

## CHAPTER III

### CONFUSION

THE Milner Mission gave an entirely new aspect to our relations with Egypt. It turned over a new page, and on the blank sheet thus exposed it wrote that we must no longer regard ourselves *in loco parentis* in our relations with Egypt. We were now nothing more than well-wisher and privileged friend—privileged because it had to be remembered that the friendship was by force of circumstance close and intimate, and that we had therefore interests that must be regarded. True, the friendship had been ruffled and the friends estranged, but we were magnanimously prepared to forget the past, and we were sure that when once Egypt realised the generosity of our intentions, she on her side would be prepared to renew and improve her friendship with us, and to recognise our special interests and help us to promote them.

It was upon this basis that the new era was to open. The hopes which were entertained were voiced, however, entirely by one partner in the negotiations. Zaghul and his party still dominated the political mind of Egypt, in so far as it found public expression, and Zaghul and his party were still concentrated upon Egyptian independence far more keenly than they were prepared to work for Anglo-Egyptian friendship. There was evidence enough of the exist-

ence in Egypt of a large volume of moderate opinion which desired a reasonable accommodation, but no evidence at all that such opinion would dare to express itself openly. At the present stage, however, we were so far committed to the new attitude that there was nothing for it but to take whatever risks were involved and to enter upon the negotiations from which it was hoped that the treaty of friendship might result. Although the Mission had completed its labours in 1920, it was not until early in January 1921 that its report was forwarded to Lord Allenby in Cairo, accompanied by an official despatch from His Majesty's Government which stated that "before taking any decision . . . they desire to profit by "consultation with the official delegation from Egypt, "which it has always been in contemplation to invite "to this country, and which a promise was given by "your Lordship to His Highness the Sultan that he "should at a later date be requested to send. I shall be "glad therefore if you will take the necessary steps "with the Sultan and the Egyptian Government for "the appointment and despatch of this delegation at "an early date so that they may be available for con- "sultation with His Majesty's Government in the "forthcoming spring. . . . Both parties will enter the "discussion with free hands; since, pending the ex- "change of views to which I have referred, His "Majesty's Government have not thought it right to "arrive at a final judgment on either the principles or "the details of the proposals contained in the report."<sup>1</sup>

All that remained to be done, therefore, was to select the Egyptian delegation, but the residual task was not by any means so simple as at first sight might appear. It was true that as far as the internal political

<sup>1</sup> F.O. Despatch: Lord Curzon to Lord Allenby, January 6, 1921.

situation was concerned there was a marked lull in activity and interest. The economic situation was to a certain extent improving owing to a gradual fall in prices: the Sultan's tour of the provinces during the month of January showed that for the time at any rate he had achieved a remarkable popularity among the fellaheen, while Adly Pasha was undoubtedly collecting a very considerable body of support for his moderate and accommodating political views. Meanwhile Zaghلول and most of his political colleagues were still in France, and it was widely reported that a section of these exiles favoured Adly's quiet methods, much more than the autocratic violence of Zaghلول. These factors all tended to create an atmosphere for action by His Majesty's Government. Now, if at all, was the moment to negotiate with a reasonable hope of success. Unfortunately the Government were still hesitating and unable to make up their minds. As we have seen, it was not until January that they sent the report officially to Egypt, and the despatch with which they accompanied it was not at all calculated to satisfy the expectations of Egypt. Lord Allenby was quick to point out that this despatch clearly indicated that His Majesty's Government were not committed to approval of any of the recommendations made by the Milner Mission, or to implement any one of them. "The fact remains", he wrote, "that the proposals conveyed to Egypt in August were from the first regarded by the public opinion of Egypt in general as proposals which must eventually constitute a substantive offer by His Majesty's Government." If it were now to be understood that Great Britain did not feel herself in any way committed to the principles recommended by the Mission, it was extremely doubtful whether it

would be possible for the Sultan to collect a delegation of any weight at all. "To sum up," said Lord Allenby, "Egypt expects a declaration of policy by His Majesty's Government based upon Lord Milner's conversation, and then to be called upon to produce a delegation to discuss details of settlement."<sup>1</sup> This statement, however unpalatable, was entirely correct, and Egyptians were quite justified in adopting such a point of view. The method adopted by the Mission had inevitably committed the British Government to the general principles of the report. The bargaining method had resulted in a triumph for Egypt and a surrender for England: it was the first of many such encounters and all of them ended in the same way. The Government of Mr. Lloyd George were not, however, prepared to accept the inevitable at once, and it was a display of reluctance which lost them the best of their opportunity. The delay gave time for the usual intrigues and dissensions to be set on foot in Egypt. Uncertainty begat a recrudescence of political activity; the Zaghlulists in particular were attacked by a rising anxiety as to how the formation of an official delegation from Egypt might affect their position and prestige. At the end of January five of Zaghlul's colleagues arrived back in Egypt, Mohamed Mahmoud Pasha, Hamid Pasha el Bassal, Abdel Aziz Fahmy Bey among them. Their return increased the uncertainty and anxiety, for it was fairly clear that they had had dissensions with Zaghlul himself, and it was not known what steps they contemplated.

At last, on February 18, 1921, the Milner Mission's report was released for general publication, but it was still unaccompanied by any declaration on the

<sup>1</sup> F.O. Despatch: Lord Allenby to Lord Curzon, January 12, 1921.

part of the Government. They were waiting with evident uneasiness for the indications of feeling in England which the debate in Parliament would afford. The degree of their nervousness was sufficiently indicated in the debate on the Address, when the Prime Minister, referring to the proposed negotiations, said: "if it had been possible I should have liked also to take into consultation the representatives of the Dominions before we come to any decision. It is a matter of most vital moment to the Empire, to the peace of the middle East, and to our future relations with India." Clearly Government did not relish the policy to which they had been committed, and it was equally clear that so anxious and unconvinced a frame of mind was not the best prelude to the new era. They had, however, to swallow the pill whether they liked it or not; and on February 22 the High Commissioner was authorised to inform the Sultan that "His Majesty's Government, after a study of the proposals made by Lord Milner, have arrived at the conclusion that the status of protectorate is not a satisfactory relation in which Egypt should continue to stand to Great Britain. While they have not reached final decisions with regard to Lord Milner's recommendations, they desire to confer regarding them with a Delegation nominated by the Sultan, with a view, if possible, to substitute for the protectorate a relationship which would, while securing the special interests of Great Britain and enabling her to offer adequate guarantees to foreign powers, meet the legitimate aspirations of Egypt and the Egyptian people."<sup>1</sup> The medicine had at last been swallowed at a gulp, and very nasty it must have tasted.

Meanwhile the work of forming the Egyptian de-

<sup>1</sup> F.O. Despatch: Lord Curzon to Lord Allenby, February 22, 1921.

legation was going forward. The proposed procedure had received no public set-backs, although Egyptian opinion had been alarmed by Lord Milner's resignation from the Cabinet, and then incensed by a daring proposal of Mr. Winston Churchill's, made at a public dinner, that she should take place among the Dominions of the Empire. But in private there was a great deal of disturbing activity. Adly Pasha was now the inevitable centre-piece of any possible picture of accommodation, and the British in particular reposed their hopes upon him. He was the only Moderate leader who was in close touch with the Zaghlist spokesmen, and at the same time he commanded the most general influence among the various non-Zaghlist groups. There was the Prime Minister to be given his due place and dignity: there was Mohamed Said Pasha, with his powerful friends among the princes of the Royal Family. There were Rushdi Pasha, Sarwat Pasha, Mazloun Pasha, who must not be slighted, and finally there was the Legislative Assembly of the future, whose approval must somehow be ensured. As to Zaghul, the common view was that he would not consent to serve, and that however much his colleagues might think with Adly Pasha, they would not desert Zaghul. All these problems sufficiently absorbed the interest of politically minded Egypt, and the promulgation of the sentences upon the twenty-two prisoners convicted in the "Society of Vengeance" trial caused little or no excitement, even though Abdel Rahman Bey and six others were condemned to fifteen years' penal servitude. Negotiation and discussion proceeded interminably until, on March 14, there came a minor crisis. Mazloun Pasha, whom the Sultan had intended to be head of the delegation, resigned the

post, and new plans had to be made. The result was the formation of a new Ministry with Adly Pasha as Prime Minister. Hardly had this difficulty been overcome when a manifesto was published by Zaghlu which, while it welcomed the new council of Ministers, laid down the following conditions of participation in treaty discussions. "Abolition radicale du Protectorat et acceptation des réserves, suppression de la censure et de l'état de siège avant tous pourparlers." In addition he demanded a majority for the Wafd upon the official délegation. Such terms were of course quite impossible of acceptance either by Egyptian Ministers or by the British Government. But this public utterance of Zaghlu had its usual effect of shaking the nerves of all concerned. As far as Adly Pasha and his colleagues were concerned, the precedent local discussion and intrigues must have placed a considerable if not uncongenial strain upon them. Adly Pasha would not serve under Tewfik Pasha, the then Prime Minister. The Sultan would not allow Adly Pasha to take a commanding position: and in working to this end he fell under the influence of Mohāmed Said Pasha, who was widely supposed to be against the whole policy of treaty, and to be intriguing actively to thwart it. In the end the High Commissioner had to intervene to put an end to this futile pursuit of personal intrigues, and the Sultan got a Ministry under the leadership of Adly Pasha which he did not much like, but which was probably the best obtainable for its purpose. But there still remained Zaghlu's ultimatum, and a great deal of anxious discussion as to what was to be done about that, and what would happen after his return to Egypt, which actually took place on April 5.

The arrival of Zaghlul immediately raised the internal situation to boiling-point. He was accorded an enthusiastic though orderly reception by the masses, and it at once became clear that hopes of his influence waning were entirely unfounded. He began his public activities moderately enough, offering collaboration with the Ministry, but he was not careful in private to conceal his true frame of mind, which was one of jealous rage against Adly Pasha. He would not brook for a moment even the possibility of a rival. "I have suffered, I have worked. I will not see credit for what I have done taken away by Adly. If I work with him, it will only be when he consents to take his orders entirely from me, and to acknowledge my undisputed supremacy." The High Commissioner sent depressing reports in regard to the possibilities in Egypt. "The question whether the Ministry can now control the situation is, to say the least, problematical. Whatever may happen, I must maintain law and order. . . . I believe that Zaghlul is in such an exalted state of mind that it would not be beyond him to attempt a coup similar to that of Arabi Pasha."<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, Zaghlul fully realised that such action on his part was certain to provoke British intervention; he did not, at all desire such a turn of affairs, and he was very careful to avoid giving expression to anti-British sentiments. Indeed, he was so filled with angry hostility to Adly and his Ministry, that his activities were entirely concentrated upon discrediting them by all possible means, and he could think of little else. The situation was not by any means pleasant for Adly Pasha, who had first of all to try and conciliate this angry hero, and if he could not do that then to cut his claws. Adly Pasha's hopes of

<sup>1</sup> F.O. Despatch: Lord Allenby to Lord Curzon, April 8, 1921.



succeeding in either task were infinitesimal, but if he failed his situation as Prime Minister and head of the delegation was bound to become impossible. He was already urging the High Commissioner to take some steps to meet Zaghlul's conditions. Could not something be done to satisfy the demand about martial law? Unfortunately not, because an Act of Indemnity was an essential precedent, and no Act of Indemnity would be of value until the negotiations were over and the new constitution established. Could not the Press Censorship be abolished? Yes, if Adly was prepared to do without it, which he was not. The next thing, then, was to consolidate the Ministry's domestic position and to increase its popularity in the country. For this purpose an obvious opportunity was offered by the cotton situation, where steadily falling prices were causing much hardship to tenant farmers. The effect was not greatly felt until the autumn of 1920. But disaster was bound to ensue from the fact that, as the result of the War boom, rents had been raised 100 and in some cases 200 per cent. The boom of cotton prices continued well into 1920, in which year cotton was selling at 187 dollars a kantar (twelve times pre-War price). But in that same year the reaction set in, and the price of a kantar of cotton had fallen to 20 dollars at the beginning of 1921. Only 40 per cent of the 1920 crop had been sold. Owing to the immense profits obtained during the boom period, landowners at least were in a strong position to withstand a crisis, and the general fall of prices came as a boon to many sections of the poorer classes. Moreover, the financial strength of the country was undoubtedly immense. Egypt was therefore in a strong position, and all that was needed to keep her there was a cautious prudence and a drastic limitation of expenditure to revenue.

Although, however, the causes of the slump were not local, and were therefore out of the control of any one government, Adly and his Ministers had light-heartedly claimed that they would set matters right, and had even gone so far as to make particular promises. They now announced their intention of undertaking Government purchases of cotton on the Minet-el-Baset exchange. The step was useless, speculative, and dangerous: even the Ministry realised that it was financially unjustifiable. But by means of it they could buy a certain amount of political support: and so anxious were the British authorities in regard to the stability of the Government, that they gave their consent to a step which was from the economic point of view entirely unsound. Times had changed indeed!

By the end of April 1921, it was clear that no agreement was possible between Zaghlul and Adly Pasha. Neither would consent to surrender the headship of the delegation. On April 19 there was a riot at Tanta, in which the police were compelled to fire on the mob, and owing to the constant propaganda against the Ministry, and official counter-pressure, it seemed inevitable that further disorder would break out. The chances of a successful outcome of the proposed negotiations, slender as they had always been, were now reduced almost to invisibility. Nothing was left but for Adly to form a delegation from among his own political associates—members of the old Turkish families, many of whom commanded no respect among their countrymen, while all would be easy prey for Zaghlul's Egyptian slogans. Meanwhile, during the time that they would be in London negotiating, Zaghlul would be consolidating his position in Egypt and preparing a magnificent brew of trouble. On May 10 the Prime Minister had composed his delegation—

Hussein Rushdi Pasha, Ismail Sidky, Mahomed Shafik Pasha, Ahmed Talaat Pasha, Youssef Soliman Pasha. An able delegation, but not one by any means calculated to secure enthusiastic popular support, still less the ratification of any results it might achieve. On May 18 there were large anti-Government demonstrations in Cairo, which were only with difficulty dispersed by the police. On May 20 Alexandria flamed up; two police stations were burnt that day: and the police were forced to fire with effect. Cairo too was the scene of further disturbances, and many casualties. On May 22 the Alexandria situation developed seriously: there was heavy fighting between Egyptian mobs and Greeks and Italians in which thirty Egyptians and fourteen Europeans were killed, and the British military authorities had to take over the administration of the town. On May 25 the High Commissioner published a communiqué in which he announced a determination not to interfere in Egyptian party politics, but pointed out that in the last resort the duty of maintaining law and order devolved upon him. He then reviewed the measures which His Majesty's Government were taking to meet Egyptian aspirations, and appealed to Egyptians to be peaceful.

So apologetic and appealing a document was naturally very welcome to Egyptians, who must have been anxiously waiting for His Majesty's Government to draw the natural conclusion from the present state of affairs, that further progress was impossible. They were surprised and delighted to find that this was not to be the case: but it was equally natural that the European communities should be angry and alarmed, and should point out that non-intervention was being carried demonstrably too far when it allowed murderous outbreaks to occur. They argued that the author-

ity whose duty it was to suppress such outbreaks had a much more urgent duty of preventing them, and the logic of this argument was unanswerable. By this time, however, political considerations had attained a preponderating importance, and principles of all kinds were being sacrificed for them. But Adly Pashā was quite right in insisting that there was nothing for it now but to go to London and begin the negotiations. The High Commissioner advised delay, and was anxious as to what might happen if disorders continued and those responsible for the administration were absent. There is no evidence to show that he realised that the trouble in Egypt had resolved itself into a personal struggle between Zaghlul and Adly, and that with the departure of one protagonist, it was reasonable to hope that there would be a lull until his return. Adly Pasha, if not more provident, was at any rate quite determined to go to London, and he had his way. The delegation departed from Alexandria for London on July 1, 1921, without disturbance, and Zaghlul was left to carry on his campaign against the Ministry and his preparations against a possible general election.

While the negotiations in London are proceeding to their inevitable failure, and during the lull which ensued in Egypt, we may take the opportunity to review the general state of affairs in that country. Fortunately for our purpose, it happened that Mr. Boyle, who had been for many years Cromer's Oriental Secretary, and who possessed a vast and intimate knowledge of Egyptian character, mentality, and society, was revisiting Egypt at this time and has left a record of his impressions. The memorandum makes refreshing reading after the half knowledge, the lack of understanding, and the misdirected sym-

pathy of the post-War years: a clear, bright light for a moment replaces the smoky torches that had now for so long been the sole illumination of our official footsteps. Mr. Boyle was left in no doubt that the British Occupation, as it was, possessed not a friend in the country, "The words 'patriotism', 'the nation', 'freedom and independence', with which the Nationalists endeavour to conjure have no charm for the mass of the people. . . . At present, however, they are thoroughly dissatisfied and a deep-seated feeling of unrest pervades the whole country." He sums up the existing situation as follows: "The Egyptian people are heartily weary of the state of uncertainty which has hung over them during the last years, of the inefficiency which they consider to prevail in the Administration generally, of the rumours and reports as to chops and changes of policy, of the clash and counter-clash of political parties, of the tension and insecurity in which they live. They have lost all confidence in British influence and control as now exerted. They look forward with painful apprehension to the possible establishment of a purely native Government, which, however, they are prepared to accept, even, in order to save themselves, with some outward appearance of enthusiasm—if it becomes inevitable, and if they can hope for nothing better." What assets had we? Our past history, a general absence of personal hostility among the masses, and the personality and position of the High Commissioner, Lord Allenby, whose lack of Egyptian experience was offset by his high reputation as a victorious and gallant soldier, his remoteness from any suspicion of personal interests, aims, or desires, "even his appearance and manners, of the type which most impresses the Egyptian mind". Mr. Boyle was left with no final doubt

that the immense majority of the Egyptian unofficial classes sincerely desired the continuance of British rule, but he was equally sure that hardly an individual among them would dare to say so in existing circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

It was depressing to learn upon such expert authority that our present policy was based upon a timid misreading of the facts, and that we were now endeavouring to force upon those whose welfare had been committed to our charge something which they neither desired nor themselves thought they deserved. Mr. Boyle had no difficulty in concluding that the cause of the trouble was the deterioration of our rule, and that the remedy should have been its regeneration. We need not doubt the wisdom of that conclusion, but unfortunately the decision had already been taken against it. Politics had won an overwhelming victory over administration, and it was universally agreed that "Nationalism" and "self-determination" were dictates which must be obeyed unquestioningly. Mr. Boyle, speaking from a past already almost forgotten, urged the claims of good government and the welfare of the people. In his day these claims had had a moral value which was universally acknowledged. But in 1920 they were discredited and lifeless. Only one claim had a moral value—the claim of "Nationalism": only one claim was universally acknowledged—the claim of "self-determination."

Expert observers, like Mr. Boyle, would point out that the claim to be free and independent was not genuinely a national claim; that the true grievances of the masses were not political grievances and were quite separate from national aspirations. Such was the attitude of the times that these facts carried no

<sup>1</sup> Memo., June 11, 1921.

weight at all. Indeed the Milner Mission, which signed the surrender to Egyptian Nationalism, knew the facts just as well as Mr. Boyle, and stated them almost as clearly. But in the hypnotic state induced by the constant repetition of transatlantic doctrines, it had become immoral to oppose the claims of nationalism by any argument, however sound. Nothing must be done to impede the severance of old ties and the carving up of the world's surface into more and yet more "self-determined" units. The process, like the fragmentation of the Indian peasants' land, had taken on the dimensions of a religious rite, and it was blasphemous to point out that, as it increased, happiness and prosperity would diminish in proportion.