

Lord Cromer's "Modern Egypt"—A Criticism



MODERN Egypt, by the Earl of Cromer, affords fascinating reading to all who are interested in Anglo-Oriental government, whether in Egypt or in India. His Lordship's remarks show a profound knowledge of Eastern habits of thought. Lord Cromer has been able to go deep into the Oriental mind, on different lines from those taken by Sir Alfred Lyall, whose Asiatic Studies have long been regarded as a very high authority on the subject. Though it is not impossible to detect, I venture to say with all respect, an occasional flaw in the arguments used in dissecting the Oriental mind, the two volumes ought to be carefully studied by every Anglo-Indian administrator. There is a very great deal of practical common sense in these pages, of "supreme sanity," such as is not always in evidence in the British-Indian administration. Lord Cromer's remarks on Anglo-Egyptian difficulties apply with redoubled force to Anglo-Indian administrative problems.

"Nevertheless (writes Lord Cromer), the difficulty of arriving at a true idea of the under-currents of native opinion is probably less considerable in Egypt than in India. Notably, the absence of the caste system, and the fact that the social and religious fabric of Islamism is more readily comprehensible to the European mind than the comparatively subtle and mystical bases of Hinduism, diminish the gulf which in India separates the European from the native, etc."

The reticence of Orientals, as Lord Cromer points out, when speaking to anyone in authority adds to the difficulties of Anglo-Indian administrators.

From a careful study of Modern Egypt it is easy to arrive at the conclusion that Lord Cromer, though a keen politician, is by no means a political partisan. As a practical statesman he is not carried away by what his lordship calls "the catchwords which sometimes attach themselves to what, from a party point of view, is called a Liberal policy in England." The regenerator of Egypt does not, for instance, believe in the most hackneyed catch-phrase of the Liberal party, "the freedom of the press." His Lordship gives instances of the abuse of the freedom of the press in Egypt, and shows how in the East freedom of the press "checks freedom of speech. This may appear paradoxical, but nevertheless is true. It is perhaps more true in India than in Egypt. In India it is a common occurrence for a half-educated native editor to publish utter, unmitigated nonsense through the medium of a fifth-rate weekly print, with the object of overwhelming the thoughtful leaders of the millions. The result is that the British administrators only hear the views of the professional agitator, and are unable to gain the insight into the under-currents of native thought which they ought to acquire for the proper understanding of Anglo-Indian problems. Lord Cromer has no hesitation in saying that a large number of the members of the Legislative Council in Egypt "would welcome the enactment of a rigorous Press law as a measure calculated to free them from the moral shackles which now hamper their liberty of speech and action." It is with a similar laudable object in view that some of the native princes of India appealed to the government of India against the so-called freedom of the press in the various cantonments and British jurisdiction in native states. They made out such a strong case against the licence of the press that in 1891 they practically forced the government of India to issue a circular in the foreign department altogether stopping the printing of newspapers in British jurisdiction within all native states. The punishment of the editor—European or native—for violating this circular is instant deportation. The native Durbars now enjoy a freedom of speech and action which is the envy of the members of the Legislative Council in Egypt. There are newspapers in native states, no doubt, but they do not enjoy the licence allowed to the press in British India. The licence of the Vernacular press in British India appears to the native mind as not only a comedy but a screaming farce. Every shrewd Anglo-Indian administrator knows that, at every turn of the political wheel in India, actual facts clash with sacred Liberal theories. Racial and religious antipathies clash with a so-called freedom of the press and land the Anglo-Indian administrator on the horns, not of a dilemma, but of a "trilemma"—the resultant of the irreconcilable Hindu, Mahomedan, and Christian forces brought to a climax. The Moslem is the antithesis of the Hindu, and both are more or less incomprehensible to the average Anglo-Saxon mind. To make the situation more complicated, the home-staying Anglo-Saxon unwittingly gives the other forces a sharp sword in the shape of a free press, with which they mercilessly attack both their English protectors and their native fellow-subjects.

Throughout the pages of these two volumes can easily be discerned the strong practical common-sense, and the scorn for theory, of the master mind behind them. The defect of the Radical mind is that, once having got hold of a principle which has proved sound in the West, it often rides it to death, regardless of the past history and the present circumstances of an Oriental country. The untravelled Radical mind is soothed by plausible generalities, though often fallacious. The Radical doctrinaires expect their agents in India to reconcile two irreconcilable policies—the licence of the Vernacular press and the preservation of peace in that vast continent with a heterogeneous

population representing one-fifth of the entire human race. The elementary difference between the ideas of the Occidental and Oriental masses is forgotten. While the Occidental ruler is supposed to govern according to the will of the people, the Oriental people are anxious to know, as a guide of their conduct, the will of the king, who to them represents Divinity on earth. It is not statesmanship to be blind to such obvious realities, simply to make everything harmonize with preconceived theories. Facts, however unpleasant, cannot in the long run be altogether ignored. Facts are bound to assert themselves, though catch-phrases may for a time serve as a tinsel covering to hide glaring and dangerous fallacies. The justification of the application of Western methods to the Oriental mind generally fails unless it is in reference to some service. A free press appears to the Indian mind as Wagner's music, which it has not been trained to appreciate. Even in Europe the press is a curious mosaic which is not always a safe guide. Lord Cromer, with characteristic frankness, says "the praise or blame of the British parliament and press was a very faulty standard by which to judge the wisdom or unwisdom" of any measure.

In the Anglo-Indian body-politic, as in Egypt, the unseen is often more important than the seen. The Indian "patriot" indulges in inflated rubbish when he talks of free institutions suited to a caste-ridden country. It would be easier to make a pyramid stand on its apex than to make the proud Brahman treat the pariah as his equal because both are human beings. Free institutions pre-suppose the idea of equality, which does not exist in India. This is a fact which even those who sometimes emit flashes of true statesmanship forget when they want to try all sorts of Western experiments on Eastern people. Radical doctrinaires should remember Lord Cromer's most significant words: "Contact with Europe has led to the adoption of the forms and incorporation of much of the jargon of Western civilization, but has been powerless to make the East imbibe its spirit." Unless and until the East imbibes the Western spirit, the free institutions of the West will continue to be among the undesirable Western experiments on Eastern people. It is not wisdom to plant an acorn on a soil where it can never grow into an oak. The soil should be prepared first for foreign plants. "The masterpieces of the statesman's art are for the most part not acts, but abstinences from action," says Sir John Seely. "I had to check the reformer," emphasizes Lord Cromer, "when he wished to push his reforms so far as to shake the whole political fabric," etc. It is the so-called reformer who is at the root of most of the Anglo-Indian troubles of the present day. The Radical reformers lack the idea of true proportion. They find plausible reasons for arriving at conclusions which fit in with their pet theories. Before introducing Western methods it is essential to ascertain facts, without which political sympathies and pet theories are likely to lead to conclusions which are dangerously fallacious. A far-sighted statesman not only abstains from unnecessary "reforms," but acts as a check, as Lord Cromer did, on the activities of missionaries and other busybodies. "Any danger from religious fanaticism may be mitigated," observes Lord Cromer, "and perhaps altogether averted, by imposing some reasonable and salutary checks on the freedom of action of missionary bodies." If the average Anglo-Indian administrator had shown as much prudence and moral courage in dealing with missionaries in India, the gulf between the rulers and the ruled would not have been so wide as it unfortunately is today. Any attempt towards too rapid progress is very properly condemned by Lord Cromer. If the Oriental hates anything, he hates sudden change. No doubt he himself changes, but unless the change proposed to him is so imperceptible that he does not feel it, he objects to it.

The intellectual phase through which India is now passing (writes Lord Cromer) stands before the world as a warning that it is unwise, even if it be not dangerous, too create too wide a gap between the state of education of the higher and of the lower classes in an Oriental country governed under the inspiration of a Western democracy. High education cannot and ought not to be checked or discouraged. The policy advanced by Macaulay is sound. Moreover, it is the only policy worthy of a civilized nation. But if it is to be carried out without danger to the State, the

ignorance of the masses should be tempered pari passu with the intellectual advance of those who are destined to be their leaders. It is neither wise nor just that the people should be left intellectually defenceless in the presence of the hare-brained and empirical projects which the political charlatan, himself but half educated, will not fail to pour into their credulous ears. In this early part of the twentieth century there is no possible general remedy against the demagogue except that which consists in educating those who are his natural prey to such an extent that they may, at all events, have some chance of discerning the imposture which but too often lurks beneath his perverted eloquence and political quackery.

The above ought to be the golden maxim which should guide the Anglo-Indian administrator. But unfortunately the Government of India are often at the mercy of untraveled British Radical reformers who are unable to form a correct estimate of the main factors in an Oriental political situation. The task of the Government of India is twofold. They are in the capacity of teachers in respect to people above them as well as those below them. They have to explain to the Home Government—that is to a democratic Parliament—what India really is they have to enunciate the first principles of Western government to Orientals to whom the very idea is foreign. The Radical reformer lays too much stress on the will of the people, which has yet to be brought into existence in India. To smash an old fabric—political or social—which, however tottering, may yet last long enough for gradual reform,

impartial judgment." As Lord Cromer points out, "half the evils of the world come from inaccuracy." It is the inaccurate appreciation in England of the effects of the licence of the Vernacular Press in India that is responsible for the present unrest in India. The Anglo-Saxon ear, after centuries of freedom, is not inclined to hear anything that has not got a ring of complete freedom about it. It is difficult to place plain Oriental facts before the British public in a form to which they are accustomed. It is jarring to the Anglo-Saxon ear to hear that there is no immediate room in the East for their most cherished institutions. Anglo-Saxon impatience prevents them from carefully preparing the soil. The result is that Oriental weeds of thousands of years in the form of custom choke the growth and kill the exotic plants of free institutions.

"Order and good government" first, "liberty would follow afterwards," is Lord Cromer's enunciation of sound political doctrine. A paper reform and a practical reform are two different things. In the East, as Lord Dufferin wrote, "a mild ruler is more likely to provoke contempt and insubordination than to inspire gratitude." The truth of this remark is apparent to the most casual observer in India. The Indian peasant has more regard for the strong Rajah than for the British Government, because he "instinctively craves for the strong hand of a master." It is a curious sight to see on the Congress platform the Brahman politician, though himself the living embodiment of despotic power in its most extreme form, demanding ultra-constitutional free institutions.

Under the commanding influence of the subtle Brahman the free institutions of the great Buddha foundered in India. Unless a reform is bound to succeed, it is worse than useless to introduce it, for when it fails the professional agitator points it out as a convincing proof of the perfidy of Albion. He takes good care that no one should say that a clash of conflicting interests was the cause of the failure. Anglo-Saxon enthusiasts who dream of a Hindu Utopia help in creating a popular sentiment against the English. As Lord Salisbury observed, "it is easier to combat with the rinderpest or the cholera than with a popular sentiment." The Government of India do not think it their business to guide native opinion. The result is that the professional agitator is master of the situation. His political opinion is often connected with some personal grievance or motive.

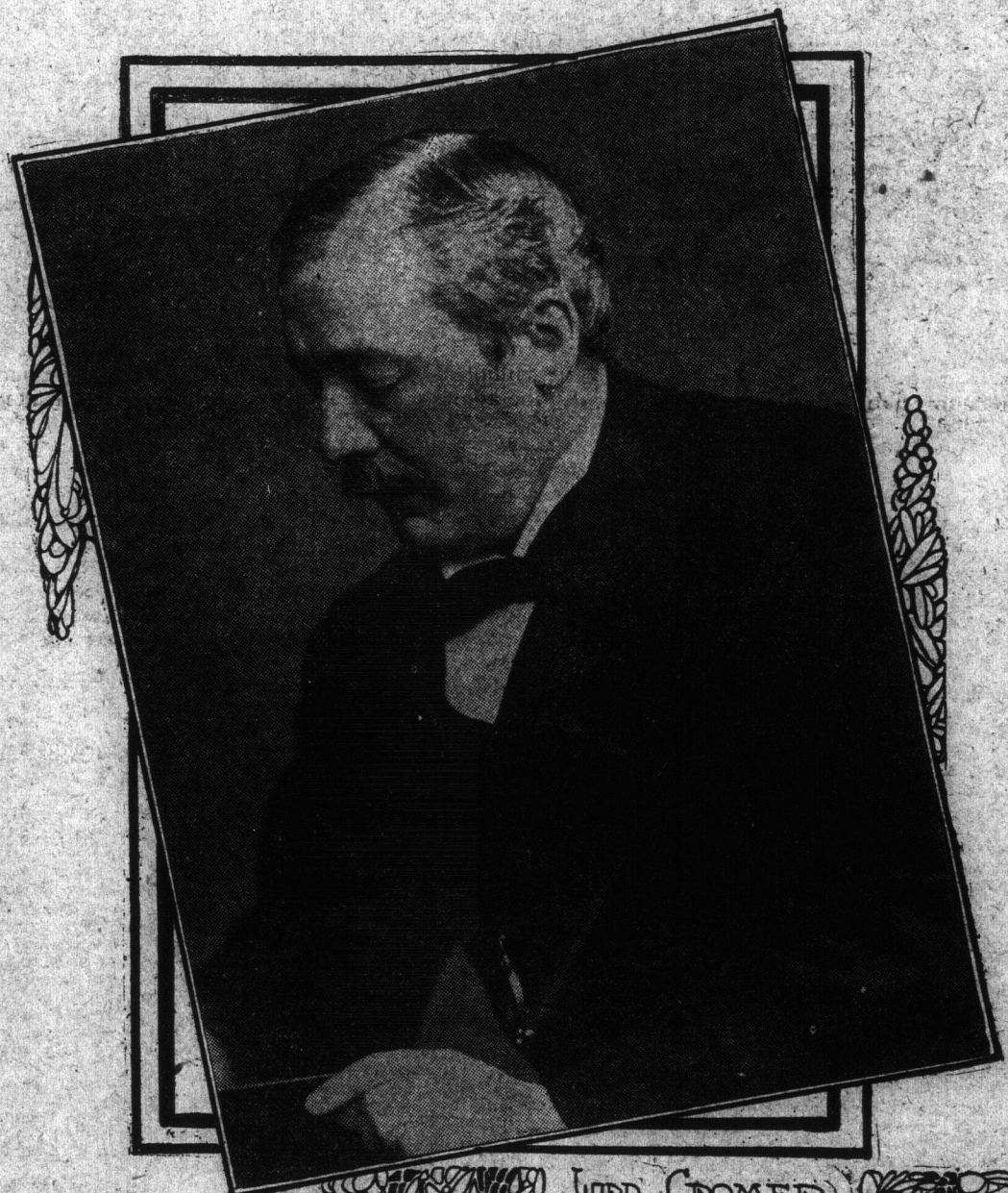
Lord Cromer's remark on the educated Egyptian applies with equal force to the educated Indian. The anglicised Indian, with very rare exceptions, is only a good imitator. He adopts "the letter, the catchwords and jargon," but not the spirit of the Western systems. The Indian, like the Egyptian, has little power of imitation. In short, the average anglicised Indian is a bad copy of the original. He is generally more tainted by European vices than influenced by European virtues. In the East, as Lord Cromer very frankly admits, "the material benefits derived from Europeanization are unquestionably great, but as regards the ultimate effect on public and private morality the future is altogether uncertain. European civilization destroys one religion without substituting another in its place." The Europeanized Indian, like the Europeanized Egyptian, is an agnostic, and his intellectual ballast is as light as that depicted by Lord Cromer of the Europeanized Egyptian. European civilization has so far failed both in training the mind and in forming the character of the Indians. A Europeanized Indian first picks up the European vices, such as drinking and gambling. Afterwards he argues with himself whether it would pay him to imitate European ideas of equality, etc. In nine cases out of ten he continues to be Oriental in other respects. It is no wonder that European civilization stinks in the nostrils of orthodox Indians. Such being the case it is very necessary that proselytizing associations should carefully ponder over the actual results of Europeanization in the East. His Lordship's remark should not only be used for home consumption, but should be exported to Anglo-India.

The unpopularity of the British race in the East is due to the arrogance of some Englishmen. They "sometimes make the British race unpopular by their bad manners and self-assertion," writes Lord Cromer. "It is a mistake to employ second or third rate Europeans," observes Lord Cromer, for "they do more harm than good." But the open door of competitive examinations is broad enough for

the low European to enter. As long as India was governed by sons of English gentlemen there was no general unrest. But nowadays every Englishman in India is not a gentleman by birth or behavior, and the political result we all know. Though the Indian has respect for a strong master, he prefers one who can assert his authority without bluster, and who can be firm without being unconciliatory. The more he is careful to avoid wounding Oriental susceptibilities, the more he is likely to prove a successful Oriental administrator. The Oriental is a master in the art of passive obstruction, and woe to the English administrator who, through want of tact, makes the Oriental use his best weapon. In Modern Egypt, the Anglo-Indian administrator will find pertinent remarks which equally apply to India. Writing about the Egyptian native army, Lord Cromer says "it should never be forgotten that an army composed of Moslems and officers of a considerable extent by Christians is a singularly delicate machine, which requires most careful handling." This remark applies equally to the Indian native army. In India the combination of the Judicial and the Executive functions in the district officer seems anomalous to theorists. In Egypt the combination of the Legislative and the Judicial duties satisfies the present requirements of that country. "Fiscal relief had a prior claim to administrative reform," observes Lord Cromer. "It was essential to alleviate the burthens which weighed on the masses of the population" before spending the poor taxpayers' money in Radical reform.

The Occidental, however discerning, is seldom infallible in matters Oriental. How can he be? The Oriental is liable to err in dealing with Western questions. Somehow the Occidental manages to obtain only a partial view of the mechanism of the Oriental mind. The explanation is simple. No Western man, however experienced in Oriental matters, knows all the circumstances which regulate the action of the Oriental mind. The result therefore is a rather inaccurate generalization and unsatisfactory inference. No impartial Oriental can go through the pages of Modern Egypt without being struck with Lord Cromer's wonderful insight into Oriental characteristics. But it cannot altogether be denied that even so shrewd an observer, after thirty-five years' (1873-1907) Eastern experience, has not always an exhaustive explanation to offer in matters which puzzle an ordinary Englishman. Lord Cromer gives an instance of an Englishman asking an Egyptian to point to his left ear. The Egyptian touched his left ear with his right hand. The Englishman, the informant of Lord Cromer, used that fact as an argument against the intelligence of the Egyptian. Apparently it did not strike the Englishman that there could be another and more reasonable explanation for touching the left ear with the right hand in preference to the left hand, which was nearer. Is it not true that both the Mahomedan and the Hindu associate the right hand with everything honorable and dignified? Neither the followers of the Prophet nor those of Brahma may eat with the left hand. No Hindu or Mahomedan may offer a book or a pencil to his superior in position or senior in age with his left hand. Such being his custom, it is only natural that the Oriental should use, in preference, his right hand when doing anything for the white man to whom he, for the time being, wants to show his regard. I am more inclined to think that it was the sentiment of respect and not want of intelligence that prompted the Egyptian's distant right hand to move towards the left ear. To bring the generalization within the domain of mathematical accuracy, the Englishman should have asked the Egyptian to touch his right ear. If he had touched it with the left hand, then certainly it was a question of want of intelligence, but if he touched the right ear also with the right hand, then it was perhaps conclusive proof that the Egyptian used his right hand to touch his left ear simply to show his respect for the Englishman. It is no doubt very difficult for an Englishman to understand the regard which both the Hindu and the Mahomedan associate with the right hand. It is a convention sanctioned by their respective religions. After centuries of practice it has grown into a habit which is unconsciously followed. The right hand is held in some esteem by Englishmen also, for, when an Englishman wants to pay a compliment to his colleague or clerk, he calls him his "right-hand man."

Modern Egypt teems with illustrations of the distance and division between Oriental facts and Western ideas. Of all external factors the East is admittedly the greatest in British politics and commerce. These two volumes are therefore most valuable to every educated man who values the entente cordiale between the East and the West, on which the peace of the entire human race depends. Lord Cromer has performed a service of the highest importance to the British government and to the government of India, not only in stating the truth as to the Egyptian history of nearly thirty years, but also in placing on record the results of his experience of Orientals and quasi-Orientals, an experience which few Englishmen of the present generation have had the opportunity of acquiring, and if his book leads responsible British politicians to be more careful in advocating and adopting Radical reforms, and all persons connected with the East, whether in the administration or in trade, to be more thorough in mastering the facts with which they have to deal, it will take rank as one of the most widely beneficial works of the age.—S. M. Mitra, in the Nineteenth Century.



LORD CROMER

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ubious-looking that Mrs. ered every Sunday when (just under the corner nes would come shower- ore the service was over! among the stones, moss- one reads the parish his-

lms, that yew tree's shade, in many a mouldering heap, forever laid, the hamlet sleep."

quote the entire "Elegy of Churchyard" of Gray ting. Among the newer ner is a somewhat more one. It marks the rest- Sir William Jenner, the er Majesty Queen Vic-

joins the churchyard, a little rustic gate, we ng meadows of the es- roughly delightful walk ew more and more beau- brought us to the brook ng along the bank for a abbit, and then ensued a t, sharp barks, and with nt they all tore after the t pursuit. The rabbit, scovered a lucky hole in n, for the dogs joined us minutes later—hot, tired

went upstairs to the the landing and listened ds on the gramophone, chosen for Mr. Begbie erself just after she had ng instrument Gounod's olin obligato by Jan had been one of those a gramophone rooms to belik make this famous (while searching among this particular one) that eat singer after the trial while singing that glori- ous depths of the gram- applied: "I felt as though e at the bottom which ly winked at me out of as with a sensation of e that I listened to the before the first tones of animent heralded the be- Then the first low notes sent a thrill through me ne voice of Melba!

d cricket on the lawn. I at one of Mr. Begbie's y, the famous crickete- esented the author with cked up" many a world-'. I cannot say whether ing associations of the ner, or the swift bowling ok away my nerve, but esulting from my efforts ly to become "world- torum where those great and "The Vigil" were est. Books, pictures, and d; the writer's favorites Honore de Balzac; every the latter's works is to ves which line the walls ble, where the writing is s the end of the room, dows open onto a lawn velvet smoothness; close ge pine tree, whose low- ne path which runs past the entire surroundings ation for the artistic and the poet and author.

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of the plan to throw pro- wer—this time in Eng- stic word of comment. Electrician (Chicago, e scientific journals do Says the paper just

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