

CHAPTER VII

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN AUTOCRACY AND DEMOCRACY

WE must now return to the chronicle of events following upon the resignation of Zaghlul and the formation of Ahmed Ziwar Pasha's Ministry. Ziwar Pasha possessed the happy exuberance of spirit which does not stop to count costs, and feels itself fully equal to difficulties not fully understood. He was a 'jolly fellow', a *bon viveur*, with the qualities and defects of that temperament; sometimes indiscreet and disinclined for concentrated work, but of a great courage, and of infinite resource. His colleagues in the Ministry were not all of them of a calibre to afford him much assistance, but they could at least be expected to be generally obedient to his orders: he himself was determined to work in friendly co-operation with His Majesty's Government, and he set about his task with commendable courage and promptitude. But though he might be successful in his external dealings, it was soon clear that he had not quite the concentration necessary to counter his internal opponents in open warfare. He himself realised this and suggested to the King that for the purpose of combating the Wafd the Cabinet should be strengthened by the inclusion of some able member of the Constitutional Liberal Party. Ismail Sidky Pasha agreed to join,

and a better selection could not have been made, for there was no more able or determined political fighter in Egypt. He joined the Ministry on December 9, and it was significant of Ziwar Pasha's courage and resource that he allocated to this able colleague the Portfolio of the Interior almost invariably held by the Prime Minister himself. Sidky Pasha at once set about his task, rearranging the appointments of Mudirs, reinstating Omdehs who had been dismissed by Zaghulul, and making his weight felt throughout the department. On December 24 Parliament was dissolved. The stage was thus set for the new elections and the critical battle between Sidky Pasha and the forces of Zaghululism. The contestants were possibly more evenly matched than at the time of the previous elections, for the strength of Zaghulul was, at any rate in some quarters, sensibly diminished. His period of administration had estranged from him a great deal of the support of officials, who were incensed at his shameless favouritism of political supporters: by its inefficiency it had seriously weakened the hold previously obtaining over the more substantial classes throughout the country. His ill-conceived and ill-managed attempt to diminish King Fuad's authority in November had done him no good and had lost him a number of the members of his own party: and finally his personal prestige had suffered much from the events following the Sirdar's murder. His plainly evidenced fears for his personal safety, his panic lest he should be arrested and even hanged, and his hasty resignation without attempting to shoulder his responsibilities, were not incidents which could be said to adorn a leader's reputation. But, of course, there still remained the immense force of the "Zaghulul tradition". In the popular mind an almost super-

stitious belief existed that Saad Zaghlul was bound to return to power, and fear and sycophancy rendered that belief a very potent political asset. To destroy this superstition was the task to which Sidky Pasha wisely bent all his energies. The powerful motives of fear, revenge, and hatred ranged behind him not only the King, but the Government, the Liberal Constitutional and the Nationalist parties. The King was already busily organising a new political party—the Ittehad, or Party of Union—so obviously associated with the Palace that it came to be popularly known as the Hisb-el-Malek. The Government from this aspect was for all practical purposes Sidky Pasha himself, who, given a free hand at the Ministry of the Interior, could do more than anybody else to bring to naught the political campaigns of the Wafd. But from the Liberals he could never expect anything but passive support. They confined their active political life to Cairo, took no pains to create an organisation in the provinces, and allowed the Wafd always to get before them with its collection of resources, its widespread propaganda, and its ceaseless political activity. The real question was whether Sidky, armed with the powers of the Minister of the Interior—powers which he could be trusted to use to the full—would carry the day against Saad Zaghlul. That the latter was anxious and uncertain was soon made clear. He had shown his republican hand very clearly in November, yet now he was forced by political anxieties to profess a devout loyalty to the Throne. He was even compelled by his fears to make persistent overtures to the High Commissioner—overtures in which he hinted not darkly at the dangers of autocracy and sought alliance with the British to guard against them. So matters proceeded until the Elections, which resulted finally in

a draw which both sides claimed as a victory. The question was decided in favour of the Zaghluists by the voting in the Chamber for the presidential candidates, when Zaghul Pasha himself secured a decisive victory over Sarwat Pasha, the Government candidate. Thereupon the Ministry, much to the surprise and disappointment of the Wafd, resigned. The King, as the Ministers fully expected, refused to accept their resignation and dissolved Parliament forthwith on March 24, 1925.

All these events left the King firmly in the saddle with a Ministry upon whose obedience—Sidky Pasha always excepted—he might fairly count. The recent elections had demonstrated forcibly enough that in present conditions it could hardly be hoped to inflict a decisive electoral defeat upon the Wafd. The only chance of success was a revision of the electoral law; and to this project the Ministry turned with relief. The necessary preparation would take time, the possibility of further elections would be postponed, and the effects of Sidky Pasha's administration of the Interior would have time to make their impression. Sidky Pasha had certainly already shown a marked degree of strength and ability, the students for the first time for many years were attending quietly to their studies, disorders were an infrequent instead of a daily occurrence, crime was decreasing, and the standard of efficiency everywhere improving.

In such a superficially tranquil atmosphere, after six stormy years of office, Lord Allenby gave up his post of High Commissioner. He left Egypt in June accompanied by remarkable demonstrations of widespread affection, not only from his personal friends and from the Cairene population, but from all classes throughout Egypt—a well-deserved tribute to an up-

right and generous personality. There was no doubt that political Egypt owed him a debt—it was his hand that had procured for her the measure of independence she now enjoyed. Although the policy of concession and of treaty had been initiated by the Milner Mission, it was Lord Allenby who had insisted that the British Government should accept all the implications of that policy and carry it to its logical conclusion. To the close student of his times it may well seem that he reposed in Egyptians a confidence far greater and more complete than did the Members of the Mission. He was ready to go much further than they were in removing safeguards and restrictions; and his determination carried the day against the doubts and hesitations which were entertained in higher quarters. It must have required more than ordinary courage to persist in the course upon which he had decided, in face of the dreadful proofs of instability and fanaticism which Egyptians were almost daily furnishing. Yet he maintained his course unswerving almost to the end, and Egypt, who had time and again repaid his confidence with the murder of his countrymen and had never been moved to a generosity corresponding to his, did well at his departure to signify some measure of recognition. But if her heart was touched, it was not for long: the absorbing pursuit of politics now claimed all her attention; and her politicians did not allow her grateful sentiments to interfere for long with her hostility to British interests and claims.

Ziwar Pasha left shortly afterwards for a visit to Europe, and Yehia Pasha Ibrahim, the founder of the Constitution, and a member of the Ittehad Party, was deputed to act for him as Prime Minister. Sidky Pasha followed him not long afterwards: he was, as

at present, arranged, designated to represent Egypt in the frontier negotiations with Italy, and was to proceed in due course to Rome for this purpose. Meanwhile the Cabinet remained, on paper at any rate, a Coalition of Ittehadists and Liberals. In this coalition Sidky Pasha, who was a Liberal and called himself an Independent, occupied an indeterminate but supremely important position. Under this Ministry the country's affairs were proceeding smoothly enough, when most unfortunately—and, as it turned out, quite wrongly—the King and his confidential adviser, Nashaat Pasha, decided that the time had come when they could dispense with external, and particularly with Liberal, support and make the Ittehad party supreme in isolation. The opportunity to take this step—disastrous as it ultimately proved—was afforded by a personal and in itself unimportant quarrel between the acting Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice, Abdel Aziz Fahmy—a quarrel skilfully fomented with the deliberate desire that the other Liberal Ministers and Sidky Pasha should resign as a result. This in fact they did and the Ministry was reconstituted in August on a purely Palace basis, while the Prime Minister, who after a pleasant visit to London was now enjoying the seductive pleasures of Evian-les-bains, sent soothing telegrams belittling the importance of the matter. Sidky Pasha was induced to remain in charge of the Italian negotiations, and there was a tendency to believe that nothing serious had really happened. But in point of fact this incident, besides being the direct cause of the restoration to power of the fallen Wafd, was the origin of difficulties that were to take years to heal. It meant indeed that all our troubles were to begin all over again, for it seriously upset the balance of power.

In order fully to understand the implications of this disastrous mistake it is necessary to review the situation which had been created by the withdrawal of British control from the internal administration of Egypt. What those who had advocated this withdrawal had hoped to see result from it was a friendly and reasonable Egyptian Government drawing its power from popular support. Such a result was indeed the only one which would enable us to procure a final settlement of the Egyptian question, and to limit our intervention in Egypt solely to the prevention of clear breaches of a definite agreement. But even the happenings of the last eighteen months had made it plain, and the years to come were to make it plainer still, that a Government composed of moderate elements and based upon popular support was the last result that would be attained by our action. There were only two alternatives possible in the existing state of Egypt. The first was the government of the Wafd, which could compel the suffrages of an ignorant electorate, but showed no quality of reasonableness or foresight. Such a Government had come into existence as the result of the first elections and there had followed the utter destruction of all hopes of a reasonable Anglo-Egyptian settlement. What is more, the poisonous seeds of political agitation had been implanted in the Sudan, and finally a state of serious disorder in Egypt had culminated in the murder of the Sirdar. Clearly we must in the interest of the three countries concerned intervene to prevent the reappearance of a purely Zaghululist administration.

The other alternative was a government based upon the autocratic power of the King—such a government would derive its strength from causes which

still operate strongly in Eastern countries; the tradition of subservience to the throne; the means which the King held, as the fount of grades and decorations, to secure the support of a people who still set much store by such things; his wealth; and, most important from our point of view the presence in the country of British troops as the final defence against revolution. But such a government would secure no popular support, and could only exist—as it now existed—by the virtual abrogation of the constitution. On the other hand the memory of autocratic misrule and oppression was not dead, and therefore the cry of danger to the constitution was the one cry which could unite all the political elements in Egypt, and to resist such danger they were still prepared to go to any lengths. From the British point of view it need hardly be pointed out that both our past and our present policy would be rendered utterly fruitless by the appearance, at this stage, of autocratic government in Egypt, when the democratic constitution which was our declared goal had hardly yet come into being, and while we, both in popular repute and, in fact, were still the supreme motive power. So long, therefore, as a balance of power was maintained, so long as all the political parties, or even two parties in coalition, were composing the Government, we need not actively intervene, but the moment that one party gained the upper hand, we were faced with the alternative of either Zaghlulism or autocracy. Neither eventuality could be contemplated and our intervention became inevitable. One other lesson was to be learnt from present happenings: that no one of the three contending parties was touched in the slightest with the true spirit of free democratic government. The first concern of each alike was to obtain control; once

obtained, they—each in turn—used it first to consolidate their political position by an unscrupulous use of the weapons which administrative office put into their hands, and then to employ the power thus afforded them for personal ends. Zaghlul Pasha and Sarwat Pasha, as leaders of opposing parties, had acted very much alike in this, and the country fully realised that it had profited from none of them. But what the rank and file feared most of all, with old unhappy memories of Khedive Ismail still in mind, was a return to autocracy. They were sick and tired of political intrigues, of constant unrest and alarms; they were beginning to forget the War, and to recall with regret the good old days of Cromer and Kitchener. The political freedom which Egypt had clamoured for and at length gained was immediately lost from her sight in the dust raised by a sordid struggle for personal power. To His Majesty's Government this situation presented acute difficulties. If the King succeeded in consolidating the position of a Palace Government and postponing elections indefinitely, to what criticism would we, whose army was recognised by all Egyptians to be his support, not be open? If, on the other hand, Zaghlul came off again the victor, what trouble might not ensue in the Nile Valley, and particularly in the already sorely vexed Sudan?

Indeed it was not too much to say that the situation in the Sudan had been brought about entirely by Egyptian agents and by subversive activities, primarily designed to further the aims of the Wafd. Although the country as a whole was not at all disaffected to British rule, but still grateful and contented, there were of course elements which formed a favourable soil for the working of the

agitator. Foremost among these were the Egyptian officials recruited from the politically minded class in Egypt, the Egyptian merchants who wanted a free hand to prey upon the Sudanese, and the Egyptian Army, which, as in Egypt, contained some elements amenable to political propaganda. Among the Sudan's population also a student class was slowly growing up which included a high proportion of half-bred Egyptian-Sudanese and of the specially undependable educated blacks of slave origin. As might have been expected, the early stirrings of political feeling in the Sudan began simultaneously with the trouble in Egypt in 1919, and were confined at first entirely to Egyptians. But it was these Egyptians, allied with members of that "denationalised" class peculiar to the Sudan—men of mixed or slave extraction—who later started the propaganda which resulted in the serious troubles of 1924. That this propaganda was purely subversive and had no genuine national basis is clear from the extreme variety of its forms. It used religion, Sudan for the Sudanese, Sudan for the Egyptians, personal grievances, class dissatisfactions—any cry it could lay hands on; provided only it could stir up disaffection. By 1922 the subversive activities of the Egyptians had organised themselves upon the usual lines of secret political societies, and unimpeachable evidence was later found to show that the centre of these organisations was Cairo, and that it was from Cairo that the promoters received stimulus and inspiration. In 1923 Hafiz Bey Ramadan, leader of the Watanist party in Egypt, visited Khartum and got into personal touch with disaffected Sudanese elements. With the triumph of the Wafd in 1924, these contacts fell into the hands of that party: two leaders in particular

were being employed in Khartum—one Mahomed Tewfik Wahabi, a judge of the Civil Courts, and one a thorough-paced rascal of slave extraction, by name Ali Abdul Latif. The latter was the "Sudanese" leader and his group or organisation was to play the open part, while the Egyptian group was designed to act as organiser and to remain in that congenial spot, the background. In order to give the whole agitation as Sudanese an air as possible, the League of the White Flag was formed of which the Sudanese were "open" and the Egyptian "secret" members, and of which the resources actually came from Egypt, but were announced to derive from Sudanese subscriptions. Its ostensible object was "the Sudan for the Sudanese", a sentiment to which no Egyptian ever intended to subscribe, and on this basis it proceeded to organise the disorderly demonstrations which took place in the early summer of 1924. With the arrest, however, of Ali Abdul Latif and others, its activities ceased to be important. None the less it soon became clear that the Egyptian agitators had other strings to their bow; in particular they had for some time been busy spreading subversive propaganda in the army. For this purpose their most effective weapon had been the discharged and pensioned black officers, originating mainly from slave stock, having many of them a grievance, and none of them regular employment. The first definite step taken in this direction was the demonstration by the Cadets' school in August at Khartum. Fortunately, owing to the tactful action of the authorities, this affair did not develop as its promoters had hoped, although it led to a serious riot in Omdurman. The next outbreak was in the Egyptian Railway Battalion at Atbara, and this was followed by disturbances at Wari and

Malakal. All these clearly were steps leading up to some much more widespread and dangerous conflagration, which might at any moment be started by one of these local disturbances. But the murder of the Sirdar and the drastic orders for removal of the Egyptian units and officers from the Sudan took the agitators by surprise and broke up their plans: and there can be no shadow of doubt that had these activities been allowed to continue, the ignorant and belligerent tribes would before long have been in revolt against authority, and the situation would only have been cleared up at the cost of much suffering and loss of life.

What made the crime of the Egyptian agitators so flagrant, and rendered utterly criminal the almost direct encouragement given by Zaghlul and his obedient Chamber of Deputies, was that as far as Egyptians were concerned their clamour in regard to the Sudan was both insincere and deliberately misleading. They knew beyond doubt that no sympathy existed between Sudanese and Egyptians: that no single Egyptian had any desire to live and work in the Sudan, and that the Sudanese, even the most disaffected, had no wish to be ruled by or allied to Egypt. Ali Abdul Latif himself did not make reference in any one of his propagandist proclamations to any suggestion of an Egyptian administration. All that Egyptians really cared about was the safety of their water-supply, and as to that the reasonable elements among them had never really had serious misgivings. The politicians were using the Sudan agitation simply for their own ulterior motives to keep emotion inflamed against the British, and for this purpose they did not scruple to put in jeopardy the lives of many thousands of innocent Sudanese subjects.

The acting Governor-General of the Sudan and his official advisers felt that one of the principal causes of the mutinies in the Army had been the divided allegiance to which the officers were asked to subscribe under the condominium. "A man cannot serve 'two masters': and now that the strength of the British authority had not only been withdrawn from Egypt but called in question in the Sudan, they felt that there would be no peace until all visible symbols of Egypt's share in the condominium had disappeared. There was indeed an arguable case for taking even more drastic action. The evidence showed perfectly plainly that not only irresponsible politicians in Egypt but the responsible Government of the country by the mouth of its own Prime Minister had refused to recognise the validity of the Convention of 1898. The political party in power had taken a large share in promoting disaffection and disloyalty to the Government which that agreement had established in the Sudan; and the Government of Egypt had directly encouraged that action. Did not this fact alone afford a justification for denouncing the Convention formally, as Egypt had in practice denounced it; and for removing the Sudan once and for all out of the vexed sphere of Egyptian politics? The demands which we had made in regard to the Gezira and to the removal of Egyptian officers and units were in reality tantamount to a recognition that in the present temper of Egypt the condominium could not be worked, and that one member of it must cease to take an active part. But as usual we did not in law, take the step which we were taking in fact, and still tried to hide behind a fiction. The Sudan was destined thereafter to become an immovable barrier to every attempt at agreement; but for the time being

the problem was to restore the moderate elements in Egyptian politics to a position in which they might hold the balance between autocracy and demagoguery. The step which the King had taken in breaking off his alliance with the Liberals was certain to produce a situation which would compel the intervention of British authority—and British authority would have to walk very delicately if the situation was to be restored. This was the problem of which, in the summer of 1925, I myself was called upon to master the intricacies. His Majesty's Government had selected me to succeed Lord Allenby in the post of High Commissioner, and I was now endeavouring to prepare myself as thoroughly as possible for the duties I was to assume in the autumn.