CHAPTER XIV

THE SARWAT TREATY: NEGOTIATIONS ONCE MORE

THE prolonged storm which was described in the last chapter was succeeded by a lull, which enabled arrangements for King Fuad's long-projected visit to England to go forward. In order that the Chamber of Deputies should not raise objections to this visit, it was essential that he should be accompanied, as was customary on such occasions, by a Minister, and after some little discussion it was agreed that Sarwat Pasha should go with him.

The Army Budget, providing for the demands we had made, passed the Chamber without difficulty: and the other contentious measure, the Sudan subsidy, was voted intact. His Majesty, shortly followed by the Prime Minister, left for London, with the close of the Parliamentary session at the end of June.

For the moment, at any rate, the backward swing of the political pendulum appeared to have been arrested in its momentum. There was even some justification for thinking that it had commenced a contrary movement. The designs of the extremist wing had been frustrated; the Government and Zaghlul himself had in the end rejected such counsels, and adopted the moderate course of meeting our demands. That this had happened undoubtedly con-

stituted a definite step in the direction of a reasonable attitude of recognition of our just claims under the Declaration of 1922. Moreover, Sarwat Pasha, who had come out as the champion of accommodation, had undoubtedly consolidated his position, and augmented his influence in political circles. With the favourable settlement, for the time being, of the two vexed questions of British officers and the Egyptian Army, there was no doubt also that the British cause had sensibly advanced. The firmness of His Majesty's Government had had its due effect, and had begun to create a more stable impression that it was necessary to pay due attention to our views.

What was essential now was that the dust should be allowed to subside. While there was no gainsaying the fact that an advance had been made, there was also no ground for thinking that Egypt was yet ready to abandon the unreasonable position consistently advocated by extremist leaders. The position of the Moderates, though temporarily strengthened, was still precarious. If left undisturbed, they might in a period of constitutional government occupied entirely with internal betterment, succeed in consolidating their gains, and in winning a preponderating measure of electoral support. But it was perfectly clear that the time was not ripe for the opening of any burning question. The temper of the nation was still doubtful in the extreme, and to do so would only result in advancing the extremist cause and setting back moderation. What was wanted was an attitude on our part of defensive caution; ready firmly to defend our position, but otherwise waiting patiently until Egypt should be prepared to make friendly advances to us. Any sign of eagerness for accommodation on our part would now merely be

nationalism which was clearly the complement of xenophobia. That these occasions were not more numerous showed at least that Zaghlul himself was impressed with the futility of a struggle with the British Government, and realised that the interests of the Constitution demanded the maintenance of good relations with us. He was beginning, too, with many of the more intelligent of his followers, to appreciate the fact that Parliament was losing public esteem. It was displaying laicising tendencies obnoxious to whole classes of the population. It had done nothing for the man in the street, and had definitely displeased the fellaheen by its handling of the problem of cotton prices, while all thinking people were alarmed at the increase of nepotism and corruption, and the dislocation of provincial administration by the interference of local deputies. Out of all this it was natural that the Liberals should be gaining ground: Sarwat Pasha's stand against interference, the obvious difficulties in which he was put by the ill-judged intemperances of the Wafd, all went to extend the sympathy felt for him and his party in the country. It was clear that the process would continue and grow more rapid, provided only that nothing was done to provide the Wafd party with a slogan by which it could once more stir up national emotion.

There was no reason, on the face of it, to suppose that Sarwat Pasha's visit to England would not be of material assistance to him in this regard. Demonstrations of friendliness and goodwill would consolidate his personal position, and commit him to nothing further; while an opportunity would be provided for demonstrating to him beyond the possibility of dispute that while His Majesty's Government were unwearying in goodwill they were also

"be useful if before Lord Lloyd left, I could give him "rather more precise indications on the lines on which "we might proceed than were contained in what I had "just said to His Excellency."

The confidence that I should undoubtedly have felt would have been rudely dispelled had I known that the very next day permanent officials of the Foreign Office began negotiations with Sarwat Pasha, suggesting there and then that a treaty of alliance should be concluded. Discussion also took place with regard to the principles of such a treaty.

In spite of the Secretary of State's clearly recorded intention not to negotiate with Sarwat Pasha "during "this visit", the historical fact is that negotiations were begun the very next day, and two days afterwards—July 15—a detailed treaty was actually in draft. On July 18 Sarwat Pasha called again at the Foreign Office and communicated a draft treaty which he on his side had drawn up. The private secretary discussed this draft with him, and finally told him that he "would at once take steps to communicate his "draft to the Secretary of State".

It thus happened that the Secretary of State, who on July 12 had been reiterating his firm intention that no negotiations should take place in London at this time, on July 18 was presented by his advisers with a draft treaty drawn up after considerable negotiation between them and the Egyptian Prime Minister. No record is available of the Secretary of State's immediate reactions to this rapid development. On July 24, however, he circulated to the Egyptian Committee of the Cabinet the sketch of a draft Treaty of Alliance produced by Sarwat Pasha, and an alternative draft prepared in the Foreign Office. He stated that owing to the pressure of

other affairs he had been unable as yet to discuss these drafts in detail with me, but hoped to be in a position to ask the Cabinet for a decision very shortly. Meanwhile I had never seen the drafts, was unaware of their existence, and had not been informed by the Secretary of State that anything was taking place.

Had I been consulted—and as I was in London, consultation with me was not difficult—I should have urged—and events would have proved me right—that in the present temper of Egypt there was absolutely no hope of any treaty which maintained the interests that we considered vital being accepted by that country. That this was not purely a personal view is shown by the memorandum which my deputy, Mr. Nevile Henderson, submitted upon the draft treaty in August, which begins as follows: "On the "supposition that negotiations for a treaty are desir-"able and inevitable, what prospect is there that, once "undertaken, they will result in an agreement accept-"able to both parties? Is it, in the first place, possible "to devise terms which, without imperilling British "imperial and commercial interests, will be sufficiently "attractive from an Egyptian point of view to ensure "ratification of the treaty by an Egyptian parliament? "And secondly, even if this were possible according "to the ordinary standards of logic and mutual ad-"vantage, will the Egyptians in general, and Saad in "particular, have the moral courage to face facts, and "to recognise that it is better to achieve something "than to keep a national programme inviolate by "achieving nothing." Those were the questions which it was vital to answer before negotiations began—questions which were apparently passed over in silence at the time—questions which were in fact ultimately answered with a flat negative. The sad

truth was that to enmesh Sarwat Pasha at this juncture in the net of treaty negotiation was to render his political downfall inevitable. Any Egyptian statesman who sponsored Treaty proposals falling short of complete independence for Egypt was certain to be torn limb from limb. It might have been bluntly replied that that was Sarwat's business, and that it was up to him to look after his own career; but the reply had no real force, for Sarwat Pasha, like many of his countrymen, was not naturally inclined to take a long view, and he was now presented with an opportunity which appeared, however delusively, to offer the possibility of immediate advantage, in circumstances which made it very difficult to decline.

On July 28 it appears that the Cabinet approved the draft of the proposed treaty which had been drawn up by the Foreign Office. On August 2 the Secretary of State telegraphed to Mr. Henderson in Egypt a resumé of the communication he was making to the French and Italian Governments on the subject of his conversations with Sarwat Pasha; the resumé made no mention of draft, or counter-draft, or Cabinet approval, but merely suggested that by conversation a frame of mind must have been induced in Sarwat Pasha in which a fruitful seed might ultimately germinate. As a matter of fact the seed had not only germinated, but had already grown into a fine tree, on whose branches preambles and clauses had already sprouted. Sarwat Pasha left for Egypt at the end of August. At the Embassy in Paris he had another conversation with the private secretary, who reported that Sarwat Pasha handed to him the observations "which he had promised me in London "on the subject of the draft treaty", expressed his intention to return to London in October "for the

action until there was some indication as to how the internal situation would develop. The Liberals had a better chance of securing the lead now that Zaghlul, the only Wafd leader who could countervail their superior intelligence, was removed. Equally, the Wafd would be more than ever anxious to assert themselves by emotional appeals. Curiously enough, these considerations were used in London as an argument in favour of pressing forward the treaty negotiations, although it was realised that the prospect of securing a treaty was now remote. It was now decided to entice Sarwat Pasha finally to his doom, on the odd theory that further negotiations would make it easier for him "to form a pro-treaty party of reasonable "persons which could out-influence and perhaps in "time out-vote the extremists". I do not know what justification was discovered in the existing situation for so wild a surmise. The one thing that was certain to destroy the influence of reasonable opinion was to throw into the present situation the torch of agreement with England, with its inevitable result of inflaming emotional unreason. None the less negotiations were pressed on: the Foreign Office went on preparing "notes", "explanatory memoranda", "memoranda on general considerations", "reports of "conversations". Everything possible was done to add fuel to the fire; and rumours were already circulating busily in Egypt, arousing all sorts of hopes and fears. As long as Sarwat Pasha could keep negotiations alive, he could make political capital out of it all. He could always be hinting at what he was going to get, and no political party in Egypt would dare to try and upset him. But the moment he was compelled to come out in the open and divulge the result of his negotiations, his doom was sealed.

He returned to London at the end of October to resume negotiations with the Secretary of State. On October 22 Mr. Nevile Henderson wrote from Alexandria a despatch which contained a final warning full of wisdom. He pointed out that there was no stability in the present internal situation in Egypt, and that its developments were impossible to foresee: that in consequence there could be no guarantee that Sarwat Pasha would get any treaty accepted, however far it went, and that in any event he would have to make known sooner or later the terms of the drafts. "It seems to me, in fact, that Sarwat's discussions in "London last July have forced us into a position in "which we must frankly and very precisely state what "we are prepared to give way upon, and what we insist "must be maintained. Egypt has the right to be made "aware of what we regard as indispensable to the "safety of our Empire."

It was a very similar view that I took myself when the fact that negotiations were well under way was at last disclosed to me on Sarwat Pasha's return at the end of October. I thought the initiation of these negotiations to have been not only impolitic, and useless, but actually full of harmful possibilities to our own interests, and to those of our Egyptian supporters. But to negotiation we were now irretrievably committed: breaking off at this stage would result in the most harm of all, besides involving a breach of faith. The only course open to me was now to do my utmost to turn the present proposals to the advantage of England and Egypt. I could, however, entertain little hope that a treaty would be secured, and it was a poor consolation to reflect that failure of this wild goose chase, when it came about, would perhaps convince the Secretary

of State that my advisers had not been entirely at fault in their diagnosis of the Egyptian situation.

For the moment, however, there was nothing for it but to concentrate upon the endeavour to secure a reasonable treaty.

However doubtful of success this course might be, we were committed to it, and must pursue it now to the end. Upon one thing I was determined: there should be no room left for doubt in any responsible mind in England as to my own views and proposals. The drafts of the treaty were not shown to me until twenty-four hours before I was called upon to give a responsible opinion. I was in London away from my papers and my advisers, but I had the situation pretty thoroughly in my head, and felt that I had enough material upon which to outline the limit to which concession was possible. In the short time at my disposal I endeavoured to make it clear to the Secretary of State that I thought that in regard to certain of the proposals made by the Foreign Office we were going beyond the minimum which was absolutely vital to our own imperial and commercial interests. Having made this divergence clear, I was extremely embarrassed at receiving a summons to the Cabinet. I at once informed the Secretary of State and placed myself unreservedly in his hands. He was my chief, and I held views which differed from his: if I went to the Cabinet I must express those views fully, even in opposition to my own chief. I asked him what he would have me do. His reply relieved me of a great anxiety, for he told me with unhesitating friendliness that I must of course tell the Cabinet what my views were, and that he himself would expect this, and welcome it. Immediately after that

meeting of the Cabinet had taken place I was due to return to Egypt, and Sarwat Pasha, as it happened, was leaving by the same boat as myself. Nothing had finally been decided in regard to the treaty, and I left London with the clear impression that there was no chance of any decision being taken until I was back in Cairo and in communication with His Majesty's Government again. I travelled therefore to Paris, and then to Marseilles: but had hardly embarked before I was overtaken by the Consul-General with an urgent telegram, which informed me that the Cabinet had decided to approve the draft treaty, that the concurrence of the Dominions was being immediately sought, and that I was to arrange for exchange of signatures immediately upon my arrival in Cairo. Sarwat Pasha had shaken off the dust of London on November 8, but had been followed to Paris, where he had been brought to further urgent discussions on the night of the 9th (to which although I was in Paris I was made no party) and on the morning of the 10th. As a result of these discussions, the Foreign Office representative felt himself able to report a virtual though not a complete agreement. He said that before leaving he had impressed upon Sarwat Pasha that "if we succeeded "in agreeing with him on all points, it was vital he "should make no attempt to reopen the discussion. . . . "He must make it clear to those in Egypt with "whom he would discuss the matter that the arrange-"ment on which he had agreed must be taken as it "stood or left." Sarwat Pasha said he would "oppose "any idea of reopening the question by telegraph".

It was the height of cruelty to extract such an engagement from the Pasha, who was now within measurable distance of his Waterloo, and could

hardly be expected to tie his own hands at a moment when he was about to fight for his life. But if others were blind to that fact, the Prime Minister of Egypt was not. He knew, none better, what were the prospects of the Foreign Office treaty being accepted by Egypt. His only hope was to press at every point for further negotiation and further concession. He had extracted a great deal already by way of concession, but not enough to save himself. Only a miracle could secure his final salvation; in its absence he could but work to defer as long as possible the fatal day of his defeat. On November 14 the following message from the Secretary of State was received in Cairo: "Please "greet Sarwat Pasha cordially from me on his arrival. "Tell him that I am happy to be able to greet him "on his return with the news that, subject to the "concurrence of the Dominion Governments, His "Majesty's Government approve the result of our "common work, and will be prepared to sign treaty as "soon as he is in position to do so. You will express "to Sarwat Pasha my high regard for the courage, "statesmanship, and frankness which he showed "throughout our conversations, and my confidence "that the same qualities will enable him to bring our "joint labours to a successful issue. The High Commis- "sioner and I will do all in our power to smooth his "path, and I count on him to help us in avoiding or "removing difficulties." Poor Sarwat Pasha! The real test of his "courage, statesmanship, and frankness" was still to come. And the satisfaction which the Secretary of State was able to draw from the prospect of signature was for him no satisfaction at all, but a nightmare of anticipation. From now onwards, the high hopes entertained in Whitehall were to be steadily dissipated, and that satisfaction replaced by

disappointed resentment, as Sarwat Pasha, animated by the instinct of self-preservation, struggled with all his might to avoid facing the issue, and to extricate himself from the bonds in which the Foreign Office had tied him.