CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

It is the land of Egypt that usually provides the English traveller with his first view of the East, and he must be dull indeed if the memory of that first view ever entirely fades. The short passage from ship to shore sets him suddenly face to face with the strange Oriental scene. The light that never was upon the land or sea of his home strikes now for the first time upon his eyes. The swift and colourful daylight sinks as if by magic to a softly luminous afterglow, and then to the unearthly peace and remoteness of the desert night. An imagination that is awake and receptive may catch from that vision an infection that will last a lifetime. Long afterwards, when the traveller has returned to the West, he will find the memory of its haunting beauty knocking persistently at the doors of his heart and mind.

Yet it has always seemed to me that it is not beauty alone that makes the appeal so enduring. There is some other quality that softens the strangeness and makes the Englishman feel a kinship, unanticipated but powerful, with a scene so foreign to his experience. It is a kinship which is difficult to explain—and I have often wondered how much of it is due to the Bible training that has so strongly influenced our childhood. Generation after generation, day after

day, we have read or listened to simple descriptions of a homely life, which has no counterpart in our experience, but yet by force of repetition has perhaps become part of our individual heritage. Until we travel into the East, that life is merely a convention —as unreal as the convention of the fairy-books. But in the East we find it going on, just as we heard of it, in every village. The characters and scenery of village life in India, in Egypt, in Arabia, are not strangers to us, but old friends. Two women will be grinding together still, and still the ox will be treading out the corn. The locusts still have no king, and still go forth by bands. The traveller may still pass by the vineyard of the slothful, the stone wall whereof is broken down: He may still hear the crackling of thorns under the pot. And still, alas! dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour. We know these sights and sounds: they are the companions of our youth magically restored to us: and by this link they demand, and obtain, from us a powerful, perhaps subconscious, sympathy. But still they are strangers. The processes of their thought are only learnt empirically, the strong rivers of their philosophical and religious life arise from sources that cannot be discovered by us; a deep gulf has parted the histories that have made them and us what we are.

In these two facts lie perhaps the deepest springs both of the benevolence we have always felt towards Eastern peoples, and of the misdirection that has often been given to that benevolence. Are kindred causes in some measure responsible for the fact that during the last ten years our ignorance of the East has been growing as our benevolence has been diminishing? It can hardly be denied that, whereas in the old days we relied upon knowledge and experience to

guide us, and increasing welfare to justify us, now we have discarded knowledge and a belief in the welfare of the masses in favour of a Western schoolman's theory—certainly not the least fallacious and superficial of the series. For what could be more dangerous than the principle of universal democracy to which all our theorists pay their daily lip service. They assert that "self-determination" is the sole criterion; that to be "free and independent" is to be happy. Are the Chinese peasants rejoicing in their new-found freedom and independence? May not the truth be that pure democracy is in no continent practically realisable, and that in most of the countries of the East it has proved itself to be directly incompatible with civilisation or the welfare of the world? And how is it that we find the same people who loudly acclaim the League of Nations, which, after all, can only develop in so far as it imposes checks upon absolute nationalism, urging us, as far as our Empire is concerned, to suppress such development by promoting nationalism at all costs?

How is this attitude, which has been so prevalent during the last decade, to be explained? Does it arise out of a combination of indifference and ignorance? Certainly only the uninstructed could seriously believe that we can at this moment of time give to India a complete democracy which will be in any sense of the word a true democracy, where the will of the people will in the last resort prevail. Only they could assert that Indians as a whole desire such a form of government, or that it would be in the true interests of India. Equally certainly, only the indifferent could have watched without feelings of grief and indignation the history of our mandate in Palestine—a country where our Government was

resented by none, but where for the first time in our long Imperial history we failed to provide security for the peoples committed to our charge. Do we no longer care to ensure that our rule is good, or that those who live under it derive material benefit from it? It is hard enough in the numerous discussions that take place upon our Imperial problems to discern any voice raised on behalf of the masses who live under our Empire. When we are considering whether we should relax our rule further, the question whether the step will promote their welfare is simply not debated. Indeed we constantly hear it said—for example—that we went to India for trade, and that is all we are really concerned for now. And the question that is really uppermost in the English mind is, can we resist the demand for complete independence? Yet independence settles not one single one of the problems which really concern the welfare of the masses in Egypt, or in India, or in Palestine. Nor is it in the least true to say that the masses want it. They can be, and have constantly been, stirred to violent expressions of discontent by political agitators. But is it imagined for a moment that they have thus responded because they have genuine political aspirations? They do not understand the machinery by which our constitutions work: they neither comprehend nor sympathise with the doctrine of responsibility. But they have their grievances, and it is by dwelling upon these that the agitator inflames them, utterly disregarding the fact that political changes would have no more remedial effect upon these discontents than the man in the moon. Good administration is their only desire and concern—and it is because we have allowed administration to be obscured by political issues that we have brought

such heavy troubles upon the shoulders of all concerned.

In all these countries the real problem has been administrative, and we have chosen to regard it as political. What was the reason? Was it simply the hypnotism exercised over us by the disastrous cry of "self-determination"? or were we also the victims of a growing indifference to responsibilities which did not appear to concern our purely material welfare? There will probably be many people who will be stirred to indignant protest at the suggestion that either of these explanations is correct. But none the less there is ground for examining both of them, and for holding that the combination of the two may have formed a stimulus at once insidious in its persuasive force, and powerful in its dangerous results. People who are attracted by the purely material appeal of a policy of "cutting losses" can shelter themselves behind the moral value which a policy of "self-determination" appears superficially to possess. Those who are naturally inclined to run after misty ideals find themselves strangely reinforced and supported by their natural enemies, the self-interested cynics. The fallacies and anachronisms which are inherent in the theory of self-determination have already been analysed and laid bare by writers much better qualified than I am for the task. The dangers which have resulted from it in Central Europe are brutally apparent to all of us. Self-determination is in fact the watchword of a world that has departed—it wrought noble deeds in its day—but it has been maintained in our present century by minds which look at our problems academically and without real understanding. These have imposed upon us a settlement of the world's difficulties which is unnatural and can only be maintained by force, yet

they are invincibly opposed to providing or employing the force which alone can preserve such a settlement until it has made its own roots. The result is fear, uncertainty, and unrest. How much longer are we to continue to worship broken idols?

Palestine provides us, as far as our own problem is concerned, with perhaps the best reasons for investigating the causes of our bewildering lack of policy. It is a country to which we were invited by its own people: and we assumed the responsibility for its government at the request of the nations of the world. There was therefore no possible room for any doubt in our own minds as to the legality and the disinterestedness of our position there. The Mandate which we received from the League of Nations laid down the lines of the policy which we were to pursue, and it was a policy which consorted with declarations we had previously made ourselves. It was in fact a settlement of one post-War problem, not imposed by victorious arms, or by the will of one nation, but made and approved by the nations of the world. But the devil of self-determination entered into this swept and garnished room, and conflicts arose very soon. When the real clash came, it found us neither forewarned nor forearmed, with the result that we failed to maintain the rule of law and the good order which it was our first and essential duty to preserve. Whatever may be said of Egypt or of our Imperial dependencies, as to Palestine there was no doubt regarding the equity of our position and our right to govern. The cause of our failure cannot therefore be found in the actions of a bygone generation. The tyrannous behaviour and unsympathetic habits of our fathers towards Palestinians are clearly not the root of our present troubles. Yet our failure there was in all

respects similar to our failure elsewhere. So that it seems clear that we must look for some cause that lies in ourselves, not in our past history: and it appears to me that we are forced back to the conclusion that the fault lies with this subtle combination between lack of interest and a disruptive faith in self-determination. From somewhere has come a prevalent desire to get rid of responsibilities which superficially appear to bring no material profit; from America has come the dangerous dogma which has obsessed our political thinkers. The combination of the two must bear the immediate guilt for the blood that has so constantly been shed in the countries for which we have been responsible since the War.

I shall not plead for a deeper recognition of our responsibilities, or for a lesser preoccupation with an out-of-date idolatry. These will come inevitably by a natural reaction, which is already beginning to show itself. But if there is a section of the vocal public in England who really think that we can solve our difficulties by throwing off these responsibilities, I would warn them with all the earnestness at my command that such a course will solve none of the problems which now confront the world, will raise a still larger crop of new problems, and will destroy our credit and prestige to such an extent that we shall cease to have any effective voice in the councils of the nations.

We are already shaping a course which will carry us dangerously near to that point. And if the story of Egypt can teach us any lesson, it is the lesson that chaos threatens at the end of that path. In solving the problem which arose at the end of the War, we decided to bury out of sight the responsibilities which we had undertaken for so many years. We concentrated instead upon our own superficial interests, and

forgot in our extremity that the two must go hand in hand, or run the risk of separate extinction. We declared Egypt to be "free and independent" in accordance with the silly slogan of the time, but we affirmed the sanctity of our own interests, and it was essential in order to preserve those interests that we should be prepared to maintain them whole and undiminished with all the force of which we were capable.

Instead, we decided to try our hand at bargaining, and Lord Allenby was very wise in the view which he consistently held that bargaining was wrong and useless. We had conceded the real point at issue before we began. We had admitted Egypt's claim to independence, and Egypt had conceded nothing in return. Upon that claim of hers she stood with single-minded persistence; at every stage she met us with the same argument of her independence: every one of our demands was tried by that test and refused. Very quickly the weakness of our position was exposed, and we appeared to ourselves and to the world weakly struggling and contemptibly failing to restore by bargaining a position which we had not the courage to maintain by other means. The days of our strength and beneficence were gone. Cromer and Kitchener, whose word was power, were but dim memories. Their successors were no longer armed with the prestige of a powerful and single-minded Empire, but hardly knowing what policy they were to carry out from day to day, must descend to the ignoble level of intrigue and opportunism, in a struggle that could bring no profit. In that contest they were doing sadly little to promote happiness or prosperity. They were fighting a rearguard action on behalf of an Empire which had lost the desire to do good, whose policy was directed, if at all, by a sorry

eagerness to divest itself of responsibilities for which its statesmen were no longer great enough. The story which we have now to tell is one of almost unbroken retreat. Again and again we shall find the British Government taking up positions from which it solemnly declares that it will never be moved: again and again we shall find it a few months later in full flight from those positions. Distrustful of its strength, uncertain of its direction, its only activity will be retreat, while it covers its indecision by a parade of sentiments which will either be misunderstood or despised. Nothing in our history is more grievous than the continuing incapacity which our Governments have displayed since 1919 to uphold their own declarations against difficulties which they invariably proved afraid to face.

The first volume of my narrative brought the history of our relations with Egypt to the point where the Milner Mission was to commence its investigations. There remains to be told the story of the subsequent years, for four of which I was myself His Majesty's High Commissioner in Egypt and the Sudan. My knowledge of the events with which the present volume deals is therefore much more intimate than my knowledge of the years dealt with by the first volume: and for that reason I shall hardly be able to escape from imparting a more subjective flavour to my narrative, and adopting a more personal tone. If I do not at all times succeed in maintaining that degree of aloofness which scientific treatment demands, I can only hope that the disadvantage to science will be balanced by a heightened dramatic interest.

The years with which we now deal are separated from the years of the Occupation by the deep gulf of

the War. Until 1914 we had been sure of our Imperial mission. There were domestic quarrels as to how that mission should be carried out, but no serious doubt as to its existence. After 1920, on the other hand, self-determination will be found to have shaken to its very foundations our faith in an Imperial policy of any kind. Self-determination will be found to govern our dealings with Egypt, and to obsess the minds of all concerned. After the passage of a decade it is perhaps not too soon to assess the results that this new theory has produced. It has been at work not only in Egypt, but through the whole of Europe and Asia. With the havoc it has wrought elsewhere we are not directly concerned, but there may be useful lessons to be learned from tracing its course in the Nile Valley,