

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PROTECTORATE ABOLISHED: THE DECLARATION OF FEBRUARY 1922.

WHILE the negotiations in London were dragging themselves through the length of the summer of 1921, Egypt was enjoying a watchful respite from disturbance. Her moment of danger was the arrival of four Labour members of Parliament in the early autumn. Sarwat Pasha, who was acting as Prime Minister, was perturbed at the bare idea of their visit, and besought the High Commissioner to prevent it. His worst fears were justified, for when these four gentlemen arrived in Egypt they attached themselves to Zaghlul, in whose company they visited a number of provincial centres, where, in their presence, and with their tacit support, he made violent public attacks upon the Government. The Acting Prime Minister reported officially in this sense to the High Commissioner, adding that before the arrival of the M.P.'s the country had been quiet, whereas now a very dangerous era of effervescence had set in. He asked that the British military authorities should prohibit further demonstrations of this kind. A great deal of correspondence ensued as to what steps, if any, should be taken, in response to this official request from the Egyptian Government. Eventually nothing was done, in spite of the fact that Zaghlul's

activities were becoming more and more unrestrained and dangerous, and grave disturbances were feared as a result. Since the probable outcome of this visit was clearly foreseen by the authorities, it is difficult to understand why they remained so inactive. These gentlemen were brought out to Egypt by Zaghul for a clearly defined purpose—to wreck the position of Adly Pasha's ministry in Egypt and destroy all chances of his carrying the negotiations in London to a successful conclusion. Encouraged by the moral support of their presence, Zaghul Pasha became more and more violent in his attacks upon the Ministry, the Delegation in London, and the British Government; he was clearly determined to destroy all obstacles to his personal domination, and was deaf to all other considerations. But the British authorities still maintained the paralysing practice of non-intervention which the recommendations of the Milner Commission had inaugurated. It was essential to their policy that a treaty should be secured: Zaghul was making a fierce attempt to prevent a treaty: the British had the power to counter that attempt. But they did nothing—sat by and watched the treaty negotiations wrecked. And then—strangest of all—when the damage had been done, the negotiations broken off, and the situation brought to danger point, they suddenly, as we shall see later, altered their practice and took action against Zaghul and his colleagues long before there had been any time or opportunity to appreciate the altered state of affairs and frame a considered policy to meet it.

Starting from a position so hopeless in its passivity, with negotiations proceeding in a despondent atmosphere in London, and Zaghul violently at large in Egypt, it was perhaps natural that the British

authorities in Cairo should regard their state as difficult and lugubrious. Mr. Scott, the Acting High Commissioner, and his advisers were beginning to display a considerable and not unnatural anxiety. If no settlement eventuated in London, would public opinion in England stand for such measures as might be necessary to impose a settlement? They did not think so, and were inclined to put forward tentative suggestions for the retirement of the British force in Egypt beyond the Suez Canal, suggestions which could only be justified by optimistic prognostications of Egyptian reasonableness. There is indeed strong evidence that a defeatist view anxious to make large concessions to the Egyptian demands was beginning to make itself felt in official circles. It was being canvassed in the Residency, and was even making headway in the Department of the Interior.<sup>1</sup> The Milner Mission's proposals had clearly destroyed the confidence of the British officials in Egypt. They did not know what Great Britain wanted, but they read the signs to mean that, although with vacillating and hesitant steps, England had none the less definitely planted herself on the path leading to evacuation and was moving slowly in that direction, and away from her responsibilities in Egypt. If that was the case, they were determined to be in the van of the movement, and had no intention of fighting heroic, still less forlorn rearguard actions. They took the view that it was no part of the duty of the Chancery staff to endeavour to restore confidence in Whitehall or in Egypt. They preferred, instead to take the initiative in suggesting surrender and the vicious circle was made complete.

In November negotiations finally broke down. On

<sup>1</sup> F.O. Archives, 1921.

receiving the news that this was probable though not yet final, Mr. Scott at once wired to Lord Curzon<sup>1</sup> that British Advisers to the Egyptian Government, had drawn up a memorandum stating that a liberal policy on the part of His Majesty's Government was essential, and that without it they could not expect to retain confidence of Egyptian Ministers. On November 19 Lord Curzon and Adly Pasha had their last meeting. This was followed by the preparation of a letter from Lord Curzon to the Sultan, which has been widely regarded as an error of judgment. This letter was, it is said, written in a spirit of outraged disappointment: it adopted a hectoring tone which was not unnaturally resented: and it was very difficult to discover any object which it could possibly serve except that of venting an undignified but not unnatural irritation. It was useless as well as uncalled-for to blame Egypt for what she was. It was we who had surrendered to the extremist demand and most important of all it was we who with open eyes had shouldered the risk of negotiating. Egyptians had not done anything to mislead us: we had gambled upon our own reading of the situation and we had no right to turn upon others when that reading proved false.

The negotiations had broken down chiefly on two points—the maintenance of a British garrison in Egypt and the control of Egyptian Foreign Affairs. Upon the first the attitude of the British Government was that, in order to discharge her responsibility for the integrity of Egypt and to safeguard her own interests and the interests of foreign communities, the existence of a British force in Egypt was essential. The view of the Egyptian Delegation was that such a force conflicted with Egyptian inde-

<sup>1</sup> F.O. Despatch: Mr. Scott to Lord Curzon, November 17, 1921.

pendence. The simple argument of independence was indeed the principal if not the sole argument upon which Adly Pasha replied. It was an argument with which we had supplied him in violation of past history and existing facts. He was in a very strong position, therefore, for he had simply to reiterate, "you assert that your aim is Egyptian independence, and each claim that you make conflicts with that independence"; and to such an assertion there was no answer either in logic or law. It was the presence of British troops that had made the Occupation and had assured to Great Britain her complete control over the administration of Egypt—"sans que besoin fût d'aucun texte de traité, d'aucune détermination de pouvoir quelconque".<sup>1</sup> Yet we were now asking Egypt to give formal agreement to a state of affairs which had been the very essence and basis of British domination. No negotiator, least of all an Oriental, could have failed to make effective play with so temptingly obvious a weakness in his opponent's position.

The case was the same in regard to Foreign Affairs. We were suggesting what amounted to a heavy restriction upon Egyptian independence. How could we propose it in view of our declarations, or expect Egypt to agree to it? Between the two points of view agreement was impossible—a deadlock resulted, just as in the previous year a deadlock had resulted between Zaghul and the Milner Mission. And again the only way out was by concession upon the one side, or the other. At first sight it seemed as if the British Government were determined to stand firm, for the declaration made to the Sultan on December 3, 1921, did not attempt to cover with a velvet glove the iron

<sup>1</sup> Reply of the Egyptian Delegation, November 15, 1922, to Draft Treaty presented by British Delegation.

hand of threatened retaliation. But it was soon clear that this declaration was merely the result of a temporary attack of spleen—an attack which did considerable harm but had no permanent meaning. On December 5 Adly Pasha returned to Egypt, and on the 8th he placed his resignation in the hands of the Sultan. The difficulty now was to secure the formation of a new ministry, and the obvious person to undertake the task was Sarwat Pasha, who had been throughout the summer acting as deputy for Adly. Sarwat Pasha was prepared to accept, provided he could get good terms. On the 11th he submitted a programme which ignored the treaty negotiations, so far as they related to British claims, but accepted them so far as they related to British concessions. If the protectorate was terminated, the sovereign independence of Egypt recognised, and the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reconstituted, Sarwat Pasha would be prepared to take office and to prove to Great Britain that her obligations and interests could safely be entrusted to the care of Egypt. On December 15 His Majesty's Government, on the advice of the Residency, agreed to this programme, but what policy they were pursuing by such agreement it appears that they themselves hardly knew. The policy which had been followed since the Milner Report had been the policy of bilateral agreement. That policy had now broken down, and the position had reverted inevitably to the *status quo ante*—the Protectorate. Now by accepting Sarwat Pasha's terms the British Government surrendered the Protectorate and thereby created in Egypt a situation which can only be described as one of legal chaos. Such was their haste indeed that they gave themselves no time to realise the extent of that chaos.

This was drifting with a vengeance, and it is not to be wondered at, now that all sense of direction had been lost at home, that the Government's advisers in Egypt should be found giving free rein to their fears, and that those fears should be giving to British policy a decided impetus in the direction of evacuation.

As usual, the gift of concessions had none of the expected effects. Sarwat Pasha had wrung from the British the conditions which he demanded for the formation of a Ministry, but no Ministry resulted. His special difficulty was that Adly Pasha Yeghen refused to support him. Adly followed the common Egyptian practice and at once asserted that the concessions secured did not go far enough. Perhaps, also, he felt, as Zaghul had done a year before, that it was rather more than he could bear that he should do all the work while somebody else took the profit. Meanwhile the direction of British policy was rendered still more obscure by the sudden arrest and deportation of Zaghul Pasha. On December 19 the Pasha was prohibited from holding a large meeting at Cairo. He protested turbulently, and was therefore ordered to cease political activity altogether. He refused to obey this order, and on December 22 he was arrested and removed to Suez for deportation. Presumably this action was taken in pursuance of the Government's primary duty of maintaining public order. If so, it was too late to be effective, for Zaghul had been left at large for many months, which he had used to prosecute the campaign of inflammatory agitation now culminating. Moreover, the arrest of the Pasha was not the inception of a series of determined measures for the restoration of order: on the contrary, it was an isolated act almost immediately followed by further

political concessions which coincided with further outbreaks of violence.

The news of the deportation was followed at once by lawless demonstrations. On the 22nd two British soldiers were attacked in Cairo, one, of whom subsequently died of his wounds. There were demonstrations on the immediately following days, all accompanied by violence, at Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, and Suez. And the year ended with the cold-blooded murder of Mr. Hatton, an official of the Egyptian State Railways, who was shot in the back and killed on December 30.

Zaghlul Pasha left Suez with his fellow-deportees on December 29 for Aden, from which port it was intended that he should be taken to Ceylon. But so sudden and unpremeditated had been the manner in which the authorities in Egypt had acted that those concerned in his destination had not been consulted. After a prolonged stay at Aden, while these matters were being arranged, he was finally taken to a more permanent residence in the Seychelles Islands. Thus in the short space of one month there had been Lord Curzon's stern admonitory letter to the Egyptian Government of December 3; on December 15 the capitulation to Sarwat and the surrender of the Protectorate; and on December 22 the arrest and deportation of Zaghlul—a truly amazing sequence of events. The situation was becoming impossibly confusing, and it was high time that Egyptian policy should be straightened out from its present erratic course. The High Commissioner's views were soon made clear: on January 12 he communicated to the Secretary of State the draft of a letter which he proposed to send to the Sultan. The letter began with a number of paragraphs designed to counteract the



effect of Lord Curzon's letter of December 3. It went on to announce that His Majesty's Government were prepared without waiting for a treaty to abolish the Protectorate and recognise Egyptian sovereign independence: that they would "view with favour" the creation of a parliament with the right to control "the policy and administration of a constitutionally responsible government." Finally, martial law was to be abolished as soon as an Act of Indemnity had been passed.

The letter outlined a policy which was startling in its novelty, but the explanatory despatch<sup>1</sup> which accompanied the draft shed some, though not much, light on its obscurity. Zaghul's arrest was now described as being an "essential preliminary to a final attempt to realise the friendly relations with Great Britain which, in spite of disappointment, they [Egyptians] still desire". It may be gravely doubted whether many Egyptians would regard Zaghul's arrest in this light, but the passage quoted shows at least that the arrest was primarily a political move, and an attempt to strengthen the moderate elements from whom so much was hoped and so little gained. The view is confirmed by the preceding sentence: "proposed letter is the result of exhaustive negotiations with Sarwat Pasha and his immediate adherents. They, on their part, have been in contact with wider circle, and Adly Pasha has been in close touch, and has lent valuable and disinterested assistance." The last paragraph of this despatch was couched in curiously urgent language, asking for approval "without modification", and authorisation to send the letter "without delay". The same nervous note is visible in all subsequent correspondence from

<sup>1</sup> F.O. despatch, Lord Allenby to Lord Curzon, January 12, 1922.

Cairo on this subject. To a request for "fullest available information", and a suggestion that Mr. Sheldon Amos and Sir Gilbert Clayton should come home to furnish this, the High Commissioner replies:<sup>1</sup> "Advice I have given to His Majesty's Government is my *final* considered opinion after full discussion with those most capable of advising me. I am certain that my proposals, if immediately accepted, will prove the basis of a lasting settlement in Egypt. If they are rejected, I foresee nothing but a rule of repression driving us to annexation of the country, which would greatly increase our difficulties." And finally: "any prolonged hesitation on the part of His Majesty's Government will seriously undermine my influence. Departure to England of two advisers could not fail to have same effect at once. Amos, Clayton, Patterson, and Dawson have nothing to add to opinions they have already expressed. They are in complete accord with me." This is certainly not the language of persuasion, and it is very difficult to escape an impression of nervous strain lying behind these dogmatic assertions, or to refrain from asking how far the High Commissioner had committed himself in his conversations with Egyptians.

The Government at home did not, however, yield at once to these representations. On January 24 they answered that they attached the greatest weight to Lord Allenby's opinion, and were fully impressed with the advice and assurances which he stated he had received: but that in effect they were, being asked to surrender a position which they considered vital to the Empire in exchange for assurances which at present had no binding value, because they had not been put in any tangible form. If Egyptian Ministers

<sup>1</sup> F.O. despatch, Lord Allenby to Lord Curzon, January 20, 1922.

sincerely held the views they had expressed to Lord Allenby they should experience no difficulty in giving explicit assurances in regard to them. The answer from Cairo was the ultimatum which previous despatches had clearly foreshadowed.<sup>1</sup> "The long delay has caused a rapid deterioration in political situation. What was possible last week may be impossible next week. I have dealt with Zaghlul and enemies of order, and now is the time to show confidence in and uphold those who are ready to work with us in the interests of Egypt. Unless His Majesty's Government generously and boldly make concessions I have recommended I see no chance of retaining co-operation of those who appreciate true situation. I will do my best to carry out policy of His Majesty's Government, but I have no hopes of being able to obtain pledges required. No Ministry exists, and if it did, no Egyptian dare at present sign his name to a bargain for anything less than complete independence. If His Majesty's Government will not take my advice now they throw away all chance of having a friendly Egypt in our time. I am confident of success if my advice is followed even now, but there must be no delay. Though I have divulged no secrets, my opinions are well known here, and if the advice I have offered is rejected I cannot honourably remain. I therefore beg that my resignation may be tendered to His Majesty with expression of my humble duty. Pending my removal I shall of course continue loyally to carry out your instructions." Lord Allenby was confessedly holding a pistol to the head of the Government. As to the accusation of delay the facts were that his first proposal had been despatched only on January 12, at which time both the Prime

<sup>1</sup> F.O. despatch, Lord Allenby to Lord Curzon, January 25, 1922.

Minister and the Secretary of State were fully engaged at the Conference at Cannes, so that the matter could not be discussed in Cabinet for several days at least; even so, it was only twelve days before their considered reply on so momentous a proposal was sent off. Nor was the now familiar assertion of certain success on the one hand, certain disaster on the other, likely to make much impression in a situation obviously so uncertain. The operative sentences were (1) the reminder that no Ministry existed—which did indeed make it difficult to secure the assurances from Egypt which Government desired; (2) the admission that Lord Allenby's views were well known to Egyptians; (3) the resignation. To so direct an assault the Government could hardly be expected to surrender, especially as the position which Lord Allenby had now taken up was not by any means invulnerable to criticism, and both the language and the form of his latest communication were such as must inevitably provoke controversy. The counter-attack was not long delayed, and put the case forcibly enough. "When you returned to Egypt early in November, you were fully informed of the policy of His Majesty's Government, which was formulated largely in consultation with yourself and was personally explained to you. Upon this basis you expressed a confident hope of obtaining the co-operation of an Egyptian Government, and indeed at one stage when Sarwat Pasha stated the conditions upon which he was prepared to assume office, we accepted them without demur. It was with some uneasiness that His Majesty's Government saw weeks pass before this offer took effect. Nor during this period had we any clear indication as to the lines on which you were seeking to come to a final understanding with Egyp-

“tian statesmen. Your telegrams 17th to 20th sud-  
“denly presented His Majesty’s Government with a  
“plan in which almost the entire position hitherto  
“taken up by them was to be abandoned, and a de-  
“cision demanded without delay. Your letter prac-  
“tically presented His Majesty’s Government with  
“an ultimatum demanding complete and immediate  
“capitulation on points on which the British Parlia-  
“ment will feel the deepest concern, and which, involv-  
“ing as they do the absence of any guarantee for the  
“future position of Great Britain in Egypt, raise an  
“issue that is vital to the Empire. Nevertheless, in the  
“endeavour to enter as far as possible into the spirit of  
“the Egyptian representatives, His Majesty’s Govern-  
“ment have shown their willingness to go to the ex-  
“treme of concession. They might have expected His  
“Majesty’s representative to welcome the bridge which  
“they were willing to build for Egyptians. But your  
“letter, without either recognising the merits of our  
“carefully elaborated scheme, or suggesting any im-  
“provements or modifications which might facilitate  
“its adoption, merely reiterates your ultimatum, de-  
“claring that nothing can be accepted or even dis-  
“cussed but what you have put forward yourself, this  
“in fact being identical, as we gather, with the demands  
“which the Egyptians have now formulated as their  
“minimum. If it be true that no Egyptian dare sign  
“his name at present to anything short of complete  
“independence, there must have been a change in  
“Egyptian sentiment which was neither foreseen by  
“yourself when you left England, nor by Sarwat Pasha  
“when he first offered to form a Ministry. We have as  
“yet received no adequate explanation of this violent  
“metamorphosis, and we cannot but regret that you  
“did not accept our suggestion to send Amos and

“Clayton to furnish the fuller information which we sought. His Majesty’s Government cannot therefore accept your resignation until they have had an opportunity of hearing you in person.”

In accordance with this instruction, Lord Allenby left Alexandria on February 3, accompanied by Mr. Amos and Sir Gilbert Clayton: preceded, however, by a long despatch which set out his answer to the Government’s version of recent events. Dealing firstly with the allegation that the policy of His Majesty’s Government had been formulated largely in consultation with himself, Lord Allenby quietly recounted the hard facts, which were that he had all along declared himself opposed to methods of bargaining, and in favour of an uni-lateral declaration; and that during his visit to England in the autumn of 1921 he had only twice been invited to Cabinet discussions, and on both occasions had clearly indicated his dissent from the attitude to which the Cabinet were disposed. As to the “violent metamorphosis” in Egyptian opinion, the High Commissioner recalled that so long ago as 1921 he had warned the Secretary of State that “no Egyptian could become a party to a permanent arrangement between Great Britain and Egypt which fell short of securing complete independence for the latter”. In view of this history, it was difficult not to conclude that the High Commissioner’s recommendations and advice had hardly received the consideration due to them. He might therefore be excused for, though hardly justified in, concluding that a pistol shot was the only means of securing attention and in acting accordingly. He appeared upon less strong ground in his version of recent events. He contended that the letter of December 3 to the Sultan brought about a

violent deterioration in the situation, but it is not recorded that he protested against this letter, nor had he clearly informed His Majesty's Government of its effects. He defended Zaghlul's arrest as a measure which counteracted the effects of Lord Curzon's declaration of December 3, and led to a crystallising of the situation in a manner favourable to action. This argument is a little difficult to follow: His Majesty's Government might be excused for not having fully realised that such unlikely results would accrue from such unpromising causes; and even if the High Commissioner were correct in his diagnosis, it is very difficult to see why such desperate speed was desirable. With Zaghlul and his colleagues removed, with political Egypt expectant rather than turbulent, it could hardly have been disastrous to devote a little time to consideration of policy, and it was certainly unwise that the High Commissioner should commit himself in Egypt to any pronounced views before such consideration had taken place. It could not be effectively argued that a policy which was to put on a more or less permanent basis the future relations of Great Britain and Egypt would fail or succeed, not according to its own merits, but according to its date of announcement; and that its value depended upon a conjunction of political circumstances which had every appearance of being fortuitous. The real reason for Lord Allenby's urgency lay perhaps concealed between the lines of his present argument. Had not the treatment he received from the Foreign Office forced him to the conclusion that a direct assault of all arms was the only method left to him of securing his objective?

Here, however, the controversy comes to an abrupt

conclusion. After the High Commissioner's departure from Egypt, the written was displaced by the spoken word, and of the latter there is no official record. Political argument disappears from the despatches from Cairo, which confine themselves to terse announcements in melancholy succession of murderous attacks upon Europeans. On February 13 Private Kershaw, R.A.M.C., was shot in the back in Station Square; on the 17th an Australian engineer, Mr. Michael Jordan, was shot dead near the Sharabia quarter of Cairo; on the 15th Mr. Price Hopkins, a railway foreman, was wounded on Shubra Bridge; on the 18th Mr. Brown, Controller-General of Administration in the Educational Department, was mortally wounded by two shots from a revolver: and on the same evening Mr. Peach, of the Egyptian State Railways, was fired at and slightly wounded. On February 28, 1922, Lord Allenby returned to Egypt, and made public the following declaration: "Whereas His Majesty's Government, in accordance with their declared intentions, desire forthwith to recognise Egypt as an independent sovereign state; and whereas the relations between His Majesty's Government and Egypt are of vital interest to the British Empire; the following principles are hereby declared:

"1. The British Protectorate over Egypt is terminated, and Egypt is declared to be an independent Sovereign State.

"2. So soon as the Government of His Highness shall pass an Act of Indemnity with application to all inhabitants of Egypt, Martial Law as proclaimed on the 2nd November 1914 shall be withdrawn.

"3. The following matters are absolutely reserved to the discretion of His Majesty's Government until



“such time as it may be possible by free discussion and friendly accommodation on both sides to conclude agreements in regard thereto between His Majesty’s Government and the Government of Egypt:

“(a) The security of the communications of the British Empire in Egypt.

“(b) The defence of Egypt against all foreign aggression or interference direct or indirect.

“(c) The protection of foreign interests in Egypt and the protection of minorities.

“(d) The Sudan.

“Pending the conclusion of such agreements the *status quo* in all these matters shall remain intact.”

Here then, within six weeks of his original proposal was the unilateral declaration which Lord Allenby had demanded, and in terms almost identical with those which he himself drafted. It now remained to be seen whether he was justified in the confidence with which he had repeatedly asserted that such action would successfully lead to a lasting settlement. The immediate result was to some extent encouraging, for by March 1 Sarwat Pasha was announcing the composition of his Cabinet. The Wafd, on the other hand, were not long in issuing a statement expressing disapproval and disappointment. As far as England was concerned there was no cause for disappointment, for on March 14 the policy of the Government was ratified in the House of Commons by a large majority of votes. But apparently the arrival in power of Sarwat Pasha and his colleagues, although a matter of satisfaction to the Residency, was not by any means pleasing to all sections of Egyptian opinion. There was a riot accompanied by fatal casualties at Tanta on March 2, the Lawyers’ Association adopted a five days’ strike, and many

schoolboys followed suit. It did not seem by any means certain that the attitude of Egypt was undergoing a genuine change: there was still the extreme demand for independence and nothing less: there was still the personal animosity among Egyptian politicians which rendered Governments unstable: there were still in the background those powerful forces, whose movements were so strongly felt upon occasion, yet seldom showed themselves upon the surface.