CHAPTER IX

1925: AND THE FUTURE

When I arrived in Egypt in 1925, the position of affairs was briefly as follows. In 1922 the policy which His Majesty's Government had followed for forty years had been abandoned, and a new policy had been announced, which was henceforth to govern the relations between Great Britain and Egypt. Our previous policy had been to occupy Egypt and to supervise the administration of that country until such time as it appeared to His Majesty's Government that that administration was stable and capable of safeguarding the welfare of the people of Egypt. The new policy was fundamentally different; while recognising Egypt as an independent sovereign State, it laid down the position which we claimed in Egypt *vis-à-vis* all other Powers, and enumerated the matters in which the maintenance of our special position was vital to imperial security. In all these matters the *status quo* was maintained, but we declared our willingness to negotiate specific agreements upon them with the Egyptian Government at some later date when they might desire it and circumstances promised success. In the meantime the Egyptians would be free to develop national institutions in accordance with their aspirations. The British position, however, was officially described in the following important words:

"We propose to declare that the welfare and integ-
"rity of Egypt are necessary to the peace and safety
"of the British Empire, which will, therefore, always
"maintain as an essential British interest the special
"relations between itself and Egypt long recognised
"by other Governments."[1]

I have elsewhere discussed the Declaration of 1922, and my views in regard to it. When the post of High Commissioner was offered to me, there was no question of a revision of that declaration. As far as I was concerned, I realised that the new policy represented a definite commitment, and the only questions which I had to ask myself were whether, as High Commissioner, I could honestly support that policy, and whether I could contribute towards its fruition. My period of governorship in India had afforded me special opportunities of watching the course of affairs in Egypt during the years preceding and immediately following the Declaration of 1922. I had formed a strong impression that the new policy then adopted had never been given a fair chance to succeed. Firmly announced at the outset, it had never been firmly maintained. We had been far too prone to disregard its definite implications and we had constantly been guilty of official expressions and actions which had every appearance of an inclination to depart from it. By our own behaviour, we were destroying the chances of success of our own child: our vacillation was arousing in the minds of Egyptians a belief that we had no confidence in our own declaration and no determination to adhere to it. Yet if the policy was to succeed, if we were finally to achieve by mutual agreement a

[1] *Egypt*, No. 4, 1922. Telegram, dated February 27, 1922, from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor-General of Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa: communicating message from Prime Minister.

reasonable settlement of the outstanding points, it surely could only be by making it clear to Egyptians that we were firmly determined to maintain their independence, and equally firmly to discharge the responsibilities we had assigned to ourselves. As long as they were given any ground for thinking that such determination, whether in regard to what may be termed the permissive or to the restrictive aspects of the Declaration, did not exist, so long would the counsels of the extremist intransigeants continue to carry weight, and a policy of erosion and *grignotage* be encouraged. But once they had realised that we meant what we said, the voice of reason would have a chance to make itself heard. This argument, which to me seemed powerful, was strongly reinforced by the consideration that haste and impatience would also be very damaging to the interests of Egypt herself. The country had barely emerged from conditions in which lawlessness and violence had been widespread. She had handicapped herself with a Constitution which was utterly unsuited to the nature of the people; her politicans had gained popular support in circumstances and by methods which were no guarantee that they could provide a healthy administration. It was essential that they should be tried out in conditions less feverish than those which had hitherto obtained; and therefore that they should be left free for a space to devote themselves to the pressing internal problems which awaited them. This could not happen as long as we were urging negotiations upon them, or encouraging them by our own vacillation to be constantly harassing us in the hope of concessions.

Such, as my memory recalls them, were the trains of thought which then passed through my mind and which led me to conclude that there was a chance to

do in Egypt valuable work if I were equal to the task. And when I undertook the office of High Commissioner it was with the determination to make the policy of 1922 a real policy—to leave no doubt in any minds that whilst the measure of independence granted under the Declaration must be real, the reservations and Egypt's respect for them must be equally real and our intention to see them respected made evident. I was confirmed, moreover, in this view by the parting counsel I received from Mr. Ramsay MacDonald when, according to custom I visited him before departure at Lossiemouth in his capacity as leader of the opposition. "Be as liberal as "you may be," he said to me, "but be firm, eternally "firm"—advice which seemed to me admirably to summarise the only course open under the Declaration of 1922. By this means alone, as it seemed to me, could the current policy of the British Government achieve success.

Owing to grave internal difficulties of every kind, the Constitution did not come into being until April 1923, and the first elections under it were not completed until January 1924. The practical independence of Egypt—the real inception of responsible democratic government—began therefore no earlier than the beginning of the year 1924, when Zaghlul and his party were returned to complete power, and the men of moderate views were blotted out of the picture. Yet by April of that year Zaghlul, still feverish from his electoral triumph, still untested by the practical difficulties of administration, was in possession of an invitation from Mr. Ramsay MacDonald to come to London to negotiate a treaty. The haste with which this step was taken was as unfortunate as it was unnecessary. It could only serve to

inflate Zaghlul, and increase the unreasonableness of his demands, while it afforded strong presumptive evidence that we disliked our present position and would make considerable concessions to escape from it. The result was foreordained. Zaghlul, as we have seen, adopted an utterly unreasonable attitude, not only in regard to negotiations, but in regard alike to internal politics, and towards foreign representatives. Worse still, the British Government showed themselves inclined to tolerate Zaghlul's impossible demands, and went to considerable lengths to bring him to London. At no stage in the subsequent proceedings—not even when the negotiations had broken down in October—were the four fundamental reservations, upon which we had taken our stand, definitely and comprehensively insisted upon. A month later, Sir Lee Stack was murdered and the policy of concession was dropped with a vengeance. In face of the sudden display of resolution by His Majesty's Government, Zaghlul resigned, and without serious opposition from any section, but also without Parliamentary or electoral support, a Ministry of Anglophile moderates was formed to deal with the crisis.

In such a situation, what element of stability was discernible? The British Government had oscillated dizzily from negotiation with a violently unreasonable extremist leader to scarcely veiled threats of reaction. The democratic constitution had given complete power to a political party which was fanatical and unbalanced; administration could only be carried on in disregard of the requirements of the Constitution: and such disregard must involve great risks. Among all the parties of importance in this situation, there was none who could justifiably claim to be displaying

those qualities of steadiness and firmness without which there was no hope of a permanent accommodation. Was it unreasonable to conclude that if the British element took the lead in this regard, the other elements in the explosive mixture would have some chance of being infected by its example and gradually calm down to a more equable temperature. Our declared attitude was clear enough and demonstrably generous—we need not be ashamed to adhere to it with firmness, nor fear any charge of stubbornness or dishonesty if we did so. And if we stood still for a little or even for a long time, Egypt would have all the better chance of surmounting the difficulties of her internal position, of adjusting her political machinery to the conditions actually obtaining, and of comprehending the realities which must govern her permanent relations with us.

I have written so much by way of preface to the story of my own tenure of office, and to make clear the attitude of mind in which I accepted the invitation of His Majesty's Government. In order that I might be in a position to carry out what was generally acknowledged to be a task of grave difficulty it seemed to me that I should be justified in asking that certain conditions should be clearly laid down and understood before I accepted. In a situation so unsettled as prevailed in Egypt at the time, where so many cross-currents were moving under the surface of the waters, constantly changing in force and direction, it seemed essential that the British representative should be given a considerable share in the planning of the day-to-day operations necessary to carry out British policy. It would be difficult enough for him to keep track of what was happening behind the scenes, and often impossible for him to convey

an adequate picture to England either in sufficient detail, or in time enough to allow of decisive action being taken. I asked, therefore, that so long as I was loyally carrying out the policy laid down by the Cabinet and accepted by me—the policy of the Declaration—I should be given a large measure of freedom in selecting the day-to-day methods by which effect should be given to that policy. It was clear that, if this request were not made and accepted, such assets as I possessed of long experience of Oriental countries and their ways would lose most, if not all, of their value, and that a member of the Diplomatic Service could more profitably carry out the function to be assigned to the High Commissioner. That the request was at once accepted confirmed me in my view that the situation in Egypt demanded it, and also gave me ground for strong hope that my relations with the Secretary of State would be frank and cordial, and that we should be able to work together with real effect.

One interesting and somewhat illuminating problem arose even before my departure. The King's *chef de Cabinet* in the course of conversation at Alexandria with Mr. Henderson, then acting High Commissioner, casually threw out the supposition that I should, of course, be bringing with me Letters of Credence for presentation to the King. The conversation was reported to London, and the question at once arose as to whether I should in fact bear such credentials, and as to what might be the awkward results if I did not. It seemed to me beyond dispute that for the High Commissioner for the first time to present such letters was to put him at the very outset in the same position as the representative of any other Power in Egypt, to ignore his special responsibility

for the maintenance of the reserved points, and to deprive him of the position necessary to carry this out. At the same time I did not attach serious importance to the *chef de Cabinet's* conversation, which was probably nothing more than one of the many little *ballons d'essai* which Oriental, and not Oriental alone, ingenuity fabricates and throws out in such astonishing quantities. I went, in fact, without Letters of Credence, visited His Majesty in my own carriage and with my own escort according to the established precedent, and had an interesting and most friendly conversation with him, throughout the whole of which no reference to this supposedly all-important question was made.

I arrived in Egypt on October 21, 1925, to find a state of affairs which could only be described as chaotic. Ziwar Pasha, the Prime Minister, was still in Europe, whither he had proceeded in July. The Cabinet over which he was to preside on his return was a Coalition of Independents, Liberals, and Ittehadists, strong in influence and ability, but not entirely coherent, and having no constitutional justification in the state of representative institutions. How fluid and uncertain was this situation in fact was very soon demonstrated, for a week after my arrival the publication by the Government of a draft Law of Political Associations—which was designed to give them extensive powers to suppress all political opposition, incensed both Opposition parties and resulted in a *rapprochement* between the Liberal Constitutionalists and the Wafd. The publication of this law seemed to me to be rather the occasion than the fundamental cause of this *rapprochement*. The real bond which was drawing all politicians outside the Government and the King's Party together was the

growing power of King Fuad, and the increasing intervention in administrative affairs of Nashaat Pasha, the King's *chef de Cabinet*.

Ziwar Pasha returned from Europe on November 9, to be confronted almost at once with a published declaration of Saad Zaghlul to the effect that he strongly supported a proposal recently canvassed, that Parliament, whether summoned by the King or not, should assemble on November 21, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. Three days later, on November 18, Government replied with *communiqués* prohibiting the assembly of Parliament, warning students to refrain from political activity, and detailing the preventive measures that would be taken. On November 21 these measures were duly put into force, and troops and police blocked all approach to the Houses of Parliament: whereupon 134 ex-Deputies and 56 Senators, belonging to all the Opposition parties, assembled at the Continental Hotel, elected Saad Zaghlul President of the Chamber, Mohamed Mahmoud and Abdul Hamed Said Vice-Presidents, and proceeded to pass a number of resolutions protesting against the existence and activities of the present Ministry. The important thing about this meeting was not the result of its deliberations, but the fact that for the first time the members of the Watanist Party, the Liberal Constitutional Party, and the Wafd had publicly associated themselves together in a common cause.

With all these actual incidents the High Commissioner, was not concerned. But the state of affairs which underlay them—the tendency towards absolutism and the drift away from constitutional rule—was a matter about which he could not but be gravely anxious. It was clear to me—and indeed to the world

at large—that occupying the position which we in fact occupied in Egypt, and also by virtue of our Declaration of policy in 1922, we should be bound, in order to protect foreign interests, to intervene forcibly in the event of a serious internal conflict. Circumstances now compelled me to envisage such a situation developing as a result of unconstitutional activities on the part of those associated with the Palace: and I asked myself what would be the effect upon our position in Egypt, and our chances of securing a genuine accommodation with her political leaders, if our intervention were to be directed against a movement of all political parties, a movement provoked by what must inevitably appear to be an attempt to suppress the Constitution and set up an absolute monarchy.

For the moment, however, my hands were tied by the necessity of bringing to an early conclusion the negotiations which were proceeding between the Italian and Egyptian Governments in regard to the settlement of the Western Frontier.

These negotiations, the conduct of which on the Egyptian side had been entrusted to Sidky Pasha, had gone on for so long without determination, that the Italian Government had for some time been evincing symptoms of extreme restiveness. The points at issue had, by the time of my arrival in Egypt, narrowed themselves down to the vexed question of the oasis of Jaghboub. Although it was quite impossible to adduce any convincing proofs of the fact, the Egyptian people as a whole had easily persuaded themselves that Jaghboub was by rights a part of Egyptian territory. The Italians, on the other hand, claimed that Jaghboub formed, and had always formed, part of Cyrenaica, and this view was borne out by such author-

ities as existed on the subject, as well as by the investigations made by Lord Milner. Sidky Pasha, however, was stubbornly opposed to the Italian claim; King Fuad was refusing to be drawn into what he regarded as an unpopular responsibility, and therefore would not give definite instructions to Sidky or to the Cabinet. Meanwhile, it was extremely difficult to persuade the Italian Government to continue to exhibit patience: already harassed beyond bearing by Egyptian procrastination, they were now contemplating the breaking off of negotiations followed by unilateral action in regard to the disputed oasis. It was impossible for the British Government to contemplate such an eventuality: the support which we should then have had to give to Egypt would have involved us in a quarrel with a friendly Power, and in a cause the legality of which appeared to us extremely doubtful. The King and the Prime Minister did not fortunately prove obdurate in the face of urgent representations, and these difficult negotiations were brought to a conclusion on December 26, when the agreement between the two Governments was signed by Ziwar Pasha as Prime Minister.

My hands were now free to deal with the situation brought about by the activities of Nashaat Pasha. Nashaat Pasha was possessed of remarkable abilities and an attractive personality; by political disposition, moreover, he was friendly to the British connexion and believed in the advantages of Anglo-Egyptian co-operation. This situation was, therefore, by no means easy or pleasant to deal with, and yet it had to be ended, not only in the best interests of the King himself—upon a long view—but also because its further development must inevitably place the British power, in the eyes of all Egypt, in the posi-

tion of suppressors of the free Constitution which had only just been granted to her. I believed that, in spite of the immediate blow which King Fuad might feel that the fortunes of his party would receive, he would be statesman enough to take in good part my exposition of the situation as I saw it, and to realise that his own best interests demanded that a Palace official should not practise so obvious and masterful an intervention in administrative business for the purpose of procuring such obvious political results. This belief was fortunately justified by the conclusion.

On December 10 Nashaat Pasha was gazetted as a Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of Madrid, and left the Palace. His disappearance had a marked effect upon a situation which was continually upon the point of becoming critical. The hostility of all the Opposition parties to the Ministry of Ziwar Pasha was extreme. It was prevented from boiling over into violent action chiefly by reason of the fundamental distrust among those parties, a distrust which fortunately rendered their union precarious. But the situation remained one of considerable anxiety, and seemed certain to grow worse with time. My intervention in regard to Nashaat Pasha had had a temporarily calming effect, and the same result was produced by a speech which I had the opportunity to make on December 24 to a large gathering of notables, by whom I was very cordially received. In that speech I sought to emphasise His Majesty's Government's faith in the principle of the constitutional régime in Egypt, and their sincere desire that it should be successful.

These temporary alleviations of the situation left the main problem untouched. It would have been

solved had it been possible to withdraw the Liberal leaders from their alliance with the Wafd, and induce them to co-operate with Ziwar Pasha in his Ministry. But efforts to bring this about met with no success. It could also have been solved by the holding of fresh elections; but unfortunately this solution had been rendered much more difficult by the action of Ziwar Pasha himself. On December 8, in opposition to my earnest advice, the Prime Minister had promulgated a new electoral Law. I had been able to induce him to modify this law considerably, but as it stood it effected the disenfranchisement of some 10 or 15 per cent of the existing electorate. That such a measure was in itself desirable in the interests of Egypt no sane mind could doubt, but in the existing political conditions it seemed unwise of the Prime Minister to provoke the further hostility of the Wafd, and at the same time to lay himself open once more to a charge of disregarding the Constitution. The step he was proposing seriously postponed the possibility of a General Election, because new electoral lists could not be ready before May. Until Elections were held the fear that an unconstitutional régime might be made permanent would be continually goading the Opposition in the direction of violence, and they were privately circulating threats of strikes in Government offices, and general disturbances. Meanwhile it was becoming clear to me that throughout Egypt there did exist a widespread and genuine feeling of aversion to the Ministry in power. Although in the Provinces political feeling was not greatly excited, undoubtedly the credit of the Ministry stood low. The King was not at this time popular in the countryside, and the Ministry was believed to be subservient to him. And this view

had been confirmed by an incident which had at the same time gravely shaken the confidences and loyalty of the official classes—the summary dismissal from his post of Mahomed Zaghlul Pasha, Under-Secretary for Communications. Mahomed Zaghlul Pasha had for several years held the rank of Under-Secretary of State, and was regarded as a sensible and hard-working man. His dismissal was effected with indecent haste, and it was widely supposed that its cause was the desire of King Fuad to get rid of an Under-Secretary who had obstructed certain plans which the King entertained for the development of his own estates. After this there was reason to fear that official obedience to Government orders would not be entirely whole-hearted. Yet, in spite of these difficulties the fact remained that Ziwar Pasha, alike by his courage and by his unswerving loyalty to both King Fuad and the British connexion, had put us under an obligation which I was quite clear must be honoured at all costs.

Such was the state of affairs when in January 1926 I paid my first official visit to the Sudan. On my return early in February, the situation had to some extent been clarified by the decision of the Opposition leaders to boycott the Election and to summon a Congress for February 19 to decide upon a remedy for the present situation. The Senate had also passed a resolution calling upon the Government to abstain from enforcing the new Electoral Law, and to hold Elections under "the Law conforming to the Con-"stitution". The first intention of the Prime Minister, whose courage never failed him, was to forbid the meeting of the Congress and to return a provocative answer to the Senate. From both these courses I was able to dissuade him, and the line which he sub-

sequently took enabled him to withdraw with a good grace from his new Electoral Law, and to substitute for it the Law of 1924, which had been ratified by both Houses. With Elections under this Law fixed for the following May, the claws of the Congress were considerably pared, and it could, and did, meet and dissolve without causing any serious trouble.

The focus of anxiety was now shifted to the period after the Elections. And in regard to the results of these—whatever the Law under which they were held—there was no room for the slightest doubt. Zaghlul's party was bound to be returned with an overwhelming majority, and it was impossible to foretell with certainty what would follow upon that result. There was no reason, however, to take too pessimistic a view. It was still possible to conclude that there were tendencies at work which were on the whole encouraging. Perhaps the foremost among these was the still considerable residue of respectful attention directed by all classes towards the British Residency —a legacy of immense value bequeathed by the pre-War administration and maintained by Lord Allenby's personal prestige and singleness of purpose. On my arrival in Cairo, I had been received with every appearance of cordiality, and it had been made quite clear that Egyptians of all classes thought it worth while to stand well with His Majesty's representative. The Ministry were constant in seeking advice from the Residency, while the Liberal Constitutionalists, the moderate wing of an uneasy Opposition alliance, showed themselves more than willing to get into friendly touch with me, to discuss the situation frankly, and to listen to what I had to say. Although, in the prevailing fear of autocracy, and of the influence behind the existing Ministry, it was impossible

to secure an accommodation between the various moderate elements, yet there was much ground to hope that, by a combination of circumspection and steadiness, the influence of the Residency might have strong effect as a stabilising force.

How strong and widespread was British prestige in the subconscious mind of Egypt was forcibly demonstrated to me on more than one occasion. After my speech at the Continental Hotel in December, the Zaghlulist Press somewhat naïvely called for action instead of words from the Residency, hinting that it was my duty to dismiss the Ministry of Ziwar Pasha, and to insist upon Parliament being summoned at once!

Meanwhile Zaghlul was exhibiting a discernible tendency towards moderation. The events of 1924 had had their chastening effect upon him. He had been made to realise the overwhelming power of His Majesty's Government, and with two of his close colleagues about to be prosecuted for the murder of the Sirdar, he was still in danger of being stigmatised himself. He was anxious, therefore, to remain as far as possible in the background, and to cultivate a name for moderation. He was also realising that, however active in destruction his own party might be, it had singularly few members of any constructive ability—it would pay him, therefore, to endeavour to secure the support of some at least of the able members of the moderate party. And, finally, his health was not all that it should be, and he was compelled to nurse his energies rather carefully.

There were undoubtedly opportunities to hand for a restoration of sanity in Egyptian politics. The power which the Residency possessed was a real power, recognised by all the political groups in

Egypt. It was not necessary for the High Commissioner to step out into the arena: he could sit at home in the Residency, secure in the knowledge that his advice would be spontaneously sought, and his intervention behind the scenes invited. Provided that he kept clearly in his mind the Declaration of 1922, and took no step which did not, upon a strict interpretation, accord with those terms, he would inevitably be invited to exercise a considerable influence upon the affairs of Egypt. The most extreme circumspection was necessary, but the prudent and carefully directed exercise of British influence was a duty which the interests of Egypt and England alike demanded. I need hardly say that I did not envisage a return to "Cromerism": indeed I found, and still find, it impossible to understand what that curious phrase means. But I did feel very strongly that a considerable share of responsibility for the success of constitutional government in Egypt still lay upon the British. The prestige which still attached to us, of which we could not divest ourselves even if we would, furnished us providentially with a means of discharging this responsibility honestly and in good faith. And after all, it would have been the merest humbug to act as if the British Army of occupation did not exist. The existence of that Army unquestionably gave us a potential domination in Egypt, and the existence of that potentiality laid upon us an inescapable responsibility. It was useless to argue that we had no intention of using our resources of power. No Egyptian could so far disbelieve the evidence of his senses as to accept such a statement for a moment. In the popular view the Government, be it good or ill, owed its existence to British tolerance, if not to British support. However tempting such a course

might be in theory, in practice it was quite impossible—Egypt herself at this stage would not allow us—to retire to our tents and take no part in her political struggles. It is a method which people quite often suggest that we should now adopt in dealing with some of our imperial problems. For me it had an air of tired irritability which made it peculiarly repellent, nor do I believe that relations between Achilles and the Greeks were made more cordial after he had decided upon a similar policy.