closing in both from the north and the south.

It was not therefore until the morning of the 24th that the *Bordein*, captained by Khassem el Mus with Sir Charles Wilson on board, started for Khartoum. She was accompanied by the *Telahawiya*, commanded by Abdul Hamid Bey. The bulwarks of the two vessels had been reinforced with boiler-plates fixed to wooden stanchions. Each had gun-turrets at the bows and between the paddle-boxes. The old 'penny steamers' had thus become armed blockade-runners.

As personnel they carried an officer of the Yorkshire Hussars ; an officer and twenty men of the Royal Sussex Regiment ; an officer of the King's Royal Rifles and two petty officers of the Royal Navy. Hence, out of seven thousand British troops who had been struggling up the Nile since September, barely a score, reinforced by 240 Egyptian and Sudanese soldiers, were able to sail with Wilson from Metemmeh just two days *before* the ill-omened date of the 26th January.

On the 28th January as they approached Khartoum the steamers had to run the gauntlet of heavy fire from guns and rifles on both banks of the Nile. Then a shout from the bank told them that the city had fallen and that Gordon was dead ! At last Khartoum became visible in the distance, and as they drew nearer to the town every glass

#### IT WAS ALL IN VAIN

was turned upon the Palace. No flag fluttered above it ! No cheering came from a city overjoyed at the prospect of long-postponed relief. No sign of welcome came from an expectant garrison. What they encountered was a withering fire from guns and musketry on both sides of the River. Collected on the river-front were interminable crowds of wild-looking men in patched *jibbas*, men who waved the battle-flags of the Mahdi and yelled in triumph.

So it was that the two little steamers had forced a way into the very jaws of death. And it was after all in vain. It was only too clear that Khartoum had fallen and that Gordon could no longer be alive. A British Relief Expedition had indeed arrived. But it had arrived, as Gordon had predicted, 'just too late'—by two days too late.

## THE 'MAKER OF MODERN EGYPT'

AYEAR and four months had now elapsed since Lord Cromer commenced his new duties as British Consul-General in Egypt, and he, representing as he did the Power whose army was occupying the country, could not avoid responsibility for its ordered government. The result was that, though nominally only a Consul-General, he inevitably became the real ruler of Egypt.

The country that he was called upon to rule was bankrupt ; its three chief instruments of government were, firstly, the *courbash* (a tapering strip of hippopotamus hide used for a savage form of flogging) ; secondly, the *corvée* (forced unpaid labour) ; and thirdly, the inhumanity of the corrupt tax-collector. Cromer therefore decided that before the foundations for any form of humane government could be laid, it would be necessary to abolish in successive stages 'the three C's'—as he called them—the Courbash, the Corvée, and Corruption,<sup>1</sup> and, by so doing, to provide the fellahin with the first rudimentary rights of free men ; not quite so simple a task, however, as the Western reader might haply think. The first result of the prohibition of the *courbash*, for instance, was a sensational increase in crime. A single example, related by Lord Cromer himself, will reveal the situation created : A man accused of crime was brought before a Provincial Governor. He refused to answer the questions that were put to him. Flogging was ordered. The criminal, unmoved, calmly informed the Governor : 'The English are here. You know that you cannot flog me !' He was not flogged. *And the questions remained unanswered.*<sup>2</sup>

The abolition of the *corvée*, too, was beset by difficulties. In the first place it necessitated the payment of a wage to the labourers who had hitherto, at no cost to the State, kept the irrigation canals free from silt. The French—quick to seize any opportunity to discomfit the English—promptly lodged an objection to the expense that would be incurred by paying these wages. For the French could not forget

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, page 262.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, pages 301 and 302.

## GLADSTONE'S DILEMMA

that England had fulfilled the pledge given to Tewfik Pasha in the 'Joint Note' by taking the promised action while France had held back,<sup>1</sup> and thenceforth it became France's unvarying policy to obstruct every British effort to improve the conditions of the country.<sup>2</sup> Without French approval neither the Khedive nor Lord Cromer had the power to authorize the payment of these wages, with the result that Great Britain, to overcome the *impasse*, agreed to provide the necessary funds by postponing the payment due to her for interest on her Suez Canal shares, thus making it possible for Cromer to take a first step towards the abolition of slave-labour in Egypt.

The British Government was nevertheless determined to bring their occupation of Egypt to an end at the earliest feasible moment. 'Mr. Gladstone's Government', says the Marquess of Zetland, 'had most unwillingly planted a foot on the banks of the Nile; but they had not the smallest intention of keeping it there for one moment longer than they could help, and weeks before their representative was due to take over the duties and responsibilities of office, Lord Granville was urging on him the importance of an early withdrawal.'<sup>3</sup>

Cromer was at first in the fullest possible sympathy with the Home Government's policy. He was himself a Liberal, opposed to imperial expansion, and, finding the millstone of a bankrupt Egypt tied round his country's neck, he was only too anxious to carry out Lord Granville's instructions. That this would be possible he had at first no misgivings, and indeed, a fortnight after his arrival at Cairo he had written to Lord Granville: 'I think I shall be able to recommend the evacuation of Cairo and the diminution of the total force.' But in spite of his Liberal views he soon found it necessary to warn Granville that if the British Government insisted on *immediate* evacuation, they must be prepared to turn a deaf ear to the cries which would without doubt be raised both in Parliament and in the Press when the Egyptians

<sup>1</sup> 'The bombardment (of Alexandria)', wrote the distinguished French author, A. B. de Guerville, in his book, *La Nouvelle Egypte*, 'was the first act as Fashoda was the last marking the decline of French influence, the decline of which began on that memorable day when the French Fleet disappeared on the horizon, and, abandoning Alexandria to the English guns, took with it the last hope of those who dreamt of an Egypt great, strong, prosperous, under the tutelage of France.'

<sup>2</sup> George E. Kirk: *A Short History of the Middle East* (Methuen, London, 1948), page 113.

<sup>3</sup> The Marquess of Zetland: *Lord Cromer* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1932), page 87.

proceeded to govern according to their own lights.<sup>1</sup> Already, at this early stage, he was finding that academic theory could at times be seriously at odds with hard facts, and when, after having occupied the position of Consul-General at Cairo for only two months, news had been received of the annihilation of Hicks Pasha's army, his eyes were opened wide to the fact that it was one thing for England to have got absentmindedly into Egypt but quite another for her to extricate herself. And so, though as anxious as ever to serve the Liberal cause, his next communication to the Home Government was more cautious : 'I hope you fully understand', he then told Lord Granville, 'that what I am chiefly aiming at is the *eventual* withdrawal.'<sup>2</sup> This, he now thought, might take longer than he had at first anticipated, though he still maintained that it could be carried out in the not very distant future.<sup>3</sup>

The menace of the Mahdi, however, instead of lessening, had, as we have seen, grown daily more formidable, and with each worsening of the situation it became less and less easy for Cromer to see eye to eye with the Home Government's policy. 'Surely it is a cruel fate', he wrote to Lord Northbrook in April, 1884, 'that drives me, with all my strong opinions against an extension of territory and the assumption of fresh responsibilities, and with strong anti-Jingo opinions which deepen every year I live, to be constantly making proposals which, at all events at first sight, have a strong Jingo flavour.'<sup>4</sup>

With every passing month it now became clearer to Cromer that the premature evacuation of the British army would result in the certain betrayal of the Egyptian population to merciless exploitation by Turkish Pashas, corrupt officials, and Levantine usurers, and that the Home Government, by asking him to withdraw the British troops while at the same time securing all those advantages which could only be obtained by keeping them in Egypt, were expecting him to achieve the impossible.<sup>5</sup>

A very strong effort was nevertheless made to escape from the Egyptian entanglement when, in 1887, a Convention was signed by British and Turkish plenipotentiaries for ratification by the Sultan by the terms of which Great Britain guaranteed to withdraw her army from Egypt at the end of three years, provided that the security of the country was not at that time threatened either from within or

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, page 352.

<sup>2</sup> The Marquess of Zetland : *Lord Cromer*, page 92.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., page 92.      <sup>5</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, page 333.

without, and Great Britain was given the right to send troops to co-operate with Ottoman forces in more or less clearly defined emergencies. But France objected. She demanded the final and complete withdrawal of all British troops within three years. Russia also raised objections. Hence, the Sultan, bewildered by French and Russian pressure, withheld his consent ; and, although the Convention had actually been signed by Queen Victoria, it was never ratified by the Sultan.<sup>1</sup>

Lord Cromer thus continued to be the *de facto* ruler of Egypt, but he had not—as present-day Egyptians often profess to believe—usurped the powers of a hitherto sovereign and independent State. On the contrary, few countries could have been less independent. Not only was Egypt a vassal of Turkey ; she had also to submit to interference in her internal affairs by a dozen and more other Powers. The European Debt Commissioners—French, Austrian, Italian, British, German, Russian—controlled all revenue pledged for the service of Egypt's National Debt. No loan could be contracted without their consent.<sup>2</sup> Other countries also possessed rights which encroached upon Egypt's sovereignty. These 'rights', known as the Capitulations, had been secured by European nations from time to time from the Ottoman authorities who, aware of the advantages of international trade but being themselves incapable of organizing it, had for centuries past granted special privileges to foreigners who could be persuaded to reside in Ottoman territory, including Egypt. The Capitulations were not treaties, because it would have been impossible, even impious, for Moslems at that time to have dealt with Christians on a basis of equality. The Sultan, however, of his grace, might condescend to grant them 'privileges' and the Capitulations were actually letters of privilege containing sworn guarantees of 'special exemptions from conditions normally existing in Moslem territory.

At the beginning of the British Occupation of Egypt there were fourteen Capitulatory Powers with privileges in her territory. Among these privileges, which came to be looked upon as rights, was immunity from direct taxation—a right which no European was prepared to relinquish and which was a most serious obstacle to many of Cromer's plans for reform. Another privilege was that before any European or American could be punished it was necessary to prove that he had committed an offence not against an Egyptian law but against a law

<sup>1</sup> Idem, vol. ii, pages 372 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Idem, pages 304 and 305.

#### THE 'MAKER OF MODERN EGYPT'

of the country of his origin. Then, in the event of such proof being obtained, criminal charges and suits of succession were tried in the accused's own Consular Court. And the foreigner's privileges did not end there, for civil and commercial suits and disputes between foreigners of different nationality, and between foreigners and the Egyptians themselves, were tried in the 'Mixed Tribunals', which consisted of a majority of European judges nominated by the Powers. No new legislation could be applied to the subjects of the Capitulatory Powers without the agreement of all of them, so that, as Lord Cromer has pointed out, 'the President of the United States and the King of Sweden had to give their consent before the provision of any new law could be applied to the subjects of the Emperor of Austria or the King of the Belgians'.<sup>1</sup>

Such were the conditions in the far from independent Egypt that Lord Cromer was now called upon to rule.

From the earliest days of his work in Egypt, however, when it had been his duty as Commissioner of the Debt to think only of the interests of the bondholders, Cromer had felt that, somehow, a far higher task awaited the British in Egypt than that of merely protecting her foreign creditors. Now, as representative of the Occupying Power, he was fired by the ambition (to quote his own words) 'of leading the Egyptian people from bankruptcy to solvency and then on to affluence, from Khedivial monstrosities to British justice, and from Oriental methods veneered with a spurious European civilization towards the true civilization of the West'.<sup>2</sup>

The long, stern race against the country's bankruptcy was won in 1889—four years after the fall of Khartoum—and from that year the revenue of Egypt exceeded its expenditure. Thenceforward, hampered though Cromer still was by the incubus of international control, reform rapidly followed reform. And as an Egyptian educationist has written, they were 'all-embracing and far-reaching reforms that made the name of Lord Cromer, their instigator and guardian from 1883 to 1907, shine and live in the annals of great administrators in history'.<sup>3</sup>

The *courbash* and the *corvée* finally and definitely became evils of the past; arbitrary arrests became impossible, commerce developed;

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer: *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, page 262.

<sup>2</sup> The Marquess of Zetland; Op. cit., page 89.

<sup>3</sup> M. Rifat Bey: *The Awakening of Modern Egypt* (Longmans, London, 1947), page 224.

#### AN EGYPTIAN CIVIL SERVICE

money became available for reorganization ; the nucleus of a Civil Service was established, and there occurred the miracle (as it was for Egypt) of a rising revenue accompanied by a gradual alleviation of the curse of over-taxation.

This was the situation in January, 1892, when the Khedive Tewfik Pasha died and was succeeded by Abbas II.

The new Khedive—young, inexperienced, self-willed—was from the first impatient of the restraint imposed by Lord Cromer, and the Egyptian sycophants who flattered him and monopolized his ear were of a class who chafed under any form of control. They were men who, ambitious for power for themselves, their dependents, and their protégés, resented the British restrictions which prevented them from governing Egypt to their own personal advantage,<sup>1</sup> and they found it easy to persuade a youth of the new Khedive's temperament that he was humiliating himself by listening to British advice.

A serious problem was thus created for Lord Cromer, who had begun his pro-consulship with the determination that Egypt, under his own discreet guidance, should accomplish her own regeneration and had therefore appointed only a very few British officials to assist him. This policy, however, had depended for its success upon a good understanding between the Khedive and a few of the highest Egyptian officials on the one hand, and Cromer himself and his very few British officials on the other. As long as Tewfik Pasha had been Khedive the plan had worked, but the attitude of Abbas II fundamentally altered the situation. And as time went on it became ever clearer that the young Khedive, 'under the attractive name of patriotism',<sup>2</sup> was set upon re-introducing a system of personal government 'similar to that which had with so much labour been eradicated'.<sup>3</sup> Lord Cromer was therefore compelled to consider radical changes in his plans for building up an Egyptian Civil Service whose honesty and competence would be so far beyond suspicion that it would be safe for him to recommend the relinquishment of British control.

At last he came to the reluctant conclusion that the only possible alternative to a relapse into the abuses of the past was the anglicization of the Egyptian Civil Service, and highly qualified British officials were therefore gradually recruited to fill important technical and administrative posts.

<sup>1</sup> Kirk : Op. cit., page 115

<sup>2</sup> Lord Cromer : *Abbas II* (Macmillan, London, 1915), page 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

#### THE 'MAKER OF MODERN EGYPT'

It thus fell to a handful of Englishmen to devote their lives to the regeneration of Egypt; and, in view of all that has happened since, the opinion of an Egyptian Nationalist, Amine Youssef Bey, is highly relevant. 'In the time of Lord Cromer', he wrote in 1940 (that is to say, many years after Egyptian affairs had been handed back to Egypt's own control), 'the character of the British official, the British businessman, and the British citizen in Egypt had come to be estimated so highly that the English ranked in Egyptian minds far above other Europeans. The Egyptians naturally resented a certain aloofness, which marred the British attitude towards Egyptians, even towards those who were their superiors in official or social circles. But in spite of this, the integrity, the honesty, the straightforwardness of the English was never questioned. At that period the English maintained such high standards, even in social matters, as to constitute them a model in the eyes of Egyptians, for the Egyptian man-in-the-street, as well as the educated classes, considered that a nation composed of men and women of so high a type must be the greatest nation in the world.'<sup>1</sup> These are the words of the son-in-law of Zaghloul Pasha, the Nationalist leader who played a greater part than any other Egyptian in ending the British Occupation of Egypt.

But Egypt could never be secure, however well governed, while the Sudan was occupied by a hostile power, and this was now the case, for although the Mahdi was dead he had been succeeded by the Khalifa, under the tyranny of whose barbaric rule the Sudan was now groaning, with its agriculture and its commerce ruined, its population decimated by disease and internecine strife. But the Khalifa had an immense army on whose fanatical courage he could rely, and this army now threatened Egypt's southern frontier and barred access to the sources of the Nile on whose waters the life of all Egypt depended.

It was clear to the British Government that, sooner or later, the Sudan would have to be wrested from Mahdiism. With the escape of the Austrian missionary, Father Ohrwalder, from the clutches of the Khalifa in 1892, and of Rudolf Slatin in 1895, a clear picture of conditions in the Sudan and of the appalling fate of the Khalifa's European prisoners had reached the world. 'Mahdiism', wrote Father Ohrwalder in 1892, 'is founded on plunder and violence, and by plunder and violence it is carried on. In some districts half the people are dead, in others the loss of life is even greater. Whole

<sup>1</sup> Amine Youssef Bey : *Independent Egypt*, (John Murray, London, 1940), page 50.

## THE RE-CONQUEST OF THE SUDAN

tribes have been completely blotted out and in their places roam the wild beasts . . . How long shall this condition of affairs continue ? . . . I have pined ten years in bondage, and now, by the help of God, I have escaped. In the name of the companions with whom I suffered, in the name of the Sudan whose misery I have seen, and in the name of all civilized nations, I ask this question : How long shall Europe—and above all the nation which has first part in Egypt and which stands deservedly first in civilizing savage races—how long shall Europe and Great Britain watch unmoved the outrages of the Khalifa and the destruction of the Sudan people ?' <sup>1</sup>

Suddenly, on the 12th March, 1896, the British Government decided that—for several reasons—the moment had come when a first step towards the re-occupation of the Sudan should be taken without any more delay, and at 3 a.m. the following day a telegram announcing this decision was handed to Lord Kitchener (then Sir Herbert Kitchener) in Cairo. Without the loss of a moment Kitchener went to the British Agency and roused Lord Cromer from sleep and together they hurried to the Palace to break the news to the Khedive.

The Home Government looked upon the re-conquest of the Sudan not only as a primarily Egyptian interest but also as one which Egypt, with some British help, should now be in a position to attempt herself, for both her army and her finances were thought to be at last equal to the strains that would be imposed upon them. The newly formed Egyptian Army, trained by British officers, had proved itself time and again to be a thoroughly efficient and commendably courageous fighting force in recent frontier skirmishes with the Dervishes ; and Egyptian finances as a result of Cromer's genius were now in a flourishing condition. The possibility of any of the expense of the campaign falling upon Great Britain had not therefore been taken into consideration by the authorities sitting in London, who either did not know or had completely forgotten that Egypt, however strong her financial position, could not do what she liked with her own money. For the key to the Egyptian Treasury was still in international custody. The Khedive was therefore obliged to apply to the European Commission of the Debt for an advance of half-a-million pounds towards the expenses of the campaign. This he did on the 19th March, and, two days later, with the problem of financing the war still unsettled, Kitchener, with Major (later Sir Reginald) Wingate and Rudolf

<sup>1</sup> Father Joseph Ohrwalder : *Ten years' Captivity in the Mahdi's Camp* (Sampson Low, London, 1893), pages 458 and 459.

Slatin—whose dramatic escape from the Khalifa had been contrived by Wingate—left Cairo for the Sudan, and various Egyptian battalions were moved up the Nile.

On the 26th March the Commission of the Debt, by a majority of four to two, sanctioned the use of the £500,000 for which application had been made, and the money was at once paid into the Egyptian Treasury. But the two dissentient Commissioners—the French and the Russian—immediately commenced an action in the Mixed Courts against the Egyptian Government, and on the 8th June the Mixed Tribunal of the First Instance delivered its judgment. It was that the Commission of the Debt—despite the agreement of the majority of the Commissioners—had had no right to hand the half-million pounds to the Egyptian Government, who were accordingly ordered to repay the sum.

An appeal was immediately made to a higher Court, and, in the misplaced hope that the Court of Appeal must inevitably reverse this surprising verdict, the campaign was allowed to proceed without a single piastre being legally available to pay for it.

## OM D U R M A N

**I**T was in a very cautiously expressed announcement that the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs notified the House of Commons that a campaign against Mahdiism had at last been authorized. The House was told that in view of the reported forward movements in various directions of the Dervishes, the British Government, acting in conjunction with the Government of Egypt and their advisers had ordered an advance to Akasha, which was the main Dervish advanced post and lay some seventy-five miles beyond the Egyptian-Sudanese frontier town of Wadi Halfa. Nothing was said that would commit Great Britain to any attempt to re-occupy Khartoum, though the Under-Secretary did add the information that the advance *might* be extended to Dongola (Khartoum is between six and seven hundred miles farther up the Nile than Dongola) and that the future action of the Government would be 'regulated by considerations not merely military and strategical but political and financial'.

On Cromer's advice, Kitchener, who, four years before, had risen to be Sirdar of the Egyptian Army, was placed in command of the Expedition.

It was intended that, apart from some British officers lent temporarily to the Egyptian Government, only Egyptian troops would take part in the campaign, but as an indication that British help would be forthcoming if needed, a battalion of North Staffordshires was sent to Wadi Halfa, and, in addition, an Indian contingent was detailed to garrison the Red Sea port of Suakin so that the entire Egyptian Army would be free to take part in the advance.

In the first important engagement—just beyond the Sudanese border, on the 7th June, 1896—the Egyptians proved their quality, but an epidemic of cholera thinned their ranks and the First Battalion of the North Staffordshires was in consequence sent up the Nile to join them, and during the three months that followed, 'the dogged perseverance of the British officers and the willing obedience of the sturdy black and fellahin troops'<sup>1</sup> overcame climate, disease, and

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, page 91.

Dervishes, and Dongola was entered on the 24th September. As the troops passed between ruined and gutted houses along streets choked with vegetation they were brought face to face with the horror of life under the rule of the Khalifa.

The occupation of Dongola was to Kitchener no more than a first step to that of Khartoum, but no further advance was possible without the British Government's sanction, though it was unthinkable that the Egyptian Army should have been encouraged to fight their way so far into hostile territory and then to be left there, with a long and vulnerable line of communications behind them. Kitchener, therefore, after having received the submission of the sheikhs in the neighbourhood, handed the command to Colonel (afterwards General Sir Archibald) Hunter, and hurried to London to discuss, *and urge*, a further advance.

The campaign had so far cost Egypt £715,000, but the Court of Appeal had not yet even sanctioned the use of the first £500,000. Kitchener, however, with the strong support of Lord Cromer, convinced the Home Cabinet that the re-conquest of the whole of the Sudan was not only absolutely necessary but could no longer be delayed, the more so since a French expedition under Commandant Marchand, which had landed on the west coast of Africa, was now known to be moving up the Ubangi River—a tributary of the Congo—and was almost certainly making for the upper reaches of the Nile which, if successfully reached, would add unforeseeable complications to Great Britain's already far too troublesome Egyptian commitments.

And so Kitchener returned to the Sudan not only with authority to continue the advance to Khartoum but also with the welcome assurance that British troops would be sent to reinforce the Egyptians and Sudanese.

The Gordon Relief Expedition had already revealed the formidable difficulties to be faced when transporting men and stores up the Nile Cataracts, and Kitchener now determined to avoid the worst of these by constructing a Desert Railway from Wadi Halfa to Abou Hammad, an undertaking which eminent railway engineers in England declared to be absolutely impossible. Distinguished soldiers who were also consulted thought it not only impossible but ridiculous, and 'many other persons who were not consulted volunteered the opinion that the whole idea was that of a lunatic'.<sup>1</sup> Kitchener's confidence in

<sup>1</sup> Sir Winston Churchill : *The River War* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, London), page 169 of the 1940 edition.

himself and his Royal Engineers was however justified and his Desert Railway proved to be one of the deadliest of all the weapons used in the fight against the Khalifa. The course of the Nile from Wadi Halfa is at first south-westerly, then south-easterly, and at a place approximately two hundred and fifty miles south of Wadi Halfa it gradually bends back in a north-easterly direction to Abou Hammad, forming one of the Nile's immense loops. Kitchener's 'lunatic' railway was planned to cross the two hundred miles of unmapped, waterless wilderness between Wadi Halfa and Abou Hammad, shortening the distance to Khartoum by about three hundred miles and avoiding three cataracts, one of them 125 miles long with a fall of 213 feet, and another 66 miles long with a drop of 160 feet.

On the 2nd December—a little more than two months after the occupation of Dongola—the Court of Appeal of the Mixed Tribunal delivered its anxiously awaited judgment on the half-million pounds that had already been spent on the campaign. It condemned the course adopted by the majority of the Commissioners of the Debt and ordered the Egyptian Government to refund the money ! But Lord Cromer had anticipated the verdict and was ready to act. He at once informed the Egyptian Government that British financial help would be forthcoming, with the result that the half-million was immediately handed back to the Commissioners, and soon afterwards the British Treasury advanced £800,000 to the Egyptian Government at 2½ per cent interest.

Meanwhile Kitchener's plans for his Desert Railway had been made with his usual foresight and thoroughness, and he and his Royal Engineers were already launching rails and sleepers into the wilds in defiance of anything and everything that a numerous, vigilant, and mobile enemy might do. Slowly and methodically the line stretched farther and yet farther into the ever-shifting mirages of the lonely, lifeless, limitless desert. 'Thousands of men were isolated in a savage desolation of glittering sand, connected with the outer world only by two thin rails stretching in long perspective as far as the eye could see ; and they laboured from dawn till sunset without relaxation and with machine-like regularity towards the vague and shimmering horizon beyond which lay Abou Hammad and the Nile.'<sup>1</sup>

By Christmas Day, 1897, Abou Hammad, Berber, and Kassala were once more in Egyptian hands, and it was now obvious to

<sup>1</sup> Lieut.-Colonel E. W. C. Sandes : *The Royal Engineers in Egypt and the Sudan* (Institution of Royal Engineers, Chatham, 1937), page 234.

Kitchener that not a single step further could be contemplated without British reinforcements which the Home Government had promised but which they had up to the present hesitated to send. On the 31st December, however, it became known that the Khalifa was preparing to take the offensive, and this was a challenge which Kitchener had to accept. To withdraw was out of the question. The ground gained must be held at all costs. And so, on the 1st January, 1898, he despatched the historic telegram to Lord Cromer which read : 'General Hunter reports confirming news of a Dervish advance. *I think that British troops should be sent to Abou Hammad, and that reinforcements should be sent to Egypt in case of necessity.*'

Both these measures were taken, and 'the curtain then went up', as Cromer wrote, 'on the last scene in the drama which had commenced with the destruction of General Hicks's army fifteen years previously'.<sup>1</sup>

The Khalifa's principal army of some fifty thousand men was concentrated at Omdurman, but a Dervish force—about twenty thousand strong—had established itself at a point on the right bank of the Atbara not far from its confluence with the Nile. This position, as impregnable as the Emir-in-command could make it, was surrounded by a treble line of trenches, reinforced by palissades of upright dom-palm logs, and further protected by a formidable *chevaux-de-frise* of thornbushes.

By the beginning of March, Kitchener had reached a place within a few miles of this Dervish fastness, and on the 7th of that month, as the sun was setting, his army left camp guided by Captain Fitton of the Royal Berkshire Regiment—who marched by star-observation—and moved cautiously forward in square formation. At nine o'clock a halt was called and while meat and biscuits were being served the moon rose. The march was then resumed—four, dark, slow-moving squares each crowned by a forest of gleaming bayonets. At about 3 a.m., the glow of the Dervish fires was sighted in the distance ; the squares were then unlocked ; the infantry—numbering nearly 12,000—deployed into attack formation, and advanced across the plateau in the form of an arc fifteen hundred yards long. The British Brigade—Camerons, Warwicks, Seaforths, and Lincolns—under Lieut.-Colonel Gatacre, was on the left ; in the centre was a brigade composed of one Egyptian and three Sudanese battalions commanded by Lieut.-Colonel Macdonald ; on the right, another brigade under

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, page 96.

‘REMEMBER GORDON’

Lieut.-Colonel Maxwell was similarly composed. In the rear of the left flank were the mounted troops consisting of eight squadrons of Egyptian cavalry under Lieut.-Colonel Broadwood, while a fourth brigade of three Egyptian battalions commanded by Lieut.-Colonel Lewis was in reserve, guarding transport and water. To each of these four Anglo-Egyptian brigades an Egyptian battery of artillery was attached, and as soon as there was sufficient light their guns opened fire.

While the enemy position was being bombarded the Sirdar’s troops took up their assault formations, and when the bombardment ceased and the bugles sounded the ‘General Advance’, the superior officers dismounted and placed themselves at the head of their commands. Then, with bands playing and pipes skirling—and shouts of ‘Remember Gordon’ from the British ranks—the infantry moved forward with bayonets fixed. Suddenly, when they were within two hundred yards of the Dervish position, the enemy opened fire and the whole entrenchment was rimmed with flame and smoke. Men began to fall, but the stockade was reached and torn down ; the entrenchments, full of Dervishes—firing point-blank—were stormed and passed ; and when the interior of the stronghold was reached it was found to be honeycombed with pits from which sprang Dervishes in their thousands, who either fired or fought with spear or sword. ‘It seemed to those who took part in it’, wrote Sir Winston Churchill, ‘more like a horrible nightmare than a waking reality. *Jibba*-clad figures sprang out of the ground, fired, charged, and were destroyed at every step.’<sup>1</sup> For an hour the hand-to-hand fighting continued. Then the last of the Dervish survivors fled southwards in a disorganized rabble and the only army that could hinder the advance on Omdurman had been destroyed.

The Sirdar’s army now went into summer quarters on the banks of the Nile, but naval workshops were established where gunboats brought from England were put together, and Kitchener’s railway was rapidly extended. Meanwhile the Home Government strengthened the Sirdar’s force by adding another British Brigade, and, when the time came for the advance to be continued, the Sirdar’s army consisted of 8,200 British and 17,600 Egyptian and Sudanese soldiers, with 44 guns and 20 Maxims on land and 36 guns and 24 Maxims on the river.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sir Winston Churchill : *The River War* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, London), page 239 of the 1940 edition.

<sup>2</sup> Sir George Arthur : *Life of Kitchener* (Macmillan, London, 1920), page 231.

It was now that rumours reached Kitchener that the Emperor Menelik was corresponding with the Khalifa, that an Abyssinian force was moving towards the upper waters of the Blue Nile, and that the French expedition under Marchand had reached the White Nile and had established itself near a village called Fashoda, more than five hundred miles farther up the Nile than Khartoum.

Evidently no time was to be lost. At the earliest possible moment, therefore, the Sirdar's army began to move south by successive stages ; Abou Klea and Metemmeh were passed ; and at last Omdurman, the Khalifa's capital, came into view. It is recorded that it was first seen at a distance by Major W. S. Gordon, a nephew of Gordon himself.

On the 1st September the final camping-ground was reached. The site chosen—about six miles from Omdurman and on the same side of the Nile—was an open strip of desert extending to the base of an amphitheatre of hills. While the Anglo-Egyptian Army was marching to its position, Kitchener and his staff galloped towards a rocky height—the Jebel Surkab<sup>1</sup>—at the southern end of this amphitheatre and from its summit he could see the Khalifa's 'capital' with the white dome of the Mahdi's tomb rising clear above a metropolis of mud huts.

On the Nile, opposite Omdurman, lay some British gunboats, and at about three miles distance across the plain the entire Dervish army, between fifty and sixty thousand in number, was advancing in a long line under the black banner of the Khalifa and the green and white flags of his Emirs. As Kitchener watched, the gunboats opened fire. It was returned by about fifty pieces from the Dervish forts. The howitzer battery then landed on the eastern bank, and one of the earliest shots shattered the dome of the Mahdi's tomb, which collapsed in a cloud of yellow dust.

Kitchener, expecting immediate action, galloped back and formed his troops in a defensive line in the shape of a wide arc based on the Nile and protected by gunboats.

At about two in the afternoon the advancing Dervish army halted abruptly, fired their rifles in the air, and settled down for the rest of the day, giving the Sirdar's troops time to strengthen their position.

At nightfall every man lay down on the sand fully dressed, arms and accoutrements beside him, ready for instantaneous action, while in the darkness on the farther side of the hills, less than five miles

<sup>1</sup> Incorrectly alluded to by some authors as Surgham Hill, or Jebel Surgham, Cf. *The Royal Engineers in Egypt and the Sudan*, page 256.

## BATTLE OF OMDURMAN

away, ‘fifty thousand savages were licking their lips at the coming slaughter’.<sup>1</sup> For the Mahdi—so they were told—had appeared to the Khalifa in a dream and promised that the invaders, notwithstanding their death-dealing war-engines, would be destroyed to the last man.

At daylight the gunboats re-opened the bombardment, while cavalry and camel corps moved out to reconnoitre. Then, as messengers came back with news that the enemy was on the move, a few Dervish flags appeared over the crest of the hills, and were followed by masses of spearmen and riflemen; the tap-tap of war-drums and the menacing swell of war-cries drew steadily nearer. ‘Led by Emirs’, wrote the author’s old friend, General Blakeney, who, as a lieutenant, took part in this engagement, ‘some of the Dervishes were in chain armour and carried swords like those of the Crusaders. Chanting the Moslem profession of faith—“*La illaha ill Allah wa Mohammed rasul Ullah*”—they came into view in a gigantic semicircle, covering the entire plain.’

‘Nothing like the Battle of Omdurman will ever be seen again. . . . Ancient and modern warfare confronted one another. The weapons, the methods, and the fanaticism of the Middle Ages were brought by an extraordinary anachronism into dire collision with the organization and inventions of the nineteenth century.’<sup>2</sup> The Dervishes collapsed in heaps under the annihilating fire, but as one line fell it was followed by another. ‘A dusky line got up and stormed forward; it bent, broke up, fell apart, and disappeared,’ wrote a war-correspondent who was present. ‘Before the smoke had cleared, another line was bending and storming forward in the same track.’<sup>3</sup>

When the first onslaught had been driven off, the 21st Lancers moved forward to reconnoitre. Among them was Lieutenant Winston S. Churchill. Commanded by Colonel Martin, they trotted towards the Jebel Surkab, whence a small body of the enemy was visible on the plain beneath. These Dervishes opened fire. Suddenly, as the Lancers charged, a ravine came into view in which a dense mass of the enemy had been concealed. Lieutenant Churchill, looking right and left, saw that his neighbouring troop leaders ‘made a good

<sup>1</sup> Sir George Arthur: *Life of Lord Kitchener* (Macmillan, London, 1920), vol. i, page 232.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Winston Churchill: *My Early Life* (publishers and proprietors of the copyright, Odhams, London), pages 170 and 184 of the 1948 edition.

<sup>3</sup> G. W. Steevens: *With Kitchener to Khartoum* (Blackwood, Edinburgh, 1908), page 282.

line', and that 'immediately behind was a long dancing row of lances couched for the charge'. Emirs on horseback, Dervishes on foot, appeared as if by magic from nowhere, but the Lancers hacked their way through. Lieutenant Churchill, with an injured shoulder, returned his sword to its scabbard and drew his pistol. The trooper immediately behind him was killed. Churchill saw the gleam of a curved sword drawn for a hamstring cut at his horse; he fired two shots, straightened himself in the saddle, and immediately saw before him another figure with an uplifted sword. Raising his pistol again, Churchill fired, and the Dervish was this time so close that the pistol actually struck him. The Lancers, with Balaclava *sangfroid*, sabred their way through a thousand Dervishes to the opposite side of the ravine, continuing their gallop to a position whence they could enfilade them. Dismounting, they opened fire with their carbines and compelled them to retreat, but of the three hundred and ten men who had galloped through the enemy in ambush, nearly a quarter had been killed or wounded in a space of but little more than two minutes. A notable exception was Lieutenant Winston Churchill, who survived to become Great Britain's Prime Minister and one of his country's greatest War Leaders.

Meanwhile, the Sirdar's army, having begun the march to Omdurman, had found the way barred by a Dervish army that had assembled behind the slopes of the Jebel Surkab and which was later joined by another force that had been hidden by other hills. But each successive manœuvre of the Sirdar's various brigades was executed with such precision that the enemy, after suffering the most appalling losses, broke and fled, pursued by the Egyptian cavalry, harried by the 21st Lancers, and leaving behind them eleven thousand dead and sixteen thousand wounded.

In the afternoon Omdurman was entered, and as Kitchener rode through the narrow, foul-smelling streets at the head of a battalion of Sudanese, every inch of his commanding figure and stern, unsmiling features, bespoke him as 'a man whose resolution was as inevitable as fate'.<sup>1</sup> Passing along roads broken by holes filled with stagnant water on which floated corpses of human beings and animals, he at length reached the 'great wall' surrounding the wrecked Tomb of the Mahdi and the Khalifa's house. Here the keys of the town were handed to him and Arabs in their thousands flocked from all quarters to receive the 'Peace-Pardon'.

<sup>1</sup> The Marquess of Salisbury.

‘ABIDE WITH ME’

Shortly after sunset, amidst shouts of welcome from the inhabitants, the British Brigade marched into the town. Thousands of captives were then released, men and women who had fallen into the Mahdi's hands when El Obeid and other provincial towns surrendered. Among them, in chains, was the German, Charles Neufeld, who had been in captivity for eleven years, and who recorded his experiences in *A Prisoner of the Khalifa*.

The stench of the ‘capital’ being unbearable, the entire Anglo-Egyptian Army marched out the following day and bivouacked four miles away.

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The next day, the 4th September, 1898, representatives of every regiment and corps were ferried across the river to take part in what must have been a profoundly moving ceremony. The troops took up their position in front of the ruins of Gordon’s Palace. Its upper story had vanished, its windows were blocked with loose bricks, the outer staircase had gone, debris was piled high against the walls, but the garden, though overgrown with weeds, was still full of blossoming shrubs, and orange and pomegranate trees. Above the ruined lower story, close to the spot where Gordon fell, two flagstaffs had been planted. By one of these stood two British officers, by the other a single British and a single Egyptian soldier. At a sign from Kitchener the Union Jack and the flag of Egypt rose simultaneously and slowly to the mastheads. A gun boomed. It was the first of a salute of twenty-one fired from a gunboat on the Nile commanded by Gordon’s nephew. Mingled with the boom of the guns came the sound of the National Anthem played by the Grenadier Guards’ Band. The Khedivial Anthem followed, played by the band of a Sudanese regiment; a short religious service was then begun, and, while a prayer composed for the occasion by a padre was being offered, Kitchener’s long pent-up feelings suddenly gave way. Tears welled up in his eyes and trickled slowly down those cheeks of iron. The ‘Dead March’ in *Saul* was then played and Gordon’s favourite hymn, ‘Abide with me’, brought the ceremony to a close.

The officers waited for Kitchener to dismiss the parade, but, still too overcome to speak, he beckoned to General Hunter to give the word of command.

## FASHODA

**T**HE time had not yet come when the future status of the Sudan could be defined, but the Home Government considered that in view of the part played in its re-conquest by British arms and British funds, Great Britain should in future have a voice in matters connected with its government. Orders were therefore given to Kitchener that no claims which might be made by Abyssinia or by France were to be recognized, that flotillas were to sail up the Blue and the White Niles, and that the expedition to ascend the White Nile should be led by Kitchener himself.

Before these flotillas sailed, the crew of a Dervish steamer brought some interesting news. This steamer—originally Gordon's—had been sent up-river some time before by the Khalifa to collect grain, and while near Fashoda—so the crew said—it had been fired upon by a party of black soldiers under European officers. If this story were true, it meant that a European Power was endeavouring to forestall Kitchener's arrival on the Upper Nile. Kitchener had scant doubt that that Power must be France, and that the new arrivals were members of the rumoured French expedition commanded by Marchand ; and it seemed clear to him that the longstanding quarrel between Great Britain and France in respect of Egypt was now about to reach its culminating point.

Some nickel-covered bullets extracted from the sides of the Dervish vessel appeared to substantiate the story told by its crew.

Kitchener's natural conclusion was that the utmost haste was necessary. And so, at six o'clock on the morning of the 10th September, 1898, he boarded a small steamer called the *Dal*, and, escorted by three gunboats towing a number of barges, set out for Fashoda. Another small steamer followed later. These steamers and barges carried a hundred Cameron Highlanders, two battalions of Sudanese, and a battery of Egyptian artillery. Accompanying Kitchener on board the *Dal*—in addition to his personal staff—was Sir Reginald Wingate (at that time Lieut.-Colonel Wingate), who was then his Chief Intelligence Officer.

#### THE FRENCH EXPEDITION

More news about the Europeans at Fashoda was picked up on the 18th September. On that day the flotilla was moored to the Nile bank at a place inhabited by a tribe to which several of the Sudanese soldiers on board the *Dal* belonged. Some of these men were sent ashore to gather what information they could from their friends, and one of them returned with a chief, a fine, upstanding black, who was brought on board the *Dal*. Like all the tribesmen of that region, he was *in puris naturalibus*! One of Kitchener's orderlies, however, reflecting that at least a *chief* should be brought to Kitchener in a more becoming manner, borrowed a cabin-towel with which he caused the chief to drape himself. So clad, he was ushered into Kitchener's presence ; but in accordance with his own innate ideas of what so great an occasion demanded, he promptly removed the towel and, as a mark of respect, proceeded to wind it round his head.

The chief's answers when questioned left Kitchener in but little doubt that the Europeans at Fashoda were Commandant Marchand and the officers and men of the French expedition which, nearly two years previously, had landed on the west coast of Africa, and, since then had been travelling slowly eastward across the continent. Having come to this conclusion, Kitchener addressed a letter to 'The Chief of the European Expedition said to be at Fashoda', acquainting him of the defeat of the Dervishes at Omdurman, and of the approach of his flotilla with British and Egyptian troops. He congratulated Marchand on the completion of his 3,000-mile journey across Africa, and added that, as the region between Fashoda and Khartoum was now clear of Dervishes, he would be happy to assist him and his party on their return to France by way of Khartoum and Cairo.

The position was beyond all power of description delicate, and Kitchener sat with Wingate discussing all the aspects of the problem far into the night. On the one hand, the life of every Egyptian—man, woman, or child—depended upon the availability of the water of the Upper Nile. On the other hand, the intentions of France had been made only too explicit by the arrival of the French Expedition at Fashoda. Kitchener's instructions from the Home Government were unambiguous. He was to convince any French commander who might be met that his presence in the Nile Valley was an infringement of British and Egyptian rights. Hence Kitchener's first intention was to hoist both the British and the Egyptian flags together at Fashoda, as he had already done at Khartoum and other places in the

Sudan, but there were objections to this being done at Fashoda, because as Marchand had arrived there before the Anglo-Egyptian re-conquest had been finally achieved, he might take strong exception to the hoisting of the British flag and argue that as that part of the Sudan was not in Egypt's possession at the time of the arrival of the French expedition, France had a perfect right to occupy it. Kitchener therefore decided to hoist only the Egyptian flag—which happened to be almost identical with the Turkish flag—and to inform Commandant Marchand that the re-conquest of the Sudan implied the restoration of Ottoman suzerainty over the country.

On the following day at dawn, all the craft flying the Egyptian flag, the flotilla continued its progress southwards. At a point about two miles below Fashoda a large native rowing-boat paddled by twelve stalwart Senegalese was seen to be approaching. An immense tricolour flag, so huge that its end almost trailed in the water, floated from a pole at its stern. The native boat pulled up alongside the *Dal*. Senegalese soldiers clambered on board and formed up on the deck. A black sergeant stepped forward and handed Kitchener a letter from Commandant Marchand. It was in reply to Kitchener's letter to him. After congratulating Kitchener and his valiant army on their great victory over the Dervish hordes, Marchand announced that 'by order of the French Government' he had occupied the region of the Ghazal River (*Bahr el Ghazal*) up to Fashoda, that he had arrived there on the 10th July, and that he had negotiated a treaty with the chief who had placed his territory under French protection.

The French Government had thus faced Kitchener with a *fait accompli*! It was a problem only to be met with the exercise of the utmost tact.

The Senegalese having returned to their boat, it was taken in tow by the *Dal*, which then continued its journey southwards.

When Fashoda at last became visible, the French flag could be seen flying from a mast in the middle of the village. Commandant Marchand's force, which consisted of 120 Senegalese armed with rifles and some Sudanese armed with spears, could also be seen drawn up near the old Egyptian fort.

For both commanders, French and English, it was a critical moment. In reaching Fashoda, Marchand had accomplished a remarkable feat. Right across the African continent he had brought three complete boats of steel with the sections and machinery of a steam-launch which

#### A DIPLOMATIC CRISIS

had been assembled by his men on the Nile. He had also brought a few machine-guns to deal with any possible opposition. But he had no artillery, and a skirmish with Dervishes had seriously depleted his stock of ammunition. Indeed, if Kitchener had not already destroyed the Khalifa's army, it is all but certain that the French expedition would before long have been annihilated by the Dervishes.

The Sirdar's flotilla moored opposite the old Government buildings. Commandants Marchand and Germain and five other French officers boarded one of the British gunboats by a gangway-plank and were conducted by Commander Keppel (afterwards Admiral Sir Colin Keppel) on board the *Dal*, where they were introduced to Kitchener and Wingate. All the British and French officers then withdrew except Kitchener, Wingate, Marchand and Germain, who sat down round a small table aft of the cabins.

Kitchener began by complimenting Marchand most cordially upon his 'magnificent' achievement, but at once proceeded to make it clear beyond any shadow of doubt, though in the most civil manner possible, that the presence of a French force in the Valley of the Nile was a direct challenge to both Egypt and Great Britain. Marchand, with markedly quiet dignity and soldierly bearing, replied that he was in Fashoda by order of the French Government. Kitchener warned him that, notwithstanding this, he intended to hoist the Egyptian flag and trusted that no opposition would be offered, to which Marchand responded that, if this were done, he and his small force would be compelled to bow to what appeared to be the inevitable, and, in view of the overwhelming superiority of the force with which Kitchener could oppose him, to 'die at their posts'.

From the deck of one of the British gunboats, Major Newcombe could see everything that was happening, although he could hear nothing of what was actually said. Kitchener, his long legs stretched out before him in a negligent attitude, occasionally waved one hand deliberately to emphasize a point; Marchand sat very upright throughout the meeting, frequently gesticulating with both hands. Kitchener did his utmost to persuade Marchand not to resort to extreme measures; Marchand for a time insisted that there could be no alternative, but, by degrees, he was brought to change his view and at length he asked if it would be possible for Kitchener to give him time to refer to his Government for instructions, pending receipt of which he would neither haul down the French flag nor

accept Kitchener's offer to escort him to Cairo. Kitchener agreed, and he and Marchand parted on terms of complete and uninterrupted courtesy.

The Frenchmen then left the steamer. Wingate went ashore in company with Lord Edward Cecil (then serving in the Grenadier Guards) and Commandant Germain. Passing through the French lines, they agreed upon the spot where the Egyptian flag would be broken—a ruined bastion of the old Fashoda Fort, situated on the only road leading to the interior, about five hundred yards distant from where the French flag was flying.

In the course of the afternoon the flotilla sailed three hundred yards farther upstream, and it was here that Kitchener's troops landed. A flagpole had meanwhile been erected and the troops drew up as on ceremonial parade. The Egyptian gunners, commanded by Captain M. Peake, prepared to fire the salute to the flag, and, in the brief interval, Kitchener, waving his hand towards Major Jackson, called out: 'A little music, please, Jackson.' Almost at once the band of the 11th Sudanese began to play, and, as the salute of twenty-one guns was being fired, the Egyptian flag was hoisted.

After the salute, Kitchener and Wingate proceeded together to the round hut, or *tukul*, which Commandant Marchand had made his headquarters. This hut was in the propinquity of the fort and a small but attractive vegetable garden already surrounded it. Marchand produced a bottle of champagne, and he and Germain drank to the health of Queen Victoria, while Kitchener and Wingate pledged the French Republic. The British officers then returned to the *Dal* and the flotilla continued its voyage still farther into the heart of Africa.

Kitchener, however, left a Sudanese battalion behind at Fashoda, and this small force, commanded by Jackson, remained encamped not far from the French, so that for the time being the French and the Egyptian flags floated almost amicably together.

In contrast with the restraint and dignity shown by the military representatives of Britain and France in the insignificant little river-station—half-jungle, half-swamp—in far-off Central Africa, the issue was being debated in Paris and in London with feelings at fever-heat and the gathering of war-clouds. In one section of the British Press, as in the ill-considered utterances of the less scrupulous of the British politicians, the comments were such as to infuriate the French, while on the other side of the Channel an equally inconsiderate Press

#### THE GORDON MEMORIAL COLLEGE

averred that an ever *perfide Albion* had insulted the honour of France ; French Deputies talked wildly of revenge : and all Europe gazed fascinated while the two countries drifted nearer and nearer to war.

It was fortunate that throughout this crisis Her Majesty's Liberal Opposition unanimously and firmly supported Lord Salisbury's Conservative Government. Lord Rosebery, the Liberal leader, using the utmost resources of his powerful oratory, declared that Great Britain had been conciliatory but that 'her conciliatory disposition had been misunderstood'. If, he said, the nations of the world were under the impression that the ancient spirit of Great Britain was extinct, or that her resources were weakened, or that her people were less determined than ever to maintain the rights and honour of the country's flag, they were making a mistake which could only end in unparalleled disaster.

The French Government, seeing that England's mind was made up, took the heroic and unpopular course of retiring from its untenable position, and decided not to press its claim to what one of the French newspapers then described as the 'desolate and unknown swamp in Central Africa'.

Kitchener left Fashoda on the 19th September, and early in October he paid a brief visit to England. There he took the first steps towards the realization of a project that was near to his heart—a College at Khartoum in memory of Gordon. The appeal which he launched in England was made (to use his own words) 'on behalf of a race dependent on our mercy, in the name of Gordon, and in the cause of that civilization which is the life of the Empire of Britain'.

A fund was opened by the Lord Mayor at the Mansion House, and the public, responding in the spirit with which Kitchener's appeal was made, quickly subscribed a sum of £135,000.

By the end of December Kitchener was back in the Sudan, and on the 5th January, 1899, the foundation-stone of the Gordon Memorial College was laid by Lord Cromer amid the ruins of Khartoum.

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Doubtless the most widely-known ex-student of the Gordon Memorial College is General Neguib. His father, an Egyptian officer, went to the Sudan with the Anglo-Egyptian Army of Occupation, and, remaining there, married a lady of partly Sudanese blood. Egypt's President-to-be, after completing his third year at the College, became an assistant at the Wellcome Tropical Research Laboratory

## FASHODA

at Khartoum (equipped at the expense of Sir Henry Wellcome), but later left the Sudan and entered the Military School at Cairo.

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On the 19th January (1899) Great Britain and Egypt signed the agreement which provided for the re-conquered Sudan to remain under the joint control of Great Britain and Egypt. This agreement acknowledged Britain's title by 'right of conquest' and provided that she should share in the present settlement and future working and development of the country. It also proclaimed that the British and Egyptian flags should float side by side throughout the Sudan.

Under this agreement the supreme civil and military command was vested in a Governor-General to be appointed by Khedivial Decree on the recommendation of the British Government, and Lord Kitchener became Governor-General while retaining the appointment of Sirdar of the Egyptian Army.

## A NEW EGYPT—IN THE THROES OF BIRTH

**A**NOMALOUS beyond any power of the pen to describe had the status of Egypt now become. Though still remaining an acknowledged province of Turkey, the country continued to be occupied by the army of an openly avowed friendly Power, and, though governed in theory, as it still was, by the Khedive on behalf of the Sultan of Turkey, the Occupying Power could not avoid full responsibility for its solvency, stability, and security. Lord Cromer therefore remained, and was obliged to remain, the actual ruler of Egypt, and he, unable as yet to call upon a sufficient number of educated Egyptians with the experience and integrity needed for the most responsible posts, had by this time built up a Civil Service which has been aptly summed up as consisting of 'British heads and Egyptian hands'. With this administrative machine—in the dependency of a foreign Power—Lord Cromer, with no more legal authority than the Consuls-General of the other Powers, was now laying the foundations of constitutional government in a land in which (to quote from the Dufferin Report to the Gladstone Ministry) 'even the germs of constitutional freedom were non-existent'. As if this task were not in itself sufficiently difficult, it was made the more formidable by the obligation to consult every Power in Europe before a single important step could be taken, and by the jealously guarded and widely abused privileges of the subjects of the Capitulatory Powers; privileges which made it possible, for instance, for the foreign tradesman to sell adulterated food and drink with impunity, which helped the foreign proprietor of a gambling-hell to defy the police, which enabled the foreign smuggler to conduct his illicit trade within sight of the Custom House and under the very eyes of the Customs officials—and so on!

An actual example of the way the Capitulations were abused is perhaps necessary. The incident selected as being to some extent typical took place when Russell Pasha (Sir Thomas Russell) was Commandant of the Cairo City Police. It occurred in the quarter

of Cairo where the vice of the East met and mingled with the vice of the West.<sup>1</sup> The crowds that filled its main street were of all nationalities and all ages ; venerable grey-beards in robe and turban, wild-looking fellahin in begrimed gown and dirty fez, Europeans, Sudanese, Levantines. Cafés, bars, eating-houses succeeded one another on both sides of the street, each with its shrieking orchestra, each, at night, with its glaring lights ; and the tinkle of guitar, mandolin, and zither mingled with the minor modes of the native *Kanoon* and *Kemengeh*, all of them striving against trumpets and drums that beat on the senses with deafening intensity. ‘Buggies’, donkey-carts, saddle-horses, and an occasional motor-car of the ‘old crock’ type, passed slowly and with difficulty up and down the street, their passage disputed throughout its length by the dense cosmopolitan throng which overflowed from its packed pavements.

There were no women in the crowded street, but a glance upward revealed them seated on or leaning over the narrow balconies of the many-storeyed houses. Window after window showed its quota of painted faces and half-clad forms. One particular unlicensed house, owned by a Frenchwoman, had for long defied the control of the police. Inviolability of domicile being the corner-stone of European privilege under the Capitulations, the police could only enter this or any other foreign establishment with the consent and presence of the Consul or his representative. Russell Pasha, therefore, having made up his mind to investigate, took with him the French Consular *cawas* in his customary picturesque Oriental uniform and with his long curved official sword. Admission having been demanded, a spy-hole in the door was opened and a voice informed the police that the proprietress was now an Italian lady. They withdrew but reappeared a week later, this time accompanied by the Italian Consular *cawas*. Again the spy-hole was opened, but the voice now announced a further change of ownership ; the proprietress, it said, was the subject of another Power. A third visit was therefore necessary. But on this third occasion the British police officer was by good fortune and good management able to take with him no less than seven Consular *cawases*. One by one the fictitious proprietresses were defeated, and the law could at last do its work.

Difficulties did not deter Lord Cromer. By this time the country was not merely solvent, it was providing an annual surplus, an

<sup>1</sup> Drastic steps have since been taken by the Government which have restored the district's respectability.

## LORD CROMER BUILDS A NEW EGYPT

achievement that had been attained *pari passu* with a revolutionary reduction in taxation. The stranglehold for so long exerted by the foreign creditors was relaxed ; funds were available for Egypt's own requirements ; vast irrigation schemes were initiated and great Nile Dams built ; land which at the time of Cromer's arrival was on the point of passing out of the hands of Egyptians into those of foreign moneylenders was again brought into cultivation and retained by its rightful owners<sup>1</sup> ; slavery was abolished, thousands of slaves had been set free, the possession of a slave had become a criminal offence ; justice had 'ceased to be a commodity to be hawked in the market place and knocked down to the highest bidder'<sup>2</sup> ; the prison system was reformed ; prisoners no longer had, even before trial, to 'live for months like wild beasts, without change of clothing, half-starved, ignorant of the fate of their families and bewailing their own'<sup>3</sup> ; sanitary and medical administration were modernized ; hospitals, medical and veterinary schools established ; confidence in the country's administration was complete and the impression of stability was such that Englishmen of the highest ability were prepared to leave posts at Home and go to Egypt, with the result that Cromer secured some of the best British brains to assist him. Commerce prospered ; foreign capital poured into the country ; great business houses were founded—most of them by foreigners—and flourished under the novel stimulus of a stable financial system. And so the foreign community increased in numbers and substance. Alexandria, whose renaissance had begun during the reign of Mohammed Ali, now grew to be almost worthy of its imposing past. At Cairo the new European Quarter not only reached but adorned the banks of the Nile, its palatial hotels helping Egypt to outbid all rivals and become the world's most favoured winter resort, a proud distinction which it continued to hold until it was forfeited by the continual political upheavals of recent years.

In the far-distant Sudan, too, civilization was spreading its benefits. One of Kitchener's first tasks after his appointment as Governor-General had been to plan the new city of Khartoum, and on the ruins of the drab little town of mud-houses plastered with cow-dung that Gordon had known, there quickly rose the clean, almost palatial city of modern Khartoum, built to Kitchener's own design by a Department of Works administered by British Royal Engineers.

<sup>1</sup> The Marquess of Zetland : *Lord Cromer*, page 133.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, page 493.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, page 134.

The task that had confronted Kitchener on his appointment was a stupendous one. The area he was called upon to rule was nearly a million square miles in extent, but less than two thousand square miles were under cultivation, the remainder being, in Cromer's words, 'desert, swamp, and primeval forest'. This vast region was inhabited by fewer than two million of the blackest of negroes, 'whose degree of civilization ranged from nothing to very little above that figure',<sup>1</sup> and who, as we have already seen, were the constant prey of ruthless Arab slave-dealers. Before the Mahdi's rise to power the population of the Sudan had been about eight and a half millions, but during the period of Dervish misrule between six and seven million had been swept away by famine, disease, and inter-tribal wars.

To the pacification of this enormous province and to the development of its resources, Kitchener now devoted his immense energies for about a year, and, for this purpose, the entire administration had to be organized from zero. His Governor-Generalship, however, was cut short at the end of 1899 when he was summoned to play his part as Chief of Staff to Lord Roberts in South Africa. Sir Reginald Wingate then succeeded him, and it was under Wingate's wise guidance (with Rudolf Slatin—now Slatin Pasha—as his Inspector-General) that the Sudan passed from infancy to early manhood.

To return to the affairs of Egypt itself. It was 'the first time in all its history that the well-being of the people of Egypt had been recognized as a trust'.<sup>2</sup> Lord Cromer, with unconquerable patience, met and countered the covert opposition of the old ruling classes whose ill-gotten privileges were one after the other wrested from them by his sweeping reforms. But he had other, and far greater, difficulties to contend with, chief among them being the obstacles placed in his way by France. The policy adopted by the French was, as Cromer has pointed out, no more and no less than 'to leave no stone unturned to render the task of Great Britain in Egypt impossible'.<sup>3</sup> For France, having forfeited her erstwhile predominant position, when, in 1882, she had turned her back on her British partner, now endeavoured to regain her lost prestige by 'doing all that was in her power to paralyse her former ally'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lord Lloyd : *Egypt since Cromer* (Macmillan, London, 1933), vol. I, page 118.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Auckland Colvin : *The Making of Modern Egypt* (Seeley, London, 1906), page 210.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Zetland : *Lord Cromer*, page 136.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Auckland Colvin : Op. cit., page 128.

It was in anti-British circles in Paris that Mustafa Kamel, the founder of modern Egyptian Nationalism, was encouraged to make his first inflammatory speeches against the British Occupation.<sup>1</sup> Mustafa Kamel owed the inception of his career as a political agitator to a Parisian lady, Madame Juliette Adam. Through her influence, while he was studying law in Paris, he became secretary to an anti-British French politician,<sup>2</sup> and on returning to Egypt he formed the Nationalist Party, founded an anti-British newspaper, and systematically propagated his political creed among the educated and semi-educated youth of Egypt, many of whom flocked to join his Party.

The speed of the country's progress under Lord Cromer's guidance had indeed made the art of government seem to be something that could be easily and quickly acquired, and an independent, honestly administered, constitutionally governed Egypt, without any help from Great Britain, appeared to be a quickly realizable ideal in the minds of an increasing number of young and to some extent educated Egyptians.

Not a few people in England shared the view of 'Young Egypt', and, unfortunately for Lord Cromer, Liberal England even went a step further by insisting that the introduction of democratic institutions was an urgent and inescapable obligation. Cromer, on the other hand, was convinced that the form of government that had been evolved by the so-called democracies of the West could never be made to work in Egypt without some transformation of the national character, and this, he wrote, 'must necessarily be a slow process'.<sup>3</sup> All that he now set himself to do, therefore, was to erect some sort of barrier, however feeble, against the intolerable tyranny<sup>4</sup> from which the Egyptians had suffered in the past. As for the transfer of administrative control from British to Egyptian hands, 'it was too much to expect', he wrote, 'when scarcely a generation had elapsed since the close of the orgy of corrupt and despotic rule in which Ismail Pasha and his predecessors had indulged, that a whole staff should have been created capable of piloting unaided the very complicated machinery necessary for the government of cosmopolitan Egypt'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kirk : Op. cit., pages 115 and 116.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lord Lloyd : *Egypt since Cromer*, vol. i, page 41.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Cromer : *Abbas II* (Macmillan, London, 1915), page xxiii.

<sup>4</sup> Lord Zetland : Op. cit., page 294.

<sup>5</sup> Lord Cromer : *Abbas II*, page xiv.

His wisely considered policy, therefore, took the form of a carefully guarded series of experiments in the direction of political progress, each of them critically watched before being extended. By this means he hoped that we should eventually (quoting his own words) ‘leave behind us a fairly good, strong, and above all things stable Government, which will obviate anarchy and bankruptcy, and will thus prevent the Egyptian Question from again becoming a serious cause of trouble in Europe’.<sup>1</sup>

Lord Cromer’s retirement in 1907 was a momentous event that brought to mind the ‘Dropping of the Pilot’ in Tenniel’s immortal cartoon. The magnitude of the task he had accomplished had filled the world with wonder. For when, in 1883, he had arrived in Egypt to take up his duties as Consul-General, he had ‘found the mass of Egyptian people plunged in the slough of despond by the ruthless despotism and extravagant profligacy of their rulers’.<sup>2</sup> During the twenty-four years that had elapsed since then, he had transformed a bankrupt and exhausted country into a land of plenty and contentment unprecedented in its own annals,<sup>3</sup> with its financial credit in the money markets of the world standing—miracle of miracles—second only to that of Great Britain and France.

In the farewell speech that he made in the Cairo Opera House to those who had jointly with himself borne the Atlas-burden of the past years, he declared that the difference between himself and his Liberal opponents in England was ‘not so much one of principle as of degree. They wish’, he said, ‘to gallop. I consider that a steady jog-trot is the pace best suited to the interests of this country. It is a pace that has done us good service in the past. I say it should be continued ; never relaxing into a walk or breaking into a gallop ; and my strong conviction is that if the pace be greatly mended, a serious risk will be incurred that the horse will come down and break his knees.’

With a Liberal Government in office in England, and its Press sedulously fostering the idea that the time had come when Egyptian institutions could, and should, be remodelled in a Liberal sense, it was natural that the instructions given to Lord Cromer’s successor—Sir Eldon Gorst—should have been that an entirely new spirit must be breathed into the Egyptian administration. Guidance by British

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, page 564.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Valentine Chirol : *The Egyptian Problem* (Macmillan, London, 1921), page 78.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

officials was therefore reduced to a minimum ; the Egyptian Ministers were encouraged to act on their own responsibility ; Egyptian officials were given the opportunity to learn the lessons of self-government from actual experience, even at the risk of reduced efficiency.

The stability of the system so long and so laboriously built up by Lord Cromer was immediately threatened. There was a steady increase in lawlessness. The fellahin showed signs of losing that respect for authority which had been bred in them by centuries of oppression and which had not yet been replaced by a sense of corporate responsibility. Serious abuses which had been suppressed now began to revive.<sup>1</sup>

'The general result of the experiment', wrote Lord Cromer, 'was to put back the hands of the clock',<sup>2</sup> and Sir Eldon Gorst had to tell the Home Government in his first Annual Report that until the people of Egypt had made 'a great deal more progress in the direction of moral and intellectual development, the creation of representative institutions, as understood in England, would only cause more harm than good'.

In 1911 Gorst died. In less skilful hands than his the failure of the experiment would have been more evident still.<sup>3</sup> It had however shown the British Government that their only course now was to appoint a man capable of acting the part of a benevolent despot ; and he must be a man of high character and forceful personality, esteemed—outstandingly so—in the eyes of the people both of Egypt and of England.

Upon the infallible advice of Lord Cromer, the fateful choice fell upon Lord Kitchener.

His arrival in Egypt was signalized by a remarkable burst of optimism. His prestige was superlative. As he stepped from beneath the towering portal of the Cairo Main Station into the great open area of the Bab-el-Hadid Square, the densely packed waiting crowd, gay with all the colours of an Oriental throng, broke into one universal roar of welcome to the man who had conquered the Dervishes ; who had created the Egyptian Army. As Commander-in-Chief of all the British Forces he represented the military strength of England, but far better and above all was the call that came from his strength of character, embodying stern justice tempered with kindly human

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lord Lloyd : *Egypt since Cromer*, vol. i, pages 84 *et seq.*, and Lord Cromer : *Abbas II*, page xii.

<sup>2</sup> *Abbas II*, pages xiv and xv.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, page xiv.

sympathy. As an Egyptian (Arabic) newspaper pithily observed : 'If we are to be ruled, let us be ruled by a manly man.' And again : 'Kitchener's appointment should be welcome, for his justice in the army is proverbial, and Egypt is hungry for justice.'

Kitchener, who had but little patience with those who advocated the introduction of Western political institutions to the East, determined to promote the welfare of Egypt in his own way. 'Party spirit', he once said, 'is to the peoples of the Orient like strong drink to uncivilized African natives.'

His government of Egypt was therefore inevitably that of a benevolent despot. Once more the millennial Phoenix, after burning its nest, had revived, and Pharaonic rule almost automatically reinstated itself.

Kitchener's plans were based upon a clear insight into the country's needs, and, despite subversive movements and the growing strength of the Nationalist Party under the Leadership of Zaghloul Pasha, he quickly gained the confidence and the affection of almost every section of the Egyptian public.

When he sailed from Egypt just before the outbreak of the First World War—never to return—the 'New Egypt' was rising rapidly from the foundations so well laid by Lord Cromer.

And British prestige was at its zenith.

\*       \*       \*

When the First World War broke out in August, 1914, our position in Egypt, always anomalous, soon became paradoxical, for our enemies stole a march on us ; a secret alliance between them and Turkey was signed ; Turkish troops began to mass on the Egyptian frontier : German officers flocked into Syria ; the Hedjaz Railway was used for German military purposes. And when the British Foreign Secretary pressed for a statement from the Sultan on whether he intended to invade Egypt or not, nothing could have shown more glaringly the paradox of the British position than the Sultan's reply : 'How could anyone credit me with the intention of invading one of my own provinces ?'

The one indispensable step necessary to regularize this position was a straightforward declaration that Great Britain no longer recognized Turkish suzerainty, and at the eleventh hour, after the Allies had actually declared war on Turkey, this was done. A proclamation, couched in unequivocal terms, formally declared that

'ENGLAND'S RESTRAINT'

the suzerainty of Turkey over Egypt was terminated and that Egypt would henceforth constitute a British Protectorate.

In view of all that has happened since, it is of interest to recall the impression made by this announcement on the mind of Arthur Weigall, the famous Egyptologist: 'A very general tribute', he wrote at the time, 'was paid both by natives and Europeans to the unselfish restraint of England in refraining from taking forcible possession of Egypt, when such a movement could have been backed by an irresistible army . . . England still adheres to the original policy of training the Egyptians to govern themselves, and the fact that no advantage whatsoever has been taken of the helplessness of Egypt has given the greatest satisfaction to the natives.'<sup>1</sup>

These words, penned in 1915, by an outstanding writer whose experience of all classes and races in Egypt was unquestionable, will no doubt recur to the reader's mind as the remainder of the Egyptian drama is scene by scene and act by act unfolded.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur E. P. Brome Weigall, late Inspector-General of the Antiquities Department of the Egyptian Government: *A History of Events in Egypt from 1798 to 1914* (Blackwood, Edinburgh and London, 1915), pages 299 and 300.

## THE RIGHTS OF A SMALL NATION

**T**HE Khedive Abbas II, who was in Constantinople when the War broke out, did not return to Egypt, and it was not long before the British Government were 'in possession of ample evidence' that he had 'definitely thrown in his lot with His Majesty's enemies'.<sup>1</sup> On the day, therefore, that followed the proclamation of Egypt as a British Protectorate, a further proclamation announced that His Highness Abbas II was no longer Khedive of Egypt and that the ruling position had been offered to and accepted by Prince Hussein *with the title of Sultan*. Prince Hussein was the eldest living male of the family of Mohammed Ali.

British troops now began to arrive in Egypt. An immense camp—a huge town of military huts—sprang up near Heliopolis almost on the site of Kléber's rout of the Turks in March, 1800. Another came into being within sight of the battlefield on which Bonaparte had defeated the Mamelukes in the so-called Battle of the Pyramids in 1798, so that 'forty centuries'—to quote Napoleon's historic miscalculation—now 'looked down' from the Pyramids of Ghizeh not upon a French Army but upon British troops fighting as allies of France. British troops were also quartered at Abbassieh, where the Army of Islam had defeated the Roman Army of Occupation in A.D. 630, and whence, in 1882, Sir Charles Watson had set out with his hundred and fifty men to take possession of the Cairo Citadel. Cairo and Alexandria were before long almost entirely surrounded by British military camps, and khaki became predominant in their colourful, crowded streets as English, Australian, New Zealand, Indian, West Indian, and other British troops mingled with their cosmopolitan populations.

Meanwhile—in February, 1915—the Turco-German army reached the Suez Canal, a grim conflict ensued, and the Turks and their allies retired, but Egypt continued to play a vital part in the War as the necessary base for the Gallipoli campaign; and, as more and more

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated December 19th, 1914, from the Acting British Consul-General in Cairo to His Highness Prince Hussein.

#### THE 'RIGHTS OF SMALL NATIONS'

British troops arrived, hospital ships plied backwards and forwards between the Gallipoli shambles and the Egyptian ports; 'Red Crescent' trains then bore the wounded to Cairo Station, and from there an unbroken succession of Australian ambulances conveyed them to hospitals or to hotels or schools, and even to factories and an amusement park, which, with the assistance of a superlatively efficient Anglo-Egyptian Civil Service, were in the twinkling of an eyelid converted into military hospitals.

Finally came the great campaign to drive the enemy from Egyptian territory eastward of the Suez Canal, to break the resistance of Turkey, and to set free the immense British force immobilized in the Middle East for service on the Western Front. It was then that place-names which will now be familiar to the readers of this book crept into the news : Kantara, El Arish, Khan Yunes, Gaza!—'blood, sweat, tears', and, at long last, victory!

Meanwhile, in 1917, Sultan Hussein had died and Fuad had succeeded to the Sultanate of Egypt.

★ ★ ★

When the Armistice was signed on the 11th November, 1918, the world began to look for the precise fulfilment of the profuse promises made by the professional politicians. Many Egyptians were bound, therefore, to remember, first and foremost, that the War was said to have been fought for the 'rights of small nations'. As a result, immediately after the cessation of hostilities, Zaghloul Pasha, accompanied by two other leaders of the advanced Nationalist group, called on Sir Reginald Wingate (then High Commissioner of the new British Protectorate of Egypt) and expressed their desire to go to London to state Egypt's case for complete independence. Sir Reginald, believing that Egypt's apparently insolvable problems were capable of solution, recommended to the British Government that they should be received in London, even though Zaghloul Pasha could not at that time claim to be the chosen representative of the Egyptian nation, since no election had been held or plebiscite taken.

Before the British Government's reply reached Cairo, Rushdi Pasha, the Prime Minister, quite properly claimed for himself the right to represent Egypt at any discussions that might take place in Europe, and Wingate, thinking it only right that he, too, should be allowed to go, recommended that Rushdi also should be received. But once again the advice of the 'man on the spot' was disastrously ignored,

and the Foreign Secretary's reply to Wingate set in motion a train of events even more serious than those which had followed the bombardment of Alexandria in 1882. The reply was not only to the effect that 'no useful purpose would be served' by allowing a Nationalist Delegation (*Wafd*) to go to London, but also that even the proposed visit of the Prime Minister would 'not be opportune'. The reason given was that the Foreign Secretary and other Ministers would be absent from London in connection with the peace negotiations.

Rushdi Pasha at once resigned.

Wingate, with the clear-sighted vision of a man who knew and loved Egypt and felt a deep concern for the welfare of its people, watched the gathering storm of anti-British feeling with profound anxiety. Daily the situation grew more tense, and at last the Home Government called Wingate to London to explain the situation.

To London Wingate went, only to find on arrival that no responsible Minister was there to receive him. The Peace Conference at Paris had begun its sittings and the affairs of Egypt, having waited so long, could, it was presumed, wait yet longer.

Resentment against the apparently depreciatory attitude of Great Britain now grew apace and it would have needed no election at this juncture to prove that Zaghloul Pasha at last had the support of the majority of the Egyptian nation. The position was indeed even uglier than it appeared on the surface in view of the strong evidence that foreign revolutionaries had indoctrinated many of the people with ideas that might well lead to chaos.

On the 3rd March, 1919, Zaghloul Pasha and some of his political associates presented a petition to the Sultan, the intention of which, it was generally understood, was to bring pressure upon His Highness of a kind to deter ~~him~~ from appointing a new Government.<sup>1</sup> This was a challenge which the British Government could not decline, and the senior British military officer in Cairo commanded Zaghloul Pasha to discontinue his activities. Zaghloul refused. Within forty-eight hours he and three of his colleagues were arrested, carried to Port Said, conducted on board a steamer bound for Malta, and left there in exile.

The reaction was immediate. The news that the Nationalist leaders were on the high seas under duress brought out excited students in their thousands to parade the streets of Cairo shouting 'Down with the English', 'Long live Zaghloul'. And on the flanks and in the

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. H.M. Stationery Office, 1921, page 14.

wakes of these otherwise harmless processions gathered the dregs of the population hankering to exploit this or any other opportunity that came their way. Soon the city was in the hands of one of the most dangerous of all mobs, a rabble of robed and turbanned or befezzed hooligans who broke into and looted shops and stoned Europeans and British soldiers to the accompaniment of slogans invoking the sacred cause of 'Independence'. The rioting spread and strikes broke out everywhere on the now all too familiar demagogic pattern. Mobs of terrorists soon filled every street in turn with infamy to the tune of pseudo-patriotic shouts of 'Long live Egypt', 'Death to the English'. In the name of 'Independence', venal gangs of well-bribed young ruffians smashed and burned the city's tram-cars and in the same bogus name the plate-glass windows of European shops were shattered. Blood began to flow. Terrified Europeans fired on mobs from their houses, which were then promptly attacked and set on fire. Lives were lost. Barricades flew up to prevent military intervention. Armoured cars began to patrol the streets. And, although there was no evidence of any preconceived plan, the riots quickly spread to the provinces.

At long last the tranquillity of the 'Cromer régime' had come to an end. During those thirty-six years of peace, prosperity, and progress—which European residents had come to look upon as the natural and permanent order of things—'no general discontent had prevailed' (to repeat Lord Cromer's own statement) 'of which the agitator, the religious fanatic, or the political intriguer could make use as a lever to further his own designs'. But all had now changed and that statement was no longer true. On the contrary, all classes everywhere were nursing grievances *for which the British were blamed*. And the reason was that so many of the younger Englishmen in the Anglo-Egyptian Civil Service, in spite of all attempts of the authorities to hold them, had managed to slip away and join the Forces. Hence, only a relatively small number of British officials were left to cope with the countless abnormal problems created by the War, with the result that for the first time for nearly forty years the Egyptian official came into his own. And so it came about that when the British Army needed Egyptian camels, donkeys, fodder, and cereals for the campaign against the Turks, and paid for them at rates which were not merely generous but often exorbitant, so much of the money had stuck to the fingers of Levantine contractors, Egyptian Civil Servants, and village 'head-men' that the scanty dole which eventually reached

From time to time invaders forming a patrician caste, or dominant rulers from without, have welded the diverse elements of the population into Empires which have waxed and waned with the political genius of their ruling families. To each domination in turn the fellah has yielded an uncomplaining obedience so long as the strong hand of the ruler enforced law and order in the community : against each in turn on the first signs of failing power the fellah has risen and wreaked his vengeance in a fierce orgy of bovine destruction. Those who saw the almost unbelievable destruction wrought to property by the infuriated mobs of 1919 will have no difficulty in reading the riddle of the systematically shattered fragments of the splendid statues of gods and kings and temples of the Old Kingdom that cover the desert plateau around the Pyramids of Ghizeh. In spite of its glaringly modern and democratic setting, the rising of 1919, once set in motion, proceeded on strictly traditional lines.'

For a time this revolt against British rule followed a course almost identical with that against the French in 1798. History, however, ceased for a short time to repeat itself. For Bonaparte, it will be recalled, sent his artillery to the summit of the hills dominating Cairo, bombarded the city, reduced it to submission, shot the leaders of the revolt, and levied a burdensome fine, after which he was able to announce : '*La sedition est endormie.*' The British Government's characteristic alternative to this method was that of appointing a 'Mission' to 'enquire and report'. Lord Milner was appointed chairman of this Mission which was officially designated the 'Special Mission to Egypt', but is more generally known as the 'Milner Mission'.

Before this was done, however, Mr. Lloyd George suddenly decided to supersede Sir Reginald Wingate as High Commissioner and to appoint Lord Allenby as Special High Commissioner in his place. Thus, a High Commissioner whose knowledge of Egypt and its inhabitants was unrivalled, was replaced by a man who, great soldier though he was, had but little knowledge of the Egyptian problem, and 'in place of definite orders he was given only a vague policy, not always easy to interpret and sometimes impossible to execute'.<sup>1</sup>

He arrived at Cairo on the 25th March, 1919, by which time, as a result of the prudent and soldierly operations of General Bulfin, the situation had become more or less stable in the capital and in many

<sup>1</sup> Earl Wavell : *Allenby in Egypt*, being vol. ii. of *Allenby : a study in greatness* (Harrap, London, 1943), page 53.

'DOWN WITH THE ENGLISH'

armed, for no Englishman had thought of carrying a weapon of any sort for self-defence since 1882. The platforms of the stations through which the train passed were all crowded with excited people who waved flags and shouted : 'Down with the English !' Drawn up at the platform of a village station was a train from Cairo packed with roughs armed with clubs, pikes, and other weapons, and when the train from the south came to a standstill it was boarded by this mob from Cairo, who rushed along the corridors with shouts of 'Where are the English ?'

As the Cairo-bound train continued its northward journey the eight Englishmen defended themselves against these assailants as best they could with soda-water bottles and luggage until Deirut station was reached. There the train was awaited by a dense mass of people in a state of the wildest hysteria. Stones crashed through the windows ; doors were smashed by clubs ; and the shouts and curses of the mob revealed the diabolical mendacity of the propaganda that had brought the situation about. 'We want the English who seized our grain,' they yelled. 'We want the English who took our camels and our money, who orphaned our children, who imprisoned Saad Pasha, who dismissed Rushdi Pasha, who killed our women and children in Cairo, who fired at Al Azhar and the Mosque of Hussein.'<sup>1</sup>

The ghastly end of these eight Englishmen will remain undescribed in these pages.

Cairo was for a time cut off from the rest of the world as completely as if it had been a city in the moon or Mars. All communications—trains, telegraphs, telephones, and postal services—had vanished. An ominous red glow in the sky hovered at intervals over the countryside, telling of burning railway stations and other Government property. European communities in provincial towns were beleaguered and in the most desperate straits, by no means all of them escaping with their lives. And when the maximum degree of futility had been achieved the situation passed rapidly out of the hands of the Nationalist leaders into those of irresponsible fanatics, 'supported', to quote from the laconic but grim official report, 'by a certain number of undesirable foreign elements'.

The stage now reached in Egyptian history was clearly and concisely summarized by 'Tawwaf' in his book, *Egypt, 1919*. 'No one', he then said, 'who has to deal with Egypt can afford to forget the unchanging nature of the foundations of society in the Valley of the Nile.'

<sup>1</sup> 'Tawwaf', Op. cit.

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### LORD ALLENBY'S RESTRAINT

other parts of the country, though some regions were still in a state of chaos, and dangerous embers of disaffection, which it would now be Allenby's task to extinguish, were still smouldering everywhere.

'It would have been easy enough,' wrote Lord Wavell, 'with the force at his disposal, to take stern measures of repression and retaliation';<sup>1</sup> but Allenby, believing that the country's hatred of England had been artificially stimulated and would flicker out if a just and generous settlement could be made, first sought a friendly understanding.

Well aware that any sign of clemency would be looked upon by most Englishmen in Egypt as evidence of weakness, he was nevertheless of the opinion that as the riots had been caused by a deep sense of grievance, the situation was one that called for a conciliatory attitude; and, having decided upon a course which he knew would be unpopular, he unhesitatingly pursued it, beginning by pardoning some of the offenders who had been convicted by military courts and commuting the sentences of others.

The result quickly became apparent. Strikes broke out. Processions paraded the streets. Cairo again vibrated with riot and bloodshed. And at intervals a British officer or Civil Servant fell victim to an assassin's bullet in one of the outwardly quiet streets of the city or its suburbs.

Sir Reginald Wingate, who had himself favoured the sympathetic consideration of Egyptian views *before* the outbreak of violence, now—on being consulted by the Home Government—advised the issue of a proclamation which would make it clear that 'the only method by which the agitators could gain a hearing was by at once returning to law and order. To give way immediately', he warned them, 'would be fraught with the gravest dangers, not only to the maintenance of our position in Egypt but to the whole of our North African possessions. Our power and authority will have practically gone, and we shall be at the mercy of agitators at any time they care to repeat the methods by which they will say they attained their ends.'

Allenby, however, determined as he was to restore law and order if at all possible by means that would avoid the further embitterment of the Egyptian people, went a stage further with his conciliatory policy by announcing the termination of the exile of Zaghloul Pasha and his associates, whom he then gave permission to go where they pleased.

<sup>1</sup> *Idem*, page 46.

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The official record of the situation thus created contains these words : ‘A fortnight’s violence has achieved what four months of persuasion failed to accomplish. The object-lesson will not be lost in Egypt and throughout the East.’<sup>1</sup>

Zaghoul Pasha’s liberation was taken by the Egyptians to be a sign of the Government’s complete surrender to the forces of disorder and produced an outbreak of frenzied, hysterical excitement such as could hardly have been witnessed in Egypt since the days of the Pharaohs. The processions of demonstrators through the streets of Cairo—like the fleet which had brought Bonaparte’s invading army to Alexandria—had ‘no beginning and no end’. The flags waving aloft in these processions were those of every nation in the world except Great Britain ; Egyptian officers, cheered to the utmost lingering echo, glided past in decorated carriages ; other vehicles bore veiled harem ladies draped from head to foot in Egyptian flags.

Collisions soon occurred between the military and the crowds. In one of these clashes two Egyptian policemen were killed, and a brief description of the situation with which Russell Pasha of the Cairo City Police had to deal on the day of their funeral may assist the Western reader to imagine the otherwise possibly unimaginable paroxysms of mass-emotion which can seize Egyptian crowds during periods of political excitement. On approaching the hospital in which the bodies of these two policemen lay, Russell Pasha found the street barricaded. Behind the barricades was a mob of howling roughs, who, however, so far from molesting the English police officer, formed a bodyguard around him and escorted him to the door of the hospital. In the inner courtyard the two corpses were lying awaiting burial surrounded by a dense mass of Egyptians shouting and chanting prayers for the dead. Respecting their feelings, Russell Pasha returned to the Square. ‘I do not think,’ he said in a letter written to his father at the time, ‘many people can ever have seen such a mob. It was composed of several thousands of the roughest elements of Cairo, all armed with something, some with knives, and some with spearheads, chisels, adzes, tree-trunks, tree-props, and so on, and those who had no weapons carried great chunks of cast-iron gratings that they had torn up from round the trees. The whole mob was shrieking and yelling and waving their weapons in the air.

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum on Unrest in Egypt, dated April 9, 1919, quoted by Lord Lloyd.

Many of the crowd, with their heads back and their mouths wide open, produced no sound from their throats except a sort of dry whistle. Others had their beards and chests white with dried saliva, and I saw several fall spinning to the ground in fits of mad hysteria.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile Zaghloul Pasha and his three colleagues on their release from exile had gone straight to Paris to lay the case of Egypt before the Congress of the Powers. On reaching Paris they found the representatives of the Powers, despite all their war-time enthusiasm for self-determination, reluctant to devote even a single moment of their time to Egypt's aspirations, and when the United States gave formal recognition—on the 19th April, 1919—to the British Protectorate of Egypt, it became clear to Zaghloul Pasha that at any rate for a time he would have to rely entirely on his own efforts. He and his friends in Paris therefore threw every ounce of energy they could muster into the task of intensifying the unrest in Egypt where the Italian Communists, as it happened, were also by this time as hard at work as they were in their own country.

'Those who followed closely the history of India in 1930,' wrote Lord Lloyd, 'will recognize almost identical steps in the development of disorder; the similarity is both alarming and instructive.'<sup>2</sup>

The campaign of violence increased. A so-called National Police Force endeavoured to usurp the authority of the Government Forces. A deluge of pamphlets—secretly distributed—described the English as cowardly tyrants whose soldiers had never won a battle except against women and children. Others gave highly coloured and mendacious accounts of British atrocities. Yet others menaced the 'traitors' who dared to hold moderate views. 'Black Hand' notices were sent to various British officials and to Egyptians known to be their loyal supporters, threatening attack by 'fire', 'knife', 'bullet', or 'vitriol' by a date left unspecified. 'The furnace', wrote a friend of the author to the *Spectator* at the time, 'where the minds of the nation are raised to a white-heat, and where all the spiritual and intellectual weapons of liberty and license are forged, is the University of Al Azhar. Thousands of students meet there nightly to hear the inflammatory eloquence both of learned Sheikhs and half-educated schoolboys. If Al Azhar

<sup>1</sup> Russell Pasha (Sir Thomas Russell): *Egyptian Service* (John Murray, London, 1949), page 203.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Lloyd: *Egypt since Cromer* (Macmillan, London, 1933), vol. i, page 310.

could be militarily occupied and its members dispersed, if some Cromwell could enter and peremptorily order the removal of the bauble, the agitation would be at an end.'<sup>1</sup>

No such action being possible, Egyptians and Levantines who valued British tutelage and had stood staunchly by their British colleagues throughout this anxious period now, one after the other, went over to the rebels for self-defence, so that in the end the extremists were in complete command of the situation.

Soon the news was heralded that the Milner Mission was on the point of leaving England, its terms of reference being 'to enquire into the causes of the late disorders in Egypt, and to report on the existing situation in the country and the form of Constitution which under the Protectorate will be best calculated to promote its peace and prosperity, the progressive development of self-governing institutions, and the protection of foreign interests'.

Before the Mission could arrive in Egypt a nation-wide boycott had been planned by the Nationalists, and when its members at length reached Cairo, organized hostility had reached such a pitch that special precautions had to be taken for their safety. Telegrams addressed to them poured in from all sorts and conditions declaring the intention of the senders to go on strike as a protest against the pollution of their presence. The vernacular Press exhausted its vocabulary of vituperation and innuendo, insisting that any recognition of the Mission would be tantamount to admitting the legality of the Protectorate and declaring that any Egyptian who had dealings with its members would be guilty of treason to his country. The inevitable strikes broke out, an unedifying exhibition of red mob-violence culminated in a succession of craven attacks on solitary English soldiers, and the climax came with three successive attempts to murder members of the Egyptian Ministry.

The headquarters of the Mission were picketed, and the pickets were instructed to inform the Press of any prominent Egyptian who dared to enter its precincts so that all 'traitors' could be pilloried. Spies dogged the footsteps of every member of the Mission to prevent the establishment of friendly contact with any section of the population, and special steps were taken to make it impossible for them to hear the views of the fellahin, with the result that whenever a member visited a village in the hope of getting into direct touch with the peasantry he found the villagers to be one and all subdued by threats

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, of 24th May, 1919.

of what would befall them if they had anything to do with the Mission.<sup>1</sup> The precautions taken by the boycotters made it obvious that any intercourse between the members of the Mission and the mass of the population would have exposed the fallacy of the Zaghloulists' claim to be speaking for the millions of inarticulate peasantry, equally obvious though it was that the minds of the masses could be poisoned by the constant vilification of everything British, and their passions roused by dangerous catchwords and the attribution—with extreme Oriental subtlety—of every personal grievance to the malignity or incompetence of the British administration.

Despite the boycott, however, opportunities for social intercourse constantly presented themselves and the people whom the members of the Mission met on such occasions included most of the chief leaders of Egyptian opinion ‘who invariably expressed their views *in private* with the greatest frankness and unreserve’.<sup>2</sup>

The members of the Mission sailed from Egypt in March, 1920. Their Report was submitted to Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, in December, 1920. A copy was forwarded to Lord Allenby in Cairo in January, 1921, and was released for general publication the following month.

It recommended that a free and independent Egypt should be established forthwith, that the Protectorate should be abolished, that the British—and all other non-Egyptian—Civil Servants should be replaced by Egyptians, that British interests should be safeguarded by a Treaty between Great Britain and Egypt, the latter country to be recognized as an independent constitutional monarchy in alliance with Great Britain.

The deadliest gale blowing from the Arctic ice-caps could hardly have struck more chill into the bones and hearts of most of those who had given their lives to the work of realizing Lord Cromer's ideals. That any Treaty could solve the incalculably difficult problems of one of the world's maximum danger-spots seemed frankly impossible in the light of the fact that the Great War just ended had begun with the barefaced avowal by a traditionally Great Power that a treaty signed by its rulers could be unilaterally set aside as being of no more value than any other ‘scrap of paper’.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Valentine Chirol: *The Egyptian Problem* (Macmillan, London, 1921), cf. page 264.

<sup>2</sup> Milner Report: page 5.

## INDEPENDENCE

**T**HE impression made on Lord Lloyd by the Milner proposals was that the negotiations must have been carried on 'in the hypnotic state induced by the constant repetition of trans-atlantic doctrines' which declared it to be 'immoral to oppose the claims of nationalism by any argument, however sound', with the result that nothing could be done to 'impede the severance of old ties and the carving up of the world's surface into more and yet more "self-determined" units. The process', continued Lord Lloyd, 'had taken on the dimensions of a religious rite, and it was blasphemous to point out that, as it increased, happiness and prosperity would diminish in proportion.'<sup>1</sup>

No exception could of course have been taken to any workable suggestion the Mission might have put forward to prepare Egypt for the earliest possible grant of self-government. Lord Granville's original promise that the British occupation would only be temporary had been repeatedly renewed, and the theory that Egypt was a national unit under the suzerainty of Turkey had always been recognized. Lord Cromer had never lost sight of that fact and had been in full agreement with the British Government's policy of *eventual withdrawal*. 'I never have been,' he wrote soon after his retirement, 'neither am I now in favour of the British occupation.'<sup>2</sup>

But the problem that had faced him throughout the whole term of his pro-consulship had not been *whether* British control should be withdrawn but *whether*—as he had said in his farewell speech before leaving Cairo—'a steady jog-trot' was the pace that would lead *soonest* to *genuine* independence or whether, on the contrary, the time had come when the pace could be mended 'without incurring the serious risk that the horse would come down and break his knees'. And it was precisely this problem that confronted the Milner Mission in 1920.

On the probable results of a *premature* British withdrawal Lord

<sup>1</sup> Lord Lloyd : Op. cit., vol. ii, page 47.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, page 564.

#### THE MILNER INVESTIGATIONS

Cromer had already given his personal opinion in his *Modern Egypt*. One of the most likely developments that he then foresaw, apart from an almost certain attempt sooner or later by another foreign Power to occupy so important a strategic position, was the eventual emergence of a dictatorship. He did not actually use that word. (The events had not yet occurred in Russia, Germany, and elsewhere, which now bring the word 'dictator' so readily to mind.) The words he used were 'arbitrary personal rule', and he used them in 1907 when giving his account of the events which occurred when Ismail Pasha, under pressure from the Powers of Europe, had abdicated in 1879. 'Ismail Pasha's abdication', he wrote, 'sounded the death-knell of arbitrary personal rule in Egypt. It may be hoped that that rule can never be revived, but in spite of the strongest guarantees which can be recorded on paper, there would unquestionably be a serious risk of its revival in some form or another if the British occupation of the country were allowed to terminate prematurely.'<sup>1</sup>

The members of the Milner Mission, however, decided that as a result of the reforming work of the British during the preceding forty years the time had come when it would *not* be premature to recommend the withdrawal of British control, the more so since they had been led by the leaders of Egyptian opinion to believe that a treaty negotiated by Great Britain and Egypt as equals could safeguard all threatened interests.

All the prominent Nationalists without a single exception had, for instance, readily admitted to them that 'Great Britain had a vital interest in Egypt as the central link in her communications with her Eastern Empire and a perfect right to protect those communications from any danger of interruption'.<sup>2</sup> The Mission was even given the impression by those with whom this matter was discussed that Egypt could, without loss of dignity, accord to Great Britain a base in Egyptian territory,<sup>3</sup> and that, in case of war, Great Britain could be given the command of all means of communication such as railways and aerodromes.<sup>4</sup>

Further, every Egyptian consulted was prepared—in any treaty concluded—to give whatever pledges might be necessary to ensure that an independent Egypt would not pursue a foreign policy hostile or prejudicial to the British Empire.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer : *Modern Egypt*, vol. i, pages 145 and 146.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 1131, 1921, page 17.      <sup>3</sup> Idem, page 28.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Cmd. 1131, 1921, pages 26, 27 and 38.

Most Egyptians agreed that Great Britain was more than strong enough to keep Egypt in permanent subjection if she preferred unwilling subjects to friendly and grateful allies, but, on the other hand, all the leading men in Egypt said with one accord that though they objected to having an inferior status imposed upon Egypt by the British Government, they would welcome a Treaty of Alliance freely negotiated on both sides, which, while establishing the independence of Egypt, would give to Great Britain all those safeguards and guarantees<sup>1</sup> which the Protectorate had been intended to secure.

It was with fallacious impressions such as these that the Milner Mission recommended that the British Protectorate should be abolished.

Although the Milner Report had not yet the force of law, its official publication was tantamount to a promise that it would be used as a basis for a permanent settlement, and the next step, therefore, was for the Egyptian Cabinet to select representatives to go to London to discuss Lord Milner's recommendations with the British Government.

At about this time a new Egyptian Ministry was formed by Adly Pasha. This Ministry was so exceptionally popular that demonstrations in its favour were of almost daily occurrence.

Early in April, however, Zaghloul Pasha arrived from Europe. His reception at Alexandria and in all the towns through which he passed, as well as in Cairo, was one of unlimited enthusiasm and excitement. Banquets in his honour were given by every section of the community.

And now a crucial problem presented itself : Was the Delegation to London to be headed by Adly Pasha, the Premier, or by Zaghloul Pasha ?

A certain coolness now began to develop between the supporters of Zaghloul and the Adlyites. The controversy between the partisans grew daily more bitter. The rift continued to widen. A preliminary riot broke out at Tantah, a large town about half-way between Cairo and Alexandria. There, a clash between the rival factions was so serious that the police had to be called out. The crowd attacked them. The police opened fire. Lives were lost. A desperate fight followed. The mob drove the police back to the cover of their Police Station. And although the authority of the Government was eventually restored, Zaghloul Pasha continued to fan the still-smouldering embers of passion by declaring that the Adly Ministers were the

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 1131, 1921, page 38.

tools of the British Government and by employing all the devices of his oratory to press home with deadly effect the charge that the Ministry had 'allowed the people to be murdered'.

Events were obviously moving towards another crisis—a new kind of crisis and one that might well prove to be unique in this land of crises. The grievances against the British had by now been completely forgotten, for a question of infinitely more moment was the decision to be taken on whether the popular Premier or the national hero should head the Delegation to London. The Ministry, taking alarm, sent word throughout all Egypt that another 'Tantah incident' was to be avoided *at all costs*. The Zaghloulists, however, were determined that a 'Tantah' incident *should* be repeated in some part of Egypt or other, and that—as a result of it—the Adly Ministry should again be obliged to demonstrate its ineffectiveness by 'allowing the people to be murdered'.<sup>1</sup>

Demonstrations in favour of Zaghloul Pasha began at Alexandria. At the outset they were not anti-British or anti-foreign. At first they were insignificant, but, the hands of the police being tied by the Government's own order, they became larger and more frequent and soon took place every night. One day the demonstrators on appearing brought carts loaded with stones, and these stone-carrying carts daily increased in number.

Seditious orators and extremist agitators were now active as never before; subversive pamphlets were distributed, and it was with the distribution of this literature that a new, grave, and most sinister influence became manifest.

Some of the more innocuous of the pamphlets merely alleged that the Adly Ministry was hand in glove with the British Government; others that its policy was dividing the nation. But there were others of unique omen which demanded violent and immediate action in such significant words as: 'Let Ireland be our example. Let fires break out in your land as they broke out there!' Yet others provided even clearer evidence of the origin of the leaven that was now at work. One of the latter was headed: 'WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE', and appealed to the Egyptian masses in these words: 'The Capitalists, after sucking the blood of the labourers of the West and exploiting them to the highest degree, have turned their attention to the East . . . Do not forget', it warned them, 'that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Egypt No. 3 (1921) Minutes of Proceedings and Report of the Military Court of Enquiry into the Alexandria Riots, May, 1921. Cmd. 1527, page 266.

## INDEPENDENCE

these foreigners, like our own rich tyrants, betray us and exploit us, and our real enemies are not those who are outside our countries or beyond the seas but those masters who exploit us here, whether they are foreigners or natives. The miners, the sailors, and the workmen of Great Britain, and the peasants of France, of Germany, and of Russia are brothers in our cause. We unite', it continued, 'with the workers fighting in Europe and America to arrive at the emancipation of the social world and extend our right hand in brotherhood to all who march with us in our economical struggle, *as this struggle will enable us to achieve our national independence.*' This egregious document ended with the words: 'Long live the power of labour! Long live the Egyptian workmen! Long live the Third International Congress! Printed at Leipzig, 1st May 1921.'<sup>1</sup>

On Thursday, the 19th May, the demonstrators carried dogs labelled 'Adly' and 'Rushdi', and on the following day the crisis developed which led inexorably to the events of Monday, 23rd May—the day that was destined to live in the memories of Alexandria's European residents as 'Red Monday'.

Friday the 20th, being the Moslem Sabbath, some of the ringleaders of the Zaghloulist faction joined the congregation at the noonday intercessions in a mosque near the sea-front at Alexandria. Stone-laden carts were waiting outside the mosque. Inside, a Zaghloulist leader addressed the congregation. Reports of what he said conflict, but at the termination of his speech the mob left the mosque and went off with their carts in a dangerous mood. Rioters soon began to converge on the great square in the centre of the city.

Diverging from this point they marched towards an important police station, where the first fighting of the day took place. The remaining police stations in the town were attacked in succession and two were set on fire. Hourly the situation grew more desperate, and by late afternoon, when one of the most important police stations was in undisputed possession by a mob who were preparing to burn it to the ground, the police had no alternative but to fire a volley into the crowd. This done, the rioters dispersed, but with that volley, as the Official Report explicitly stated, 'the object of the Zaghloulists was achieved', and Zaghloul promptly 'issued his manifesto against the Government for shooting down "innocent victims".'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This pamphlet was one of the documents placed before the Military Court of Enquiry into these events—Egypt No. 3 (1921)—and a translation is given on pages 234 to 236 of their Report.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, page 252.

#### UNBRIDLED INSENSATE FURY

Up to this moment the disturbances had been political, and, the principle of Egyptian self-government having been officially accepted by Great Britain, the duty of preserving public order had been left to Adly Pasha and his Cabinet.

With Saturday (21st May) a new phase began. The funerals of some of the Egyptian victims of the riot then took place, and, at the cemetery, a Sheikh, speaking to a crowd of approximately six thousand people, referred to the dead as '*Shuhada*'—martyrs—who had sacrificed their lives in the cause of their country's independence. All such martyrs, he told his hearers, went at death 'direct to Paradise'.<sup>1</sup> The next day—Sunday, the 22nd—a crowd estimated at fifteen thousand attended the funeral rites of the remaining victims and passions were still further inflamed by funeral orations.

It seems to have been due to these speeches and pamphlets—at a time, too, when Moslem feeling was deeply moved by military operations then taking place between the Greeks and the Turks in Asia Minor—that the fury of the mob came to be turned against the Europeans. There was the inevitable prelude of window-smashing and shop-looting. Then bands of Egyptians began to make systematic rushes at Europeans. Soon some of the streets were packed with gangs of thugs ; revolvers barked ; panic grew and grew. Such was the state of the city when a harmless and unfortunate Italian sailor, barely landed from his ship, was repeatedly and fatally stabbed, paraffin poured over the presumably inanimate body and lighted, and the crowd, dancing round the burning corpse, clapped their hands in ecstasy. An Egyptian woman with the heart of a fiend stirred up the fire on the man's body with a stick, while the crowd danced round exultingly. An ambulance passing, the mob called to it : 'Here is one you cannot cure !'<sup>2</sup>

The condition of the town grew steadily worse and when night fell the rioters gave full vent to their unbridled, insensate fury in a neighbourhood where Greeks, Italians, Maltese, Czechoslovaks, and representatives of almost every European country lived in blocks of flats some three or four storeys high. The darkness was partly relieved, partly emphasized, by the glare of burning buildings ; the screams of women and children were agonizing to hear ; shots were fired from windows by terrified inhabitants ; natives poured paraffin on the doors, and flames rose as high as the second floors. Here and there desperate women on the roof-tops wrenched blocks of masonry from

<sup>1</sup> Idem, page 242.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, page 255.

## INDEPENDENCE

the parapets and hurled them on to rioters who waited beneath to beat the inhabitants to death as they endeavoured to escape from the blazing buildings. Everyone in the streets who showed a European hat was attacked and beaten into unconsciousness, if not murdered outright.<sup>1</sup>

At last a detachment of the Egyptian Army arrived to restore order, but as they passed through the streets they were greeted by the rioters with round after round of applause, accompanied by loud and frantic shouts of: 'These are Egyptians!' 'These are our brothers!'<sup>2</sup>

In the small hours of the morning reports reached Police Headquarters that the peace of the city was again restored. And with these reports 'Red Monday' dawned.

To depict in sufficiently glaring and lurid tones the tragical events of this *dies nefastus* would tax the brush of a Hogarth. For a period of two hours—between eight and ten in the morning—all the horrors of the previous day were re-enacted, this time on a bigger scale than before. The soldiers of the Egyptian Army and the uniformed armed Government watchmen used their weapons in support of the rioters by shooting down Europeans in the streets and by firing at the windows of European-occupied flats.<sup>3</sup> Two European schoolboys—a Greek and an Austrian—were shot by the soldiery on their way to school and died in the Greek hospital. Europeans who misguidedly appealed to Egyptian soldiers for protection were met with fixed bayonets and driven back to find what mercy they could expect at the hands of the mob.<sup>4</sup>

Colonel Ingram—the British Assistant Commandant of the Alexandria City Police—on arriving at the Governorate that morning found it besieged by a crowd of Italians. Revolvers were being brandished. The moment that he was seen, prolonged shouts arose of 'Long live the English!' Upstairs in the Commandant's office the Italian Consul awaited his arrival. His compatriots, he said, were clamouring for arms to protect themselves and their families. With excited vehemence he protested at the utter failure of the authorities to keep order, and demanded the immediate employment of British troops. The French Consul, arriving at that moment, supported his demand. Messages now came in from various quarters that showed the rapid deterioration of the situation, and under these circumstances

<sup>1</sup> Egypt No. 3 (1921), page 254.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, page 259 and 267.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, page 256.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, page 261.

#### SITUATION BEYOND CONTROL

Ingram telephoned to British Headquarters : 'Please prepare to take over the city at a moment's notice.' It soon became evident that the mob was in an even more dangerous mood than had previously been shown ; shots began to be heard in the Square below ; and Ingram, on going to the window, saw that the time had come for taking the most decisive action. He therefore sent his final message to British Headquarters : 'Situation beyond control. Please take over !'

At ten o'clock British troops arrived in response to this summons and were greeted by a wild storm of cheering from the waiting Europeans, but it was not until between five and six in the evening that the situation was entirely under control.<sup>1</sup>

\*       \*       \*

Subsequently to these events a Military Court of Enquiry, after interrogating three hundred and seventeen eye-witnesses—British, French, Italian, Greek, Czech, Bulgarian, and Egyptian—and visiting hospitals and the scenes of the riots, pronounced its verdict : 'The Court is of the opinion that the Zaghloul Party were determined to force the Government to repeat the Tantah incident. The Government were just as determined that it should not. In the face of the weakness of the Government the mobs got bolder and bolder, until they got definitely out of hand. The Court draws attention to a very important fact. Always there has existed in Egypt, at any rate among the lower classes, a fanatical hatred of Europeans. It has shown itself again and again . . . Whenever the Government has grown too weak to control this feeling, or whenever the people think it has, it has broken out . . . The outburst in Alexandria happened because the people thought that the hand of the Government was relaxing and that the authorities dare not act against them. They took two days for preparation, and then the long pent-up hatred of Europeans burst out . . . '

\*       \*       \*

The French Consul, in his evidence, used much the same language. 'Exactly the same thing that happened on the 11th June, 1882', he said, 'has happened on the 22nd May, 1921.' And both he and the Italian and the Greek Consuls protested that *they could never consent to*

<sup>1</sup> Idem, pages 259 and 263.

*their nationals being protected by any force which consisted exclusively of Egyptians.*<sup>1</sup>

★ ★ ★

The Delegation to London was headed by the Prime Minister, Adly Pasha. It sailed from Alexandria in July, 1921, and Zaghloul Pasha, thus left behind in Egypt, was free to continue his campaign against the Ministry and enhance his chances for the premiership at the forthcoming general election.

This was the moment when four members of the British Labour Party, with their inherited sympathy for those whom they considered to be the 'under-dogs', decided to visit Egypt to cultivate the leaders of the Revolt. They were Messrs. Swan, Lunn, Lawson, and Mills. Professor Segal accompanied them to act as secretary.

They arrived at Alexandria in September (1921), and there 'the landing was made to the accompaniment of cheers from the crowds lining the quays and the decks of the ships. After receiving bouquets from the "Future Mothers Delegation", and to cries of "God save Swan", "Long live Zaghloul", they motored through the densely thronged streets to their hotel.'<sup>2</sup>

According to Lord Lloyd : ' Sarwat Pasha, who was acting as Prime Minister, was perturbed at the bare idea of their visit, and besought the High Commissioner to prevent it. His worst fears were justified, for when these four gentlemen arrived in Egypt they attached themselves to Zaghloul, in whose company they visited a number of provincial centres, where, in their presence, and with their tacit support, he made violent public attacks upon the Government.'<sup>3</sup>

On the day when they arrived in Cairo, the writer and his wife had accepted an invitation that came from an Egyptian friend to accompany him on a drive to the Ghizeh Pyramids in this friend's carriage and pair. Passing through one of the city's semi-mediaeval districts they emerged into the European Quarter near the Opera Square. Here progress was impeded by an immense crowd that had assembled to welcome the British Labour politicians, and our coachman, when he could proceed no further, pulled up at the side of the equestrian statue of Ibrahim Pasha. Right and left of us ran one of Cairo's main—and most imposing—thoroughfares. Flags of all

<sup>1</sup> Egypt No. 3 (1921), page 267.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times* of 20th September, 1921.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Lloyd : Op. cit., vol. ii, page 48.

nations, except that of Great Britain, fluttered in the light breeze and the vast crowd that stood so tightly wedged included an infinity of sheikhs, merchants, fellahin, and Bedouin, Persians, Syrians, and Turks, all in their rainbow-hued costumes, with an occasional European, and numbers of Levantines and Egyptians of the middle-classes attired in smart clothes of European origin and wearing the ubiquitous fez. Bright-eyed little Egyptian boy street-vendors on the outskirts of the crowd displayed their trays of cheap and gaudy novelties, and their slogans were : '*Wala haga masnu' fil Inghilterra*'—Nothing of English make—and '*Kulli haga masnu' fee Alamania*'—Everything made in Germany. Meanwhile, as we ourselves awaited the representatives of British labour, the cry again and again repeated itself: 'Everything made in Germany', 'Nothing of English make'.

Sounds of acclamation could at last be heard in the distance and presently a long line of cars came into view approaching from the direction of the main railway station. As these cars drew nearer the shouting increased in volume till it became a long-sustained roar, and, as they passed by, the keenness of the delight of their four British occupants at the warmth of their reception was obvious in every countenance. From time to time one of them would wave a hand to the cheering crowd. I endeavoured to catch the purport of the deafening uproar, but only the voice of one man standing close to the carriage was distinct enough to be intelligible. He, a student in European clothes of perfect cut but wearing a fez, waved his arms in an ecstasy of enthusiasm, and the words of his shouting at last became recognizable : 'Long live Labour ! Down with England !'

My Egyptian friend and I exchanged glances. He shrugged his shoulders and remarked : 'Not all our people can understand that a British politician can sympathize with Egypt's aspirations and at the same time be a loyal Englishman.'

## THE SURRENDER OF THE KEY

**A**DLY PASHA's negotiations in London broke down mainly on the question of imperial communications, and the ensuing deadlock, with Zaghloul Pasha dangerously active, was marked by menacing demonstrations ; clashes occurred in the provinces between Zaghloulists and those who supported Adly ; lives were lost ; Upper Egypt was thrown into chaos ; and at last Lord Allenby, convinced that there was no hope of improvement in Anglo-Egyptian relations while Zaghloul Pasha remained in the country, ordered his arrest and deportation.

The far-reaching concessions advocated by the Milner Report had as yet utterly failed to bring either tranquillity to Egypt or friendship between that country and England, but the Lloyd George Government took an irrevocable step further forward in 1922 by announcing to the world that the British Protectorate over Egypt was definitely abolished and that Egypt would thenceforward be recognized by Great Britain as an independent sovereign State—an announcement generally referred to as the 'Declaration of Egyptian Independence'.

Fuad, hitherto Sultan, now became King of Egypt.

Four matters of vital importance however (which came to be known as the 'Four Reserved Points') were 'reserved to the discretion of the British Government' until a treaty could be concluded 'by free discussion and friendly accommodation on both sides'. These four reserved points were : (1) the security of the communications of the British Empire, (2) the defence of Egypt against foreign aggression or foreign interference of any kind, (3) the protection of minorities and foreign residents, (4) the Sudan.

It soon became evident, however, that it would be no easier for Lloyd George to withdraw from Egypt in 1922 than it had been for Gladstone in 1882, for even while the statesmen of the two countries were doing their utmost to frame a Constitution to replace the régime of the Occupation, the political atmosphere in Egypt became so explosive that it led to further attacks on British subjects. Hardly

#### THE INEVITABLE CRISIS

a week passed without some outbreak being signalled and many Egyptians were as horrified as Englishmen at the continuing campaign of murder.

It was not until April, 1923, that a Constitution was at last promulgated and the exodus of British and other European officials began.<sup>1</sup> Zaghloul Pasha was then allowed to return from exile and, in the election of January, 1924, his Wafd Party swept the polls.

As a Labour Government was almost simultaneously elected in England, the hopes of the Egyptian Nationalists ran high, because they now felt that all their demands, however extreme, would at last be met ; for not only was Zaghloul Pasha a personal friend of Ramsay MacDonald, but—if Zaghloul Pasha's son-in-law is to be believed—‘a considerable section of the new British Cabinet were pledged almost as deeply as Zaghloul himself to the policy of the Wafd’.<sup>2</sup>

In July, 1924, while Egyptian Nationalists were providing both inspiration and support for anti-British activities in the Sudan, Zaghloul Pasha left for London with the expressed intention of negotiating the ‘treaty of friendship and alliance’ which the Milner Mission had regarded as both essential and practicable. But Zaghloul’s demands on arrival in London were that every vestige of British control should be removed without more ado ; that the British Army should leave Egypt forthwith ; and that the British Government should renounce all claim to protect minorities, foreign residents, or the Suez Canal.

Ramsey MacDonald warned him that no British Government could ever neglect the duty of guarding the Suez Canal, and he returned to Egypt empty-handed.

The inevitable crisis followed and Sir Lee Stack, Sirdar and Governor-General of the Sudan, was shot while driving in Cairo. Informed opinion in England however remained unchanged, namely, that it was Great Britain’s inescapable duty, in creating an independent Egypt, to provide, somehow, for the security of the lives and capital of the thousands of foreigners for whose interests she had made herself responsible, and that the withdrawal of the British Army of

<sup>1</sup> A very few British officials (those with indispensable technical qualifications) were retained temporarily.

<sup>2</sup> Amine Youssef Bey : *Independent Egypt* (John Murray, London, 1940), page 115. Cf. also Lord Lloyd : *Egypt since Cromer*, vol. ii, pages 85 to 88.

#### THE SURRENDER OF THE KEY

Occupation could not be contemplated without adequate guarantees that British imperial communications would be in safe hands.

Years then continued to pass without any sign of the 'friendly accommodation on both sides' that had been so confidently expected by so many members of the British Government. A treaty was indeed drafted by Sir Austen Chamberlain in 1927 which conceded far more to Egyptian sentiment than even the Milner Mission would have thought prudent, but it shared the fate of all other attempts to compromise. Nahas Pasha, who—Zaghloul Pasha having died—had become leader of the Wafd, would have nothing to do with any treaty that allowed a single British soldier to remain on Egyptian soil, 'be it Suez or Sinai'—those were his words—and the Egyptian Cabinet declined even to consider its terms.

British prestige, at its zenith in 1914, had by this time sunk 'as low as to the fiends', and when, in 1929, Ramsay MacDonald again became Prime Minister, he made a complete break with the past. Lord Lloyd was then High Commissioner. Although Lord Lloyd had never approved of his Government's Declaration of Egyptian Independence, he had gone to Egypt determined scrupulously to respect Egypt's sovereignty, though equally resolved to demand respect by the Egyptian Government for the four reserved points. The situation had, by 1929, become rather more reassuring from a British point of view than it had been for some time past, but the newly elected British Labour Government immediately 'stirred the calm waters into violent commotion'.<sup>1</sup> Lord Lloyd resigned and was succeeded by Sir Percy Loraine.

All attempts to base British policy on the Milner Report were now abandoned. By this means the Labour Government hoped that a way would be found to establish democratic government in Egypt and to make possible a workable treaty between Egypt and Great Britain.

A draft treaty was then prepared, going far beyond anything suggested before in recognizing complete equality between the two countries, since what had hitherto been held to be the unilateral obligations of Egypt were, in this draft treaty, at last recognized as the mutual obligations of both countries to adjust military strategy and foreign policy to the common interest. All British intervention in Egyptian affairs was now to cease and the British troops were to be withdrawn from Cairo and Alexandria and isolated in the Suez Canal Zone. -

<sup>1</sup> Lord Lloyd; *Egypt since Cromer*, vol. ii, page 304.

#### BRITISH OCCUPATION TERMINATED

Elections were then held in Egypt, where a Wafd Government was again returned and Nahas Pasha became Prime Minister. But agreement could not be reached on the question of the Sudan, with the result that once again the negotiations failed, and it was not till 1935 that the Egyptian Government again raised the question of the Treaty.

The National Government then in power at Westminster agreed to resume discussions at the stage where they had been broken off in 1930, and a delegation left Egypt for London under the leadership of Nahas Pasha.

On the 22nd August, 1936, a Treaty of Alliance was at last concluded which definitely terminated the British Occupation.

For Egypt this was perhaps the greatest event since the Arab Conquest. The Treaty recognized the equal status of the two countries and stated that it had been entered into 'with a view' (to quote the Treaty) 'to consolidating their friendship, their cordial understanding, and their good relations'. It recognized the Suez Canal as an essential means of communication between the different parts of the British Empire and therefore provided for the stationing of a limited British force in the Canal Zone, but this force was not to constitute in any manner an occupation, nor was it in any way to prejudice the sovereign rights of Egypt. This small force was to be allowed to remain in the Canal Zone until the Egyptian Army was itself in a position to ensure by its own resources the entire safety of navigation of this vital highway of world traffic.<sup>1</sup>

The treaty provided that at any time after ten years the two countries could, by mutual consent, negotiate for a revision of its terms; and that, twenty years after its signature, a revision could be made at the request of either of them.

The problem of the Sudan was settled by continuing to recognize the principle of the Condominium, and the British Government, in order to assist Egypt to attain true independence, promised support for any steps the Egyptian Government might take in the hope of getting the Capitulations abolished.

In view of all that has happened since the conclusion of this 'treaty of friendship and alliance', it should perhaps be made clear to those readers who do not know Egypt that the Suez Canal Zone in which

<sup>1</sup> The numbers of the forces to be maintained in the Zone were not to exceed, of the land forces, 10,000, and of the air forces, 400 pilots together with the necessary ancillary personnel for administrative duties.

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the British troops were now to be stationed is separated from Egypt proper by a stretch of uninhabited desert.

At last—it seemed—a way had been found to satisfy Egypt's desire for complete independence, though many feared that the communications of a great Empire had been imperilled by the inferiority-complex of a small nation. The Egyptian concessions, too, had been made at a time when the Italian invasion of Abyssinia had made Egypt acutely aware of the Italian threat to the upper reaches of the Nile as well as to her territory on the Red Sea Littoral, and it remained to be seen what attitude the Egyptians would take if this menace were removed.

In the course of these negotiations King Fuad died and was succeeded by his son, Farouk.

The next step forward was made in 1937 when representatives of the Powers were invited by Egypt (with Great Britain's support) to attend a Conference at Montreux to arrange, if possible, for the abolition of the Capitulations. That this was no easy matter is not surprising in view of the importance of the issues at stake. But in May of that year the Montreux Convention was signed and the extra-territorial privileges so long enjoyed and so often abused by foreign residents in Egypt were brought to an end.

Prime Minister Nahas Pasha paid tribute at Montreux to the collaboration of the British delegation in seconding Egypt's efforts, and Captain Euan Wallace, who signed the Convention on behalf of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand as well as of Great Britain, took occasion to refer to the very important assurances given by the Egyptian delegation which, he said, 'had done much to allay the fears and apprehensions which, without those assurances, would probably have been entertained'.

\* \* \*

Before the British troops stationed in the interior of Egypt could be withdrawn to prepared positions in the Suez Canal Zone, the Second World War broke out, and once again the British Empire—assisted at a later stage by troops from the United States—had to prevent Egypt from being invaded by a foreign Power.

The Egyptian Cabinet at once took steps to fulfil all its obligations under the Treaty, but the political barometer of the country as a whole rose and fell with the varying fortunes of the combatants. During the British retreat in Cyrenaica before Rommel's forces in

#### AN ULTIMATUM TO KING FAROUK

1942, for instance, there was a wave of anti-British feeling. Italian flags appeared on the rooftops and from the windows of houses in Cairo and other towns; most Egyptians firmly believed that Great Britain's total defeat was imminent; Egyptian students marched through the streets shouting: 'We are Rommel's soldiers'; others assembled before Abdin Palace with cries of 'Long live Rommel', and it was at this critical moment that the British authorities had reason to believe that King Farouk intended to appoint a Prime Minister—Ali Mahir Pasha—whose pro-Axis sympathies were common knowledge. It was Ali Mahir and his 'inner cabinet' who had been suspected of being responsible for leakages of military information when, during Wavell's first rapid advance into Cyrenaica, a highly secret letter addressed by the G.O.C., British Troops in Egypt to the Egyptian Minister of Defence had been found in the possession of a captured Italian General. It was natural that the British military authorities should attempt to prevent any such appointment; and so, soon after dusk on the 4th February, 1942, the streets leading to Abdin Palace were seen to be filling with British troops; armoured cars began to surround the Palace; three tanks appeared before its wrought iron gates and forced an entrance; the British Ambassador and the G.O.C., British Troops entered the building accompanied by a few British officers; and King Farouk was presented with an ultimatum—either to appoint Nahas Pasha as Prime Minister or to leave the country'.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the issues at stake, many Egyptians look upon the action taken as a major violation of the 1936-Treaty.

King Farouk yielded; an election was held at which Nahas Pasha was again returned; and during the critical days of June and July, 1942, when the Eighth Army was forced to fall back from Tobruk to El-Alamain, the Wafd Government under Nahas Pasha—faced with deciding whether to side with Italy or with Britain—stood firmly with Great Britain.



By 1945 conditions in Great Britain and Egypt were so completely reversed from what they had been in 1882, when Captain Watson had demanded the keys of the Cairo Citadel, that it would have been impossible for Watson at that time to have imagined what lay ahead. For at the close of the Second World War, Egypt, far from being

<sup>1</sup> Kirk: *A Short History of the Middle East*, page 201.

#### THE SURRENDER OF THE KEY

bankrupt was, on the contrary, the possessor of sterling balances of some £450 millions and with an external debt all but non-existent, while Great Britain, to whom, in the main, she owed her solvency, was left a debtor nation.

The British Empire and Commonwealth nevertheless remained a power—perhaps the greatest power—in world affairs, and two World Wars had demonstrated the fact that the Suez Canal and the Isthmus of Suez were of vital strategic importance not only to the Commonwealth but also—like Gibraltar and Singapore—to the entire Free World. It was now seen, too, that Rénan had indeed been right when, eighty years earlier, he had said to de Lesseps : ‘ You have marked out the field of the great battles of the future ’, and had described the Suez Canal as ‘ a point for the occupation of which the whole world will struggle ’. A further important fact revealed by the two World Wars was that it might sometimes be difficult for Great Britain to protect the Suez Canal without the stationing of troops in Cairo and Alexandria ; but the 1936-Treaty had made this impossible and it was now necessary to transfer all British Troops to the Canal Zone. The removal, however, of so large a body of men and such a vast quantity of military material and stores could not be undertaken immediately after the capitulation of Japan, with the result that for some time after the cessation of hostilities thousands of British and American troops continued to throng the streets of Cairo and other towns, where they acted as an irritant to many of the politically-minded upper- and middle-class Egyptians.

Nationalist resentment at the presence of these foreign troops grew daily stronger, and, with all fear of invasion temporarily removed, there began a violent agitation for their immediate withdrawal from Egyptian soil, not merely from the towns but even from the Canal Zone.

The sense of humiliation felt by the Egyptians at the presence of these foreign troops will no doubt be incomprehensible to many British people, seeing that United States bases exist in England ; that members of the United States forces are seen daily in the streets of London, in its suburbs, and in other towns and villages ; that these foreign soldiers are looked upon not as enemies but as friends engaged in a common task ; that they are welcomed and entertained in English homes, and that it has occurred to no one—British or foreign—that their presence affects British national sovereignty in any way.

‘A VERY GRAVE STATEMENT’

The Egyptians, however, looked upon the presence of the British and American forces in Cairo and Alexandria as derogatory to their newly acquired sovereign status. Passions were fanned to fever-heat by the Wafdist Press; mob violence was fomented by the Wafd Party, ‘with its left wing apparently in collusion with Soviet agents’.<sup>1</sup> The result was the despatch to London of an Egyptian Note requesting the immediate revision of the terms of the 1936-Treaty which, the Note stated, had been accepted by Egypt only under pressure and ‘as a testimony to the loyalty and sincere desire for collaboration which inspire her towards her ally’. The Note reached London towards the end of 1945, and as some time elapsed without evidence that it was being favourably considered by Mr. Attlee’s Government, anti-British demonstrations were staged in Cairo, the inevitable riots following.

\* \* \*

As a result of this agitation a delegation from Whitehall to discuss the revision of the 1936-Treaty arrived at Cairo in the spring of 1946, and on May 6th Mr. Attlee made an announcement in the House of Commons which came as a violent shock to many of his hearers.

‘I think the House would wish to be informed’, he began, ‘of an announcement *which has been made* in Cairo by the British Treaty Delegation on the subject of the negotiations now in progress.’

He then proceeded to read the announcement which had been made in Cairo. It ran: ‘It is the considered policy of His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom to consolidate their alliance with Egypt as one between two equal nations having interests in common. In pursuance of this policy, negotiations have begun in an atmosphere of cordiality and good will. *The Government of the United Kingdom have proposed the withdrawal of the British naval, military, and air forces from Egyptian territory*, and to settle in negotiation the stages and the date of completion of this withdrawal, and the arrangements to be made with the Egyptian Government to make possible mutual assistance in time of war or imminent threat of war in accordance with the alliance.’<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Churchill at once rose. ‘This is a very grave statement,’ he said; ‘one of the most momentous I have heard in this House—a

<sup>1</sup> Kirk: *A Short History of the Middle East*, page 227.

<sup>2</sup> Hansard, vol. 133, 7th May, 1946, col. 783.

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complete evacuation of Egypt by all naval, military, and air forces, and this *offered at the beginning* of the negotiations. I am bound to place on record at this very first moment that His Majesty's Government have not consulted in any way any other people in this country at all. It is entirely their own course that they are pursuing and the whole responsibility must rest with them. On the other hand, it does seem to me that the Opposition are bound to mark the gravity of the occasion. Sixty years of diplomacy and administration . . .

At this point Mr. Piratin interrupted with the remark :

'That is long enough.'

In the vitally important debate that took place a few days later,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Eden, who had been Foreign Secretary when the 1936-Treaty was concluded, set himself the task of rebutting the Egyptian contention that the presence of foreign troops in the Suez Canal Zone could possibly be regarded as a derogation of national sovereignty. 'As I read the Egyptian demand', said Mr. Eden, 'and some of the statements made in this country, I have regarded as entirely unjustified, suggestions that the 1936-Treaty in some way inflicted humiliation upon Egypt, or was . . . way derogatory to Egyptian sovereign status. That was certainly not thought by anyone at the time. It was not thought by anyone in this House, and it was not thought by any Egyptian citizen. In fact, they all said the contrary.'

When Mr. Churchill rose to speak it was the procedure adopted by the Government that he condemned. They had, he pointed out, *first* promised to evacuate the country, and *secondly* to defend the Canal, which, he contended, was a contradiction in terms. . . . 'I cannot imagine', he continued, 'a more lamentable and indeed disingenuous procedure. We promise something as a prelude in order to give them a start, but, in fact, we concede the whole point at issue . . . A perfectly sensible and straightforward course was open. The Government of Egypt had the right to raise the question of the revision of the Treaty in the tenth year. They have done so. His Majesty's Government could then have replied : "We will certainly discuss the matter with you, but you should first of all tell us exactly what it is that you propose, and how the essential matters of the defence of the Canal and Isthmus are to be provided for." The Egyptian Government could next, in due course, have put forward their plan. We could then have said : "We will discuss this plan with the Dominions who have in two wars exerted themselves in your

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, vol. 423 no. 146, col. 706.

'I CHOSE FRIENDSHIP'

defence, the graves of whose soldiers in scores of thousands lie in the desert.''<sup>1</sup>

The debate was wound up by Mr. Bevin, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who pointed out that the Opposition appeared to have overlooked one vitally important aspect of the problem—the development of the United Nations Organization, 'in which', he said, 'all countries, great and small, feel that they have a new status. It is not', he added, 'a very popular thing now *in international affairs* to maintain troops on other people's soil . . . Therefore, I recommended to my colleagues that they should begin the negotiations by making a proposal to do what we promised to do from the first day when we went to Egypt, namely, to withdraw and evacuate our troops. Then we would proceed from that basis to decide what shall be substituted for the troops. If nothing can be substituted to protect this great artery, it is quite true that the Treaty must stand. Egypt could only denounce it, and this would place her in a very difficult position. I have tried in this business, as an act of good faith, to begin the negotiations by making the proposal ourselves, without waiting to be forced, or for disorders in the streets, or to have it dragged out of us . . . One of the great things which we have to achieve in that country is *to get over the inferiority complex* . . . I recognize, like everybody else, that, in the early days, the work of Lord Cromer and others was such that it redounded to the advantage of us all, but we cannot live in the past. . . . It is a terrific anxiety', he concluded, 'to know whether one is taking just the right step, and *what its reaction will be on something else in this close-knit world*. In this case I had the choice of going to my colleagues and recommending force when the disturbance was in progress, or offering friendship, which I thought would re-echo through the Arab world. I chose friendship.'<sup>2</sup>



Thursday the 4th of July, 1946, destined to be a red-letter day in Egypt's annals, happened to be the hundred and seventieth anniversary of that other 4th of July when, in 1776, the former British colonies on the North American Continent obtained their independence and became the United States of America. The date chosen for the ceremony now about to be performed in Cairo to mark a

<sup>1</sup> Idem, columns 780 and 781.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, columns 786, 787, 788, 789.

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not dissimilar occasion appeared therefore to many close observers to be due to something that superseded mere chance.

The road leading from the centre of Cairo to the Citadel was lined, sparsely for so historic an occasion, with inhabitants from the neighbouring districts. From time to time a cheer broke out as passing cars brought British and Egyptian officers to take part in the impending ceremony. As the cars reached the end of the long street—Mohammed Ali Street—and passed between the two imposing mosques at its extremity, they emerged into the open space beyond which the massive and magnificent Citadel rises from a spur of the desert hills that reach the city's edge.

In the heart of the great fortress a select group of Egyptian and British officers and representatives of the world's Press were waiting expectantly in a position allotted to them in one of its quadrangles.

The Union Jack that had hitherto floated there so proudly now drooped listlessly from its staff in the hot, windless air.

At the moment of half-past eight the silence was broken by the sound of bagpipes. A few breathless minutes ebbed away. The pipers and band of the Highland Light Infantry then marched into the quadrangle. A hundred other ranks followed, forming up in threes confronting the flag. A few minutes later the sound of another band drew nearer. The music ceased and an Egyptian contingent, filing into the quadrangle to the sound of drum-beats, halted face to face with the British detachment as they presented arms.

A green staff car drove slowly into the quadrangle. A jeep followed. Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Allfrey, the British General Officer Commanding, descended from the car as both detachments presented arms and the General Salute was played by the British band.

Excited cheering was now heard from beyond the quadrangle heralding the approach from the city of the Egyptian Army's Chief of Staff. A brilliantly coloured car stopped at the entrance to the quadrangle and Ferik Ibrahim Attallah Pasha alighted. To the playing of the General Salute by the Egyptian band the British General Officer Commanding and the Egyptian Chief of Staff cordially shook hands.

Together they then proceeded to a position in the centre of the quadrangle. The eyes of everyone present were fixed on them, fascinated. The supreme moment had come, and General Allfrey, approaching Attallah Pasha, presented him with a silver key—a replica of the main key of the Citadel that had been handed to Sir

#### THE END OF AN ERA

Charles Watson in the darkness of the night of the 14th of September, 1882, after the defeat of Arabi Pasha at Tel-el-Kebir.

As the key was passing from British to Egyptian keeping, the British band played 'God save the King', and the Union Jack was slowly lowered, folded, and taken away.

The Egyptian National Anthem sounded. Attallah Pasha and General Allfrey drove away together in a British car. Egyptian soldiers now stood on guard where, for the previous sixty-four years, British sentries had stood. Vehicles packed with British soldiers, their difficult task so far as could be seen honourably fulfilled, unostentatiously drove away.

The simple ceremony took no more than half-an-hour, but to the few privileged spectators it seemed that they had witnessed the end of an era in Egyptian history that had originated with the Pharaohs.

★              ★              ★

The negotiations between Mr. Bevin and the Egyptian Government continued, but there were difficulties to overcome and, three months after this ceremony had taken place, the Wafd called upon the Egyptian people to begin a new struggle for full and complete sovereignty.

Riots again broke out in Cairo ; a bonfire of British books blazed in its main square ; lives were lost ; hundreds of arrests were made ; and it was clear that Mr. Bevin's 'act of good faith' was unlikely to bring the 'friendship' which he had so confidently believed 'would re-echo through the Arab world'.

A National Liberation Army then came into being and went into action against the British troops in the Canal Zone early in 1952, while, almost at the same time, Cairo fell into the hands of a maddened, murdering, looting mob whose destructive violence, directed by trained specialists, followed a course and reached dimensions that proved it to be a revolutionary outbreak deliberately planned and organized by foreign Communists. The world-famous Shepheard's Hotel was one of the many landmarks that went up in flames ; the British Turf Club was attacked and burnt to the ground ; a number of its members were murdered and their bodies, dead or alive, were thrown into the flames. A pall of smoke hung over the city ; and when order was at last restored by Egyptian troops, a large part of the European Quarter lay a wilderness of ruins.

★              ★              ★

#### THE SURRENDER OF THE KEY

Six months after this, power was seized by a group of officers led by General Neguib, and King Farouk was compelled to abdicate in favour of his infant son. A year later, 'Egypt's military council of the revolution decreed an end of the monarchy and formed a republican régime modelled basically on the United States system with General Mohammed Neguib as President and Premier'.<sup>1</sup> In a broadcast speech General Neguib proclaimed 'the termination of the monarchical system, the rule of the Mohammed Ali dynasty, and the title of Royal Family'.

The new régime represented a complete *volte-face* in the Egyptian attitude to the past. The heroes of yore became traitors and criminals. The same journals that once rang with adulation of the Kings, Sultans, and Viceroys, now denounced them as tyrants. Zaghloul, once the idol of his people, was now a traitor and tool of the British ; Pasha and Bey were extinct titles ; the dollar was no longer the 'vehicle of enslavement' ; foreign capital became a vital necessity. The only surviving factor was hatred of British 'imperialism', which was caricatured in the Egyptian Press by artists and journalists who resorted to the grossest and most sordid forms of vilification—though this attitude bore no relation to the cordial friendship extended to personalities.

One more year passed ; and then—in 1954—an agreement between Great Britain and Egypt was initialed in Cairo which provided for the complete withdrawal of all British forces from Egyptian soil within twenty months from the date of its signature.

This so-called 'Suez Agreement' was enthusiastically welcomed in the United States whence news was at once cabled to the British Press to the effect that the settlement 'would automatically clear the way for a new programme of American economic, technical, and military assistance' to Egypt ; that the number of United States technical advisers then in Egypt would be doubled in the near future ; and that the number of Egyptian trainees in the United States on special courses would also be doubled ; Egypt would receive further assistance with her educational programme both in instructors and facilities ; and the United States would support Egypt's plan for extension of mining, labour, and sanitation projects. 'American officials' (the message concluded) 'had made provisional plans for increased assistance so that work could go forward without delay when a settlement was reached'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 18th June, 1953.

<sup>2</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 28th July, 1954.

‘THE AWAKENING OF EGYPT’

Egypt did not have to wait long. The British Parliament approved the settlement, and the reason given by the Cabinet for having consented to the evacuation in spite of the fact that they had opposed it when it had been proposed by their political opponents, was that ‘strategic thoughts of a year ago were now utterly obsolete’.

The agreement was signed in the Pharaonic Hall of the Egyptian Parliament in Cairo in October, 1954, and, the following month General Naguib was deposed by the Revolutionary Command Council.

\* \* \*

The dawn of the new era that seemed to have begun in 1946 is symbolized by the work of an Egyptian sculptor named Mukhtar. This stands in the Square in front of the main railway station at Cairo, and is almost the first object to meet the eye of visitors arriving by rail. On a massive pedestal repose a monumental sphinx—enigmatic but not uneloquent symbol of Egypt’s Past. A female figure—representing Egypt—standing by its side, rests one of her hands upon its shoulder. The other is engaged in withdrawing from her face the veil that has hidden the world’s progress from her eyes and obscured her vision of her own destiny.

Mukhtar, a passionate Nationalist, called his work: ‘The Awakening of Egypt.’

We can but wonder what the awakening holds in store ?



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