CHAPTER XIX

THE LESSON REMAINS UNLEARNT

I HOPE that my readers will not regard as entirely inexcusable the parenthesis of the last chapter. I am aware that, in the manner it has been there dealt with, the subject is relevant far more to my personal history than to the history of Egypt. But the incident described had, of course, its importance in the story of our Egyptian policy, quite apart from my personal part in it: and I must now hasten to make amends for my digression by treating of it fully in its bearing on the main story.

In the debate in the House of Commons this aspect of the affair was unfortunately put very much in the background, owing in the main to Mr. Henderson's sweeping personal references. The debate had been opened by Mr. Baldwin, whose constant endeavour it is to lift Parliamentary discussion to the plane of general and not particular arguments. It was, no doubt, in pursuit of this excellent purpose that he refrained that day and has since consistently refrained from any reference to the good relations which had always existed between myself and the Cabinet of which he was Prime Minister. Mr. Henderson was animated by no similar purpose. He descended at once to the particular and, as a result, the debate was far less informative than the previous debate in the

House of Lords had been. In that House some very interesting information had been obtained by Lord Reading from Lord Parmoor—it was in effect that the Labour Government were not contemplating any change in policy, but a change in procedure which might be all-important. Lord Reading summarised the information he had received in these words: "We are told, first, that there is no change "of policy as regards the four reservations and the "Sudan; secondly, that there is no change of policy "in regard to internal questions. The third is that "the only change of policy may be in procedure, "which I quite agree may be important." LORD PARMOOR: "All-important".

In explanation of what this all-important change of procedure was, all that was vouchsafed from the Government benches was the following statement by Lord Parmoor: "There is in one sense a change of "procedure. I think that the late Government always "desired, as far as the internal policy of Egypt is con-"cerned, after negotiation and arrangement, that it "should have as much as possible the constitution of a "self-governing community. I do not say about the "methods followed. In that respect we probably go "further. We have the same desire, but a different "way, no doubt, of proceeding." Now this extremely cryptic phraseology was capable no doubt of several different interpretations. It might have meant that His Majesty's Government intended intervention in Egyptian internal affairs for the restoration of Parliamentary Government. It might have meant that they intended to negotiate a treaty upon the basis of concessions more generous than the previous Government had contemplated. We need not, fortunately, consider the infinite series of meanings which it could

have carried, for history has shown us that what was actually intended was a combination of the two above recited. It was indeed admitted in both Houses of Parliament that negotiations—or conversations with a view to negotiations—had already commenced with the representatives of Egypt. And it was subsequently made clear that the Government of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald were prepared to go very much further in concession than Mr. Baldwin's Government had gone, and that they also intended to intervene very directly in the internal affairs of Egypt by using these negotiations as a means to end the existing régime and restore Parliamentary Government.

This was a very definite change, and it was much more than a change in procedure. It constituted, beyond doubt, a marked alteration of policy. It will be recalled that since the Declaration of 1922 the one principle that had been steadily maintained had been no interference in Egyptian internal affairs except for the purpose of maintaining our essential interests as enshrined in the reserved points. It had never been suggested that we should intervene for any other purpose, and the suggestion would have been rejected as soon as made. The only instance which could possibly have been adduced as in any way remotely analogous was the indirect part which I myself had played in inducing Ziwar Pasha to restore Parliamentary Government in 1926. But the analogy would not bear inspection, for in that case the cessation of Parliamentary Government had itself been due to the direct intervention of His Majesty's Government, and the ultimate responsibility for the situation so created rested upon our shoulders. For the rest such divergences of view as there had been had concerned themselves solely with the interpre-

tation of our declared policy, and His Majesty's Government and the Residency had been entirely of one mind as to the importance of not intervening for any other cause save in defence of that policy. But now Mr. MacDonald's Government were proposing directly to interfere in support of one of the parties to a purely internal political struggle—a change of policy which could not be in any way linked to the Declaration of 1922.

The change of procedure was equally clearly defined, and, in the light of recent experience, clearly ill-advised. It was, of course, perfectly true that the Conservative Foreign Secretary had endeavoured to negotiate a treaty, and that the negotiation of such a treaty was a cardinal point of the policy laid down in 1922. But to begin negotiations again—and so soon—was to ignore every lesson that could be learnt from the previous attempt. The events described in many previous pages must have made it clear that even when Sir Austen Chamberlain began his negotiations with Sarwat Pasha the time could not be considered ripe for the achievement of a reasonable treaty. Sir Austen Chamberlain in his attempt to secure a treaty made what were admitted to be very considerable concessions to the Egyptian demands, but the Wafd remained completely unreasonable and unresponsive, rejected the proposed treaty out of hand, came into power as the result of that rejection, and proceeded to use that power in a manner which seriously undermined the relations between Great Britain and Egypt, and played havoc with the internal administration of that unfortunate country. Such respite from these calamities as she had since achieved had only come from the cessation of Parliamentary Government. The lesson, as far as His Majesty's

Government was concerned, was perfectly clear. It was set out by Sir Austen Chamberlain himself in a despatch dated March 13, 1928, and addressed to me in Cairo: "As regards the treaty, a most generous "offer of settlement was made by His Majesty's "Government, and the Prime Minister of Egypt saw "in it a great opportunity for his country. It was re-"fused, however, by his Government at the bidding of "the Wafd, as he himself has explained. The Cabinet, "nominally responsible for Egyptian policy, have re-"jected it on the ground that it does not provide for "the complete withdrawal of the British troops in "Egypt, because they have allowed their will to be "imposed upon by people without responsibility. The "late British Government (Socialist) refused to con-"sider the complete withdrawal of British troops, and "no British Government will or can accept such a "condition. The treaty stands as the high-water mark "of British concession to Egyptian nationality and it "may be well for patriotic Egyptians to be left to "ponder on the generosity of its terms and the charac-"ter of its reception by the Egyptian Parliamentary "majority."

Moreover, Sir Austen Chamberlain was not alone in drawing these conclusions. At the same period more than one of the responsible officials in the Foreign Office were busy placing upon record the conclusions to which a consideration of the negotiations inevitably led them. These records were of peculiar interest to me, for they showed me very clearly that whatever differences there had been in the past, the opinion of the permanent officials was now at one with my own. It seemed unfortunate that Mr. Henderson in his search through the papers had not lit upon these various statements of the un-

wisdom of the course he contemplated. Had he, for instance, been apprised of this considered opinion held by one of his senior advisers? "The recent nego-"tiations, no less than earlier ones, have shown that a "reasonable compromise between British interests and "Egyptian aspirations will not on its merits alone be "accepted by Egyptian opinion." The writer goes on to infer that one of the few circumstances which can bring about such acceptance would be that the Wafd should be discredited. "The prestige and credit of "the Wafd will depend largely upon our handling of "the political situation while the present Government "(that of Mahmoud Pasha) remain in office."

Even more significant are the reflections recorded by another official who had been most active in impelling Sarwat Pasha to negotiate. In an interview which he gave to an Egyptian representative in the summer of 1928, he made up for a defective memory by a firmness of language and a soundness of judgment which did him credit.[1] "It had been the con-"sistent policy of His Majesty's Government not from "their side to make any offer to Egypt. . . . Sir "Austen Chamberlain had adopted the same line of "conduct. Beyond impressing upon Sarwat Pasha that "he could not see what Egyptian interest could be "served by allowing the present unsatisfactory state of "affairs to continue, he had nothing specific to sug-"gest. This conversation had resulted in Sarwat Pasha's "putting forward his first draft. Any departure from "such policy would give the impression that it was we "who were anxious for an agreement . . . it was de-"sirable to leave the Egyptians under no delusion that "it was their interest in the first place that such an "agreement should be arrived at."

[1] See p. 228 *ante*.

All these admirable lessons were now to be discarded as soon as learnt. The rising tide of concession to Egypt was in a very short space of time to wash away all traces of "the high-water mark" left by the Chamberlain-Sarwat Treaty. The Wafd, in the loss of whose prestige and credit lay the only hope of a reasonable compromise being accepted, were to be restored not only to prestige but to power by the direct intervention of His Majesty's Government. And all this was to be done in a manner so hasty and impatient that it could not fail to give to Egypt and to the world the impression that Great Britain was desperately anxious to secure a treaty at all costs, whatever concessions might be involved. And at the last, the history which Mr. Henderson and his colleagues were determined so completely to disregard repeated itself inexorably. The negotiations broke down, just as previous negotiations had broken down, in face of the utter unreasonableness of the Wafd: the political career of Mahmoud Pasha, the moderate statesman to whom the negotiations owed their inception, was brought to an end, just as that of Sarwat Pasha had been brought to an end: once again the Wafd was left in possession of the field, and once again the only salvation that could be found for Egypt was in the termination of the Parliamentary régime.

There is the authority of the then Secretary of State for Air—the late Lord Thomson—for stating that these negotiations were begun—or that "conversations" were commenced when Mahmoud Pasha visited London in June. "The Prime Minister of "Egypt was over here in June, and he saw, quite "naturally and properly, the Foreign Secretary, and

"the Foreign Secretary discussed quite inevitably "Egyptian questions with him, and was so impressed "by the reasonable character of the proposals of "Mahmoud Pasha, the then Prime Minister, that he "requested the permission of the Cabinet to carry on "negotiations." It was indeed more than curious that I as His Majesty's representative in Egypt was at no time informed of these conversations, or of their result. But what was much more important, from the point of view of Egypt was that although these negotiations were begun and carried well forward with Mahmoud Pasha, it was made a condition of their final conclusion that they must be, while still only in the stage of proposals, submitted to the Egyptian Parliament. This meant in effect that Mahmoud Pasha must resign, and the Parliamentary régime be restored. At the elections which must be held for this purpose it was inevitable that the Wafd would be restored to power, and that the real negotiations would take place with them. However reasonable, therefore, Mahmoud Pasha's proposals might be, they were not, and under the proposed procedure could not be, the proposals which would have in practice to be considered. The Socialist Government was in fact disclosing its whole hand—giving away all its bargaining counters—before the real negotiations even began. The only result of telling Mahmoud Pasha what he could secure by way of concession was to impose upon his political opponents—the Wafd—the absolute necessity of securing more concessions still, or of refusing to sign a treaty. The procedure adopted was indeed certain automatically to defeat its own object. It was, as Lord Parmoor had said, "all-important"—and all-destructive in its ineptitude.

By the autumn of 1929 matters had been carried so far that a White Paper was published under the title of "Exchange of Notes relating to Proposals for an "Anglo-Egyptian Settlement". The whole of Egypt now knew the concessions that Mahmoud Pasha had already secured, and the proposals were therefore, by the very fact of their publication, foredoomed to failure. But worse still was to follow. It was quite true that the White Paper began with a letter from the Foreign Secretary to the Prime Minister of Egypt which stated: "The accompanying proposals, "together with the explanatory notes to be exchanged "on matters of detail, which Your Excellency is about "to submit to the Egyptian Parliament, represent the "extreme limit to which I could recommend His "Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of "Great Britain and Northern Ireland to go in their "desire to achieve a lasting and honourable settlement "of outstanding questions between Great Britain and "Egypt". But that declaration of firm intentions had just as little effect in Egypt as other previous declarations of a similar character. The previous ones had been a bluff, and Egyptians had little doubt that this would prove to be the same. Had they not been told, only a year before, that the Chamberlain-Sarwat Treaty was "the high-water mark of British con- "cessions", and yet within a few months far greater concessions were being offered, not in the course of any final negotiation, but as a sort of ground bait before decisive negotiations had even started? The statement might have been of some effect had there been any justification in past history for believing it.

But what little chance there had been for such credulity was very soon swept away by Labour and Liberal speeches when the proposals set out in the

White Paper came to be debated. The fact may be easily illustrated by a glance at the debate which took place in the House of Lords on December 11. The speech which was regarded as the most impressive, and was taken by the Government benches to be a convincing vindication of their policy, was that made by the late Lord Grey of Fallodon. His whole thesis was that the independence of Egypt must be the cardinal aim of our policy, and that all other considerations must be subordinated to this. At the very outset of his speech he said: "... The most important point of the Declaration of 1922 ... was that Egypt was for the first time "in its history recognised as a sovereign independent "State, and whatever we may say about reservations, we "must regard that statement that Egypt is henceforth "an independent sovereign State as the governing "factor in all our negotiations". The vital and, in my judgment, the fatal point about this statement was that it exactly affirmed the Egyptian argument against which all attempts at negotiating a settlement had shipwrecked. All along they had met us with the flat assertion that we had recognised Egypt's independence, and that therefore we had no right to demand any conditions which infringed that independence. That was the deadlock, and it could never be removed until we had got Egyptians to understand that their statement was simply not true. In point of fact, the Declaration of 1922 had not given Egypt complete independence; it had given her a qualified independence, an independence which was subjected to certain definite reservations. If these reservations had not been expressly made, no Government and no party in Great Britain would have agreed to the 1922 Declaration. They were an absolutely vital part of that Declaration—just as important and just as sacrosanct

as the recognition of independence. Let us look at Lord Milner's Report: "The moment is favourable "for placing the relations of Great Britain and Egypt "on the satisfactory and enduring basis of a Treaty "which will *at one and the same time* establish the "independence of Egypt and secure the interests of "Great Britain". Let us look at the Declaration itself: "Whereas His Majesty's Government, in accord- "ance with their declared intentions, desire forth- "with to recognise Egypt as a sovereign state: *and* "*whereas the relations between His Majesty's Govern-* "*ment and Egypt are of vital interest to the British* "*Empire*".

So essential were the reservations regarded as being, that British troops were to remain in Egypt, British advisers were to be maintained in the Egyptian administration, and capitulatory privileges were to run as before, until agreement could be reached on the reserved points. Three attempts had already been made to reach such agreement: all had failed because the Egyptians refused to recognise the essential interests of Great Britain, and tried every proposal by the sole criterion of complete independence. And here, at the moment when a fourth attempt was to be made, was Lord Grey, with all the weight of his great name and reputation, asserting that the Egyptian standpoint was right and just, and giving them direct encouragement to persist in it. Nothing was better calculated to defeat the very end which he professed to desire. For four years in Egypt I had been strenuously endeavouring to bring to fruition the policy of the Declaration of 1922. I had made that policy the final test of every proposal, and some years' of close study of the facts had convinced me that the only hope of achieving the goal of that policy lay in

ourselves maintaining the declaration fully and firmly, and so compelling Egyptians to realise that they must recognise it too. In the speech which I made in the House of Lords before Lord Grey spoke I had endeavoured to make this clear: all my criticisms of the Government's proposals had one basis and one only—that they did not consist with or did not advance the Declaration of 1922. I fear that my speech must have been very ill-delivered, for this is how Lord Grey summed up: "To-night we have had put before us "two broad policies. One is the policy of the noble "Lord, Lord Lloyd, who made a speech which is pre-"cisely the sort of speech I should have endeavoured "to make if I had been defending the Cromer régime "in Egypt. If that speech is to be carried out to its "consequences, it means reverting to that sort of "work in Egypt . . . on the other hand there is the "policy of following out the developments of the "Declaration of 1922."

In fact, the policy of the Government and the speech of Lord Grey began by failing to comprehend the real meaning of the Declaration of 1922, went on to disregard as completely as if they had never occurred the history of the past seven years and the three utterly unsuccessful attempts that had already been made to secure a settlement, and finished by entirely misinterpreting or else by omitting all reference to what had actually been achieved. Lord Grey, for instance, referred at some length to the question of the use of the Nile waters, and was at pains to indicate the sort of arrangement that he thought ought to be come to in the future. He was, it surprisingly appeared, completely unaware that an arrangement, such as he was now urging the Government at some length to make, had already been concluded after long

and difficult negotiations; and indeed he admitted to me afterwards that he had never heard that such a settlement had even been attempted. He was estimating and pondering upon the policy I had followed not only, upon his own admission, in complete ignorance of important events which had recently taken place in Egypt, but also under a complete misapprehension as to the very nature of the policy itself.

Granted these false assumptions, Lord Grey's point of view was competently logical, and supported by arguments well suited to convince. There appeared at first sight a great deal to be said in favour of the simple policy of giving Egypt complete independence, while retaining the Sudan administration entirely in our own hands and providing adequately for the defence of the Suez Canal. What I was intent upon pointing out was the practical difficulty, for instance, of providing for the effective defence of the Canal and, at the same time, of giving Egypt complete independence. Quite apart from the fact that Lord Grey had completely overlooked a number of critical questions still awaiting solution, such as, to mention only one, the defence of foreign interests, he also seemed blandly unaware of any difficulty in this particular problem, or of the necessity of framing our tactics accordingly. His attitude and that of the Labour Party was in fact that to foresee difficulties was tantamount to opposing the policy. The only way to promote the policy was to forget past experience and to turn a blind eye upon all possibilities of failure!

One paragraph in Lord Grey's speech seemed in particular to illustrate this attitude very clearly, and the grave dangers inherent in it. "I would most "earnestly deprecate", he said, "any analogy between "India and Egypt. It is a most dangerous thing, and

"coming from the noble Lord (Lord Lloyd) who has "been in both places, and whose words carry weight in "both places, it is most dangerous. Egypt has never "been part of the British Empire. It was independent— "I was going to say self-governing, but governed under "its own King, before we went there. The whole "history of India has been entirely different, and I "think it most wrong and unwise politically to admit "that there is any parallel between what we have done "and may do in Egypt, and our position in India. It is "most dangerous to mix up the two things, and I "should not admit for a moment the argument that "because we have made a declaration about Egypt it "has any bearing upon our policy in India."

The speaker could of course have been challenged as to his assumptions—and in one case out of his own mouth—for he had just previously stated that, owing to the suzerainty of Turkey, Egypt had never been independent till 1922 and he had also admitted that during the years of the Protectorate it could have been maintained that Egypt was part of the British Empire. But that controversy had no importance beside the practical facts of the situation. To talk of the danger and unwisdom of drawing any analogy between India and Egypt was simply to bury one's head in the sand. However careful British statesmen might be to draw no analogies, the dangerous comparison had long ago been drawn, and long ago acted upon by all those who were actually taking part in the politics of Egypt and India. In the minds of Egyptian and Indian spokesmen, the situation of both countries was practically identical—both desired independence, both were refused the full gift they desired, because of the overriding presence of Great Britain, both claimed that they had received

recent promises of independence, and both asserted that they would consider no other proposal until those promises were implemented. In face of this fundamental identity, it became simply a pleasant academic exercise to talk of points of difference—it was like arguing in a cloud-burst about the difference between an umbrella and a parasol. Lord Grey's point was valid, for a debating society—though even there, not unanswerable—but it had no connexion at all with the actual facts of the situation that had to be met. Unfortunately it had a considerable, indeed almost a decisive, effect upon the important debate on Egyptian affairs in the course of which it was delivered.

Although it might be argued with all the force of logic that we had never had a regular position in Egypt, and that in India we had a legally indisputable right to remain; in sober reality our position in both countries was conditioned not by legalities, but simply by our will and our capacity to insist that the interests which we looked upon as vital should be fully regarded. The policy of 1922 was an attempt to reconcile the independence of Egypt with a due regard for the vital interests of Great Britain and the Empire. The policy of Egyptians was to assert that the independence of Egypt must come first, and that the interests of the Empire could be safely left at the mercy of an independent Egypt. The experience of the last seven years had been a constant repetition of the lesson that the policy of 1922 could not be carried out until Egypt had realised the inevitable necessity of paying as much regard to our vital interests as to her own independence. For four years I had been endeavouring to the best of my ability to follow a line of action which would ensure this real-

isation, and so allow the policy of 1922 to be consummated. And now the Socialist Government, with the powerful blessing of the Liberal Party, were intending to undo anything that might have been achieved to this end, and to confirm Egyptian politicians in their belief that they had only to remain unreasonable a little longer and the policy of 1922 would be finally surrendered.

The proposals now to be put forward will be found summarised in an appendix to this volume. They are there set out side by side with the proposals of 1921, 1924, 1927, so that the reader may trace with ease and rapidity the path of the British retreat. It will be sufficient, therefore, to say here that they contemplated the removal of British troops from Cairo and Alexandria to the deserts east of longitude 32°, the withdrawal of British officers from the Egyptian Army, and the suppression of the European Department in the Ministry of the Interior. These proposals meant in effect the disappearance of our effective power to protect foreign residents. Having surrendered that power, the proposals undertook that for our part we would use all our influence to secure the abolition of the Capitulations. The only counterweight was a clause in the draft whereby the King of Egypt recognised his obligation to defend the lives and property of foreigners in Egypt and specifically undertook to carry it out. All these proposals were perfectly consistent with the sovereign independence of Egypt, but entirely inconsistent with the Declaration of 1922. They were clearly based upon the latter part of the now famous advice of Mr. Theodore Roosevelt: "Govern—or Go". The argument ran that since the Declaration of 1922 we had debarred ourselves from governing, and therefore there

was only one course open to us—to go. And the sooner we stopped shuffling uneasily, hat in hand in the doorway, the better it would be for everybody concerned. It was pointed out in addition that we could very easily provide for the security of our Imperial interests by garrisoning the Canal, and telling Egypt that the administration of the Sudan was no concern of hers. The argument had the attractiveness of simplicity, but the actual situation was not in fact by any means so simple. It meant, of course, a complete change from the policy underlying the Declaration of 1922. But apart from that it assumed as beyond doubt that conditions of internal peace were now assured in Egypt, and this assumption could not unfortunately be justified upon any evidence. No one could, for instance, doubt that there was a very strong antagonism between the sovereign on the one hand and the popular or extreme political party on the other. Only so recently as 1926–27 the Wafd had been busy organising measures designed to suborn the allegiance of the Army. In 1928 there had been a counter-stroke which had suspended the Constitution. The situation was precarious, and the chief motives for restraint on either side were, first, the presence of the British element in the Egyptian Army and administration, and then—in the last resort—of British troops. But if these restraining forces were withdrawn, what justification was there for supposing that the two parties would not contend by violent measures for mastery? And if such internecine strife did break out, with the almost certain corollary of widespread loss of foreign lives and property, what would then be the position of Egypt? It would be impossible for Great Britain, having herself surrendered the means of protecting foreign lives and property, to insist that other Powers should not

take such measures as they thought necessary to intervene on behalf of their own subjects. We could not say to Italy, for instance: "We cannot protect Italian "residents in Egypt and you shall not". And if once a foreign Power was provoked to send a force to Egypt, what complications might not be involved, not only to the position of our troops on the Canal, but to the economic life of the Sudan?

It was, in fact, essential that, as Sarwat Pasha himself had maintained, Egypt should recognise "that British interests require that the procedure "adopted should be a prudent one, and that a begin- "ning should therefore be made with measures of pre- "caution which will be progressively relaxed until they "disappear, leaving in their place a spirit of proved "confidence". There was no necessity for the brutal antithesis of "govern or go", no necessity to conclude that because our policy was difficult of achievement, achievement was therefore impossible. With a truer perspective, with patience and industry, and with a steady regard for the facts, a solution of our difficulties was possible. It was only a superficial or prejudiced survey, or else a tired mind, that would conclude that no other course was now possible to us but to cut our losses and go home.