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GREAT PAGE OF HISTORY UNFOLDED



VIEWING the book just issued by the Earl of Cromer, "Modern Egypt," the London Times says:

If "that is a good book which is opened with expectation and laid down with profit," Lord Cromer's volumes amply fulfill those two conditions of excellence. Since Caesar wrote "De Bello Gallico" we can recall no instance of a great Captain of the State telling so fully and unreservedly and with such lucidity and candor, the story of great events quorum pars maxima fuit. And Caesar's must have been in many respects the easier task. The story of a political enterprise, such as the transformation of Egypt, which has involved the most delicate international issues, and has dealt with grave racial and religious problems, besides fanning the flames of hot party controversies at home, must have presented for the modern Pro-Consul innumerable difficulties, which the master of Roman legions could well afford to disregard in relating the military conquest of Gaul. Lord Cromer has triumphed over those difficulties by approaching his literary task in the same spirit in which he carried out his official task in Egypt. The prudence, the patience, the admirable sanity which have been the distinguishing characteristics of the active statesman are reflected in the scientific detachment and lofty impartiality which he now displays as a historian. At times, indeed, Lord Cromer reminds one forcibly of a great judge summing up a case before a jury of his countrymen and expounding with dispassionate serenity the evidence upon which he himself and all those who have been responsible for our policy in Egypt during the last quarter of a century will stand approved or condemned at the bar of posterity. Of course, no man can really be judge as well as counsel, witness and defendant in a suit which is largely his own, but Lord Cromer may be almost said to have squared that circle.

"There were a better story and I could recollect the beginning." That is perhaps already the attitude of mind of many an Englishman, no longer even with the prime of life still before him, towards the story of the British occupation of Egypt. Of the younger generation amongst us not a few are inclined to assume that the responsibilities involved in the British occupation were lightly incurred in the wanton pursuit of an overweening Imperialism, and prone to criticize any methods of administration that do not wholly conform to the ideals of an advanced democracy, they refuse or are unable to realize what the condition of Egypt was before the magician's wand evolved order out of chaos and prosperity out of unspeakable misery. With the authority which belongs to an unrivalled experience dating back now for more than thirty years, to the day when as Major Baring he took up his first post in Cairo as Commissioner of the Debt in 1877, Lord Cromer has for the benefit of the British people set forth step by step the chain of events which has thrust upon them a position of great responsibility in regard to Egypt, not, indeed, unmixed with advantages for themselves, but certainly unsought for and often accepted only with pusillanimous reluctance and alarm. He has shown them at the same time that the work of rescue they have performed is one that they may well be proud of, and that though it is still far from completion, and there may still be many difficulties and disappointments in store for them, the task is worthy of their highest endeavor, so they be not "weary in well-doing." In regard to the events of later years in Egypt, and especially since the accession of the present Khedive, Lord Cromer, no doubt rightly, still considers himself under obligations of reticence; but with those which preceded and followed the British occupation up to 1892 and with the dramatic story of the Sudan down to 1907 he deals, as he truly says, "fully and unreservedly," and it is, therefore, to that part of his work that we propose to devote mainly the space at our disposal today.

Long before Ismail Pasha succeeded to the Khedival throne, Egypt had suffered much from the evils inherent to Eastern forms of despotism. She had known worse rulers than he was, more grossly incompetent and more petty cruel; but in the East, as Lord Cromer shrewdly observes, "the maximum amount of harm is probably done when an Oriental ruler is for the first time brought in contact with the European system of credit," and this was the misfortune that befell Egypt in the evil days of Ismail. During the early years of his reign Egypt had been an earthly paradise for the European adventurer and for the native usurer, as well as for the Egyptian Pasha who happened for the time being to be the instrument of his master's capricious will and the recipient of his reckless favors. But during the later years it had become a hell upon earth for the unfortunate people of Egypt, tailable et corveable a merci, as the people of France had never been in the worst days of the old regime. Those were the times when Daudet's Nabab Hounished exceedingly at the Court of Cairo, when a Finance Minister boasted that in one year he had squeezed £1,500,000 out of the taxpayers' pockets, when the public debt was run up within thirteen years at the rate of some seven millions a year to close upon one hundred millions sterling, when one-fifth of the arable lands in a country wholly dependent upon agriculture passed into the hands of the Khedive, and was exploited by forced labor for his sole benefit, when the trust funds of the religious foundations and of the orphan

and the widow were mercilessly pillaged "by superior order," when the Treasury was driven to such fraudulent expedients as the spendthrift law of the Moukabala. This vertiginous "Rake's Progress" Lord Cromer sketches in with a masterly hand. "The origin of the Egyptian question," he frankly admits, "was financial"; but he argues with no little force that, if it was the bond-holders who brought about foreign interference, it was foreign interference that alone could and did relieve the people of Egypt from a system of government which was as ruinous to them as to the foreign creditors of the country. Sordid and sometimes even grotesque as are the details of Ismail's struggle against the forces which he had challenged, the story as told in these pages acquires something of the dignity and fatefulness of a Greek tragedy. Ismail disappears ingloriously from the scene at a nod of the two Western powers, "a victim to the insolent abuse of power." But where he had sown, the wind his son Tewfik, an upright and well-meaning ruler according to his lights, reaped the whirlwind, Ismail's sham "Constitution," with which the veriest incarnation of despotism hoped to succeed in playing off the "national will" against his foreign creditors, was the protoplasm out of which, a few years later, the "Nationalist" upheaval was evolved, just as the turbulent demonstration of Egyptian officers clamoring for arrears of pay, whom Ismail had secretly mobilized against his European ministers, was the forerunner of Arabi's mutiny. Ismail had, in fact, already fallen when "the nadir of financial chaos and popular misery was reached in the summer and autumn of 1878"; but it was from the belated explosion of sullen and long-pent-up wrath engendered by the grossness of his misdeeds that British ships and British troops had to save his unfortunate successor in 1882.

Never has it been more clearly shown than by Lord Cromer's plain statement of facts how there was, indeed, under the compulsion of an irresistible fatality, that Kinglake's prophecy was fulfilled and the Englishman's foot at last firmly planted in the valley of the Nile. When it was first proposed, at the beginning of 1876, to place Egyptian finances under European control France and Italy each agreed to select a commissioner, but Lord Derby declined to appoint an English one on the ground that her Majesty's government was unwilling to interfere in the internal affairs of Egypt. After the introduction of Anglo-French control it was to the initiative of France, reluctantly followed by the British Government, under the pressure of political considerations in Europe on the eve of the Berlin Congress of 1878, that the measures were taken in Cairo which led up to the downfall of Ismail. Again, in the winter of 1881-2 it was Gambetta who invariably shaped the diplomatic action of the two Powers in Cairo, with the result, if not with the intention, that military action was bound sooner or later to ensue. Gambetta fell before the final crisis, but "he exercised a decisive and permanent influence on the future course of Egyptian history. Lord Granville, M. de Freycinet, and others might do their best to put back the hands of the clock, but it was impossible that they should ever restore the status quo ante Gambetta." England to the last fought, almost blindly, and certainly with the clumsiness of the blind, against her destiny. Not for the first or for the last time she was willing to accept even the armed intervention of Turkey in Egypt. She welcomed the assembling of a European Conference in Constantinople in order, as Lord Granville put it to the Porte, that we should be able "to meet the pressure that would be put upon us to take immediate and independent action." It was not at our wish that the French fleet sailed away from Alexandria a few hours before Admiral Seymour opened the bombardment. Internal dissensions and mistrust of Germany—Prince Bismarck's share in

preventing French co-operation with England at that stage deserves to be closely studied—finally induced the French to stand altogether aloof. Even Italy's co-operation was invited by the British government and refused, professedly out of regard for the susceptibilities of the Sultan, an argument significantly akin to that which had been used by the German ambassador to Paris at the same time as Lord Granville was being assured by the German ambassador in London that "in the event of the British government taking action on their own initiative they would receive the moral support of Germany." Lord Dufferin himself has pointed out how the prolonged endeavors he made to induce the despatch of a Turkish force to join hands with Wolseley in Egypt, even after the stricken field of Tel-el-Kebir, merely served to ruin his reputation as an honest man, whilst enhancing it as a diplomatist. There is quiet but well-merited irony in Lord Cromer's observation that "English history affords other examples of the government and people of England drifting by accident into doing what was not only right, but most in accordance with British interests"; but it may well be doubted whether they have ever drifted quite so helplessly as when they drifted into the British occupation of Egypt.

Nor did they cease to drift after the occupation had taken place. No sooner was the Englishman's foot planted in the valley of the Nile than, "fearful of what he had done, he struggled to withdraw it." But the same fatality which had compelled him to plant his foot there compelled him to keep it firmly planted. It is at this stage that the drama reaches to truly tragic heights. Whilst the short-lived storm had burst and passed away over the delta of the Lower Nile, a tempest of tropical fury had arisen unobserved and was sweeping over the vast territories on the White and Blue Nile, extending to the great lakes of Central Africa, which had been more or less nominally subjected to the authority of Cairo during the course of the nineteenth century. If the Egyptian pashas had chastised their own people with whips, they had chastised the Sudanese with scorpions. Before England had had time to take stock of the situation in Egypt itself and of her new relations with the Egyptian government, "a formidable rebellion, the suppression of which would tax to the utmost their military and financial resources," had broken out in the Sudan. Who was to advise or to help them at that critical moment in "the adoption of a rational and practical policy" save England? But just as the British government had closed their eyes to the stern logic of facts in Egypt, so also now in the Sudan. They were "in no way responsible for the operations in the Sudan which have been undertaken under the authority of the Egyptian government, or for the appointment or actions of General Hicks." Then in the autumn of 1883, just at the moment when Lord Cromer, who had left Egypt at the end of 1880 to be finance minister in India, returned to fill the post of British representative in Cairo, came the rudest of awakenings with the annihilation of the Egyptian forces under Hicks Pasha in the waterless desert of Kordofan. The flowing tide of Mahdism rolled on resistibly toward Khartoum. Could it even be stayed there? Failing the employment of British or of Turkish troops—the former was peremptorily refused by the British government, the latter was clearly never seriously contemplated—the only possible policy was complete evacuation of the Sudan. It had become "an unpleasant but imperative necessity," as Lord Cromer speedily realized, but it was extremely unpalatable to the Egyptian government. Mr. Gladstone and his colleagues were vacillating and irresolute in taking action, but they could be prompt and resolute enough in laying down a course which would, as they hoped, avert the

necessity for action. Not only did they endorse Lord Cromer's recommendations for the entire withdrawal of the Egyptian forces from the Sudan, but when Chérif Pasha, the Egyptian prime minister, showed a strong determination to reject that policy, Lord Granville bluntly intimated that Egyptian ministers and governors, so long as the British occupation continued, would be expected to carry out the advice of the British government or forfeit their offices.

Lord Cromer's vindication of the policy of withdrawal appears to us irrefragable. It had at any rate the supreme merit of looking facts in the face, but its execution unhappily furnished fresh opportunities of vacillation and irresolution of which the British government availed itself abundantly. The copious and lucid exposition of the lamentable episode which ended in the fall of Khartoum and the death of Gordon is perhaps the most valuable and complete contribution to history which these volumes contain. It has, moreover, the most poignant human interest, for it brings into startling relief the cruelty of the position into which Lord Cromer was forced as the intermediary between the home government, which could never make up their minds at all, and the heroic visionary whose mind was always made up, but was unhappily seldom made up for more than a few days—sometimes for not more than a few hours—in any fixed direction. Lord Cromer had great misgivings from the first as to the wisdom of sending any European officer up to Khartoum, and still greater misgivings as to the selection of General Gordon for such a mission. Nor does he spare himself in judging his own share of responsibility. Se justice, nemo nocens absoluitur. It is not from any narrow inability or ungenerous failure to appreciate Gordon's splendid qualities that he acknowledges how deeply he still regrets having waived his original objection to that perilous adventure. "Had I known General Gordon better, I should certainly," he states, "never have agreed to his mission." Whether, in any case, the British government would have listened to his objection seems more than doubtful, for public opinion was loud and insistent, and like McKinley, Mr. Gladstone always had "his ear to the ground," listening for the vox populi. Scarcely had Lord Cromer with a heavy heart bidden farewell to Gordon, who left Cairo, "in excellent spirits and hopeful of success" on the night of January 26, 1884—a date to be remembered—than he began to receive from him in quick succession that "large number of very bewildering and contradictory messages," which gave rise to many painful controversies at the time of the publication of Gordon's diary. Gordon's sudden and incoherent revulsions of opinion must have been a matter of constant and harassing perplexity for a man of Lord Cromer's cautious deliberation and thoughtful judgment, but with unflinching patience he set himself "to distinguish between such proposals of General Gordon as represented his matured opinions and others which were mere bubbles thrown up by his imaginative brain, probably forgotten as soon as made." Unfortunately, it was just "the valuable residuum" which Lord Cromer knew how to extract from Gordon's superabundant output of schemes and plans that the British government, far more hopelessly bewildered than their agent in Cairo, would have nothing to do with. For the residuum was Zobeir, and Zobeir smelt of slave-hunting. Gordon's "mystic feeling" in favor of the employment of Zobeir grew into a settled conviction as he came to closer and closer quarters with the appalling difficulties of his task. Gordon's ill-fated lieutenant, Col. Stewart, to whom full justice is for the first time done in these pages, gradually came round to the same view. Nubian Pasha, the astute Prime Minister of Egypt, supported it. Lord Cromer cast the whole weight of his deliberate judgment in its favor, and so cogent

were the arguments he used that the British government were for a moment on the point of acquiescing, though they dreaded the outcry in England, if it became known that they were dallying with slavery in the person of Zobeir. Gordon's own impatience and impulsiveness destroyed whatever chance there might have been of securing what he wanted. He communicated his views to Mr. Power, the luckless correspondent of The Times in Khartoum, for publication in this paper. He wrote in his journal that he had asked openly in this way for Zobeir "in order to save her Majesty's government from the odium of such a step." It was a generous indiscretion, but it was a fatal one. It provoked a frenzied outburst of sentimental hostility at home. The Anti-Slavery Society took the lead in marshalling the forces of righteous indignation. The Opposition scented the chance of defeating the government in the House of Commons. The danger to ministers, if they acceded to Gordon's demands, was imminent and definite. Gordon was far away, and the danger to him, if they rejected his demands, was less obvious and definite. They made no attempt to explain the situation or to enlighten the public. They had yielded to an emotional wave of popular feeling when they sent him to Khartoum. They yielded without an effort to another but opposite wave when they refused to let him have Zobeir.

Worse things still were, however, to follow. Having rejected Gordon's demands, the least, it would seem, that the British government could have done should have been to face the probable consequences of their action. It is impossible even at this distance of time to read without a blush of shame the pages in which Lord Cromer records at full length and with impressive restraint the long-drawn story of fatuous hesitation and delay which led up to the final catastrophe at Khartoum. As early as April 14, 1884, Lord Cromer urged the British government to prepare for a relief expedition. Lord Wolseley had tendered the same advice in London, even a few days earlier, from the military point of view. The Government replied with requests for fuller information, and when they had the information, in so far as it was obtainable at all, they placed their own construction on it. Well might Gordon write in the bitterness of his heart:—"It is as if a man on the bank, having seen his friend in the river already bobbed down three times, hails: 'I say, old fellow, let us know when we are to throw you the lifebuoy. I know you have bobbed down two or three times, but it is a pity to throw you the lifebuoy until you are really in extremis, and I want to know exactly, for I am a man brought up in a school of exactitude.' When the lifebuoy was at last tardily thrown, it was too late. 'Mr. Gladstone was slow,' Lord Cromer remarks, 'to recognize facts when they ran counter to his wishes. The natural result ensued. The facts asserted themselves.' And later on he closes this momentous chapter of history, never before related with such fulness of documentary evidence and personal knowledge, with the following passage, too weighty not to be quoted at length:

In a word, the Nile expedition was sanctioned too late, and the reason why it was sanctioned too late was that Mr. Gladstone would not accept simple evidence of a plain fact, which was patent to much less powerful intellects than his own. Posterity has yet to decide on the services which Mr. Gladstone, during his long and brilliant career, rendered to the British nation, but it is improbable that the verdict of his contemporaries in respect to his conduct of the affairs of the Sudan will ever be reversed. 'Les fautes de l'homme puissant,' said an eminent Frenchman, 'sont des malheurs publics.' Mr. Gladstone's error of judgment in delaying too long the despatch of the Nile expedition left a stain on the reputation of England which it will be beyond the power of either the impartial historian or the partial apologist to efface.

Lord Cromer's balanced judgment scarcely ever leaves room for criticism; but we may perhaps venture to suggest that, scrupulous as he is to do justice to the noble but erratic genius whose shortcomings he had cause to realize more painfully than anyone, and wholeheartedly as is the tribute which he pays to Gordon's memory, he perhaps scarcely recognizes sufficiently the magnetic quality of the man to which, as much as to his military capacity, must have been due the protracted resistance offered by Khartoum to the overwhelming hordes of barbarism that surged up for months against it in vain. After he had sent away Stewart and Power in September Gordon was the one Englishman left in Khartoum to keep treachery at bay within its ramparts as well as to superintend its defence against the external foe. He fell at last on the fateful 26th of January, 1885, one year, day for day, after he had started from Cairo. He fell, as Lord Cromer well says, "felix opportunitate mortis, but could any other but Gordon have held the fort as long as Gordon did before he fell? More than that. Was it not, even in a higher degree than Lord Cromer himself suggests, the national sense of shame engendered by the hero's death which steeled the determination of the British people never again to shrink either from their appointed task in Egypt or from its inevitable corollary, the reconquest of those regions which were henceforth indissolubly associated in the popular mind with Gordon's tragic fate? Is it not even permissible to ask whether, had not Gordon died, as he did, in Khartoum, the British and Egyptian flags would ever, or at least so soon, have waved there again?

The Anglo-Russian Relations



At a meeting of the Central Asian Society, the London correspondent of the Novoe Vremya since 1892, gave a lecture on "Anglo-Russian Relations." The chair was taken by Lord Ronaldshay, M. P., says the London Times.

M. de Wesselitsky, who spoke for an hour and a half, gave a comprehensive survey of the history of Anglo-Russian relations from the time of Peter the Great with the object of showing that these relations were traditionally cordial, and that the differences of recent years had their origin in Asiatic and not in European affairs. The Crimean war was due to an unfortunate series of miscalculations by diplomatic experts, and it was now generally recognized that, in the famous phrase of Lord Salisbury, England had put her money on the wrong horse. It was only, however, in the relations between the two countries were consistently marked by mistrust and suspicion. During the Boer war he was one of two or three continental publicists who dared to support the English cause; and he only had the opportunity of doing so because the editor and proprietor of the Novoe Vremya allowed him liberty, as London correspondent, to dissent from the editorial policy. Russia's steady refusal to listen to counsels of intervention helped to pave the way for a better understanding, and an improvement in the diplomatic relations between the two countries began in 1903-4. Russia spontaneously recognized England's position in Egypt, and England spontaneously gave assurances of a non-aggressive policy in Tibet. The idea of an agreement on questions of Asiatic policy took shape. Among the elements in the situation pointing to the strong desirability of the understanding was the moral disturbance of the balance of power in Europe caused by Russia's war with Japan. Another great factor was the awakening of Asia and the spread of nationalistic sentiment among her peoples. The Russian people had always known the treasures of English literature far better than the English people had known Russian literature, and their admiration of the English (whom they knew to be at least open enemies and not treacherous friends) had stood in the way of the growth of Anglophobia. Russian assent to a policy of Asiatic agreement arose, not from fear or calculation, but from a recognition of the mutual advantages derivable; it was facilitated by the belief that it was well worth while to make sacrifices to win back the traditional English sentiments of sympathy and regard. The convention marked a new era in the history of both Europe and Asia, and one from which great beneficent results might be expected. It set free for other work great forces which the

two nations had kept up to resist one another's supposed designs. It showed that both countries had reached the limit of Asiatic conquest and would fully respect the independence of those Asiatic countries which they had not absorbed. It gave the best possible security for the maintenance of a stable balance of European power, for it might almost be described as a French as well as an Anglo-Russian agreement. It served as a great protection not only to the smaller states of Western Europe from Sweden to Switzerland, but also to those of the Balkan peninsula, for it opened the door for an effective European concert in respect to the unfortunate nationalities of that region. He earnestly hoped that the re-establishment of cordial relations between the two Great Powers would lead to a great increase of intellectual contact between their peoples; and he was convinced that trade relations would be stimulated. In particular, he would like to see Englishmen having the largest share in the opening up of Siberia; and he looked for Anglo-Russian co-operation in building new railways and developing trade routes to Mongolia and Western China, and also in the establishment of railway communication with India, which must surely come.

A brief debate followed, in which Lord Ronaldshay, M. P.; Mr. Hart-Davies, M. P.; Colonel C. E. Yate, and Mr. F. H. Skrine took part.

Canada

God had entrusted them, and to ensure a future of that was the task divine people. The awakening of recent date. But it had imagination. Ambassadors visit, had spoken of in half a century more 600,000 people in the Dorset, which from its geographical position must be the commercial centre of a population, he estimated.

One could almost wish these days of Canada's greatness some of them there that reaching the time when they died, they might contribute solving of those problems which lie in the path of the When this greatness came, would possess it? Would citizens, possessed of that exalteth a nation? It ideals planted in the nation. Home life and reverence was one of the first people's greatness. There no greatness of character, except there were homes found. Family life was the source of inspiration. It was the morals. History the gates of Eden nations in proportion as their and holy. The reverse had in Gibbon's "Decline and how Rome's immoralities

stand the test of material and commenced and would prosperity tended to loosen society together; to unite. To pass from the cottage experience showed, was often pure influences. It was prosper and be unspoiled, the preacher, in closing, we success, but if you pass the palace of wealth, carry you."

Journal comes this little and his royal pupil. The in history, and the prince we now come to the Emperor do you know about him, tion was followed by a si- coming awkward when it diplomatic tutor. "Your he said, "perfectly right, this emperor the better."