

THE MODERN WORLD
A SURVEY OF HISTORICAL FORCES
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EGYPT

GEORGE YOUNG

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

MR. GEORGE YOUNG'S wide first-hand knowledge of Levantine conditions coupled with his authoritative work on Ottoman Law (*Corps de Droit Ottoman*, 7 volumes, published by the Clarendon Press, first edition 1905-1906) entitle him to be heard with respect on the political problems of the Near East. In the present volume Mr. Young brings a fresh and always independent judgment to bear on the growth of Egyptian nationalism, discovering in the history of the recent past ampler grounds for hope than his countrymen are wont to conceive. In his last two chapters Mr. Young quits the past for the future and enters the frankly controversial field of the relations hereafter to be established between Britain, Egypt, and the Sudan. Not every reader will agree with the policies which are recommended, but as the argument is presented with skill and fairness the dissenter is unlikely to complain.

H. F.

May 24, 1927.

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

AN interesting monument to Modern Egypt now confronts the newly arrived traveller in the Station Square of Cairo. Egypt is represented as a Sphinx staring in its stony trance. The Spirit of Egypt, a female figure, stands beside it stretching out a hand to rouse it from its age-long apathy. That is modern Egypt's conception of itself—a conception to which we shall again and again return in answering the questions of the Sphinx.

What Modern Egypt is regionally can be easily defined. It is the lower valley and the delta of the Nile—a belt of irrigable land broadening as it goes northward, bordered by desert on either side, and bounded by the Red Sea on the east and by the Sahara on the west. But what modern Egypt is racially is more difficult to describe. For the various races that have at different times settled in this region have only, during the last few years, begun to fuse into what can be called an Egyptian. And of all the new nations that emerged in Eastern Europe and Western Asia out of the world wars that precluded the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Egyptian is the most elusive and enigmatical.

A century ago, after the Napoleonic wars, Egypt burst into the field of European politics, like a flaming comet, to the utter disorganisation of the political system of the day, much as did Turkey after the Great War. Egypt then represented a force that baffled Western rulers and broke up European alliances, much as did Turkey a few years ago. Even so did the Egypt question cause a

rupture in an Anglo-French *entente* and the fall of M. Thiers, just as Turkey caused a rupture in a later Anglo-French *entente* and the fall of Mr. Lloyd George. But the uprisal of Turkey was clearly a retarded national renaissance. To what force are we to attribute the upheaval caused a century ago by the Egyptian expansion? For there was no Egyptian national consciousness inspiring the campaigns of Mehemet Ali. The establishment of Egypt as an independent State by an alien adventurer compels us to believe that there is a force of nationality that can do its work before there is any national consciousness.

A first difficulty, therefore, in writing an account of Modern Egypt is knowing where to start. Nearly all national movements—for example, those of Turkey, Greece, Ireland, and other modern nations—begin with a renaissance of the national language, legends, and literature. This, in time, leads to a political rebellion against the alien authority or *ancien régime*. But Modern Egypt has no language, no literature, no legends of its own. The art of Ancient Egypt may possibly survive vestigially in Modern Egypt. Certainly designs and decorations may be seen in the Muski that look like degenerate descendants of those in the Museum. For example, the designs of the arabesques in lattice-work balconies can be seen on Pharaonic works of art, and one of these balconies is represented on a tomb of Amenophis IV. of the sixteenth century B.C. But a similar connection has never been traced in the literature. Maspero once heard a tale being told in a village that he recognised as a Pharaonic theme. Investigating its origin with creditable caution, he traced it back to a small girl who had got it out of one of his own translations in a school primer.

Owing probably to foreign conquests, there was nothing in Egypt corresponding to the Keltic bardic schools, or to the Romance ballad singers, that was capable of carrying on a literary tradition through an illiterate age. The Egyptian stock of folk stories is certainly a very rich one; for the main amusement in Egypt, as all over the East, has always been listening to professional story-tellers. But these stories seem to be all importations. They have been analysed by Yakub Artin Pasha (*Contes populaires inédites du Nil*) into four groups: The Turco-Persian, which are picturesque and poetic, peopled with djinns, fairies, fair ladies, and handsome princes. The Græco-European, which have a Byzantine setting, or are animal fables. The Arabo-Berber, mostly with a religious motif and with the familiar scenery of Bagdad. Finally, negro tales of black magic and "ghouls." Of later literary sources the *Thousand and One Nights* and similar collections are much in evidence.

But Yakub Artin also claims that one class of tale is typically Egyptian, a class which he distinguishes as such by three characteristics; that they are picaresque, feminist, and pantheist. In this class he includes borrowed themes that have been worked over to suit the local taste. And this class of tale is certainly interesting to students of the Egyptian national character as suggesting that it is even more curiously feminine than that of other peoples long ruled by an alien authority. Moreover, the details of these Egyptian stories give us some interesting sidelights on the national mind; while in their general point of view we find very useful clues to the reactions of Egypt in respect of her successive alien masters, whether Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Mamelukes, Turks, Arnauts, or British.

As an example of an illuminating detail, we may note that in these Egyptian stories the "Black Man" or bogieman—the "Arap" of Oriental fiction—becomes a man in a black coat, black hat, and black boots. For the negro was a familiar and a friendly figure in Egypt, and so the "Black Man" was converted into the unfamiliar and formidable foreigner. While as an example of point of view, we may observe that the Turk generally appears in one of two rôles, respectively characteristic of the contempt of an Egyptian Cleopatra for the stupidity of her lord and master, and of her respect for his strength. Innumerable are the stories in which the Turk is deceived by the cleverness of an unscrupulous Egyptian mistress, but these are mostly too long and too broad for reproduction. Here is one in which the feminine part is played by a man.

A Copt who was clerk to a Turkish Pasha accounted for money he had stolen by charging it—to shoeing camels and shearing horses. "What is this?" said the Pasha. "Who shoes camels and shears horses?" "Oh, Pasha," said the Copt, "thou knowest all, and nothing escapes thee. Shall I, then, write it as to shoeing horses and shearing camels?" "But no camels have been shorn nor horses shod," objected the Pasha. "Oh, Pasha, thou art always in the right," said the Copt, "and that is why thy servant so wrote it in the account." Which satisfied the Pasha, who settled the account.

Now for another tale expressive of a feminine admiration for men of action.

Allah, looking one day on the Garden of Eden, saw that Adam and Eve had sinned. So he summoned an angel, and said to him: "Go thou and show clearly to these twain how they have sinned, and why, therefore, they must go out from My garden." So the angel went

and found Adam and Eve sleeping, and he showed them fully how they had sinned and why they must go. "Allah is just," said Adam. "We will go," said Eve, "as soon as the day dawns." After many days Allah looked again and saw Adam and Eve still in the garden. So he summoned the Archangel Gabriel, and said to him: "Go thou, gird on thy sword, and show them all the power of Allah that they may go." So Gabriel went and found them eating, and he showed them all the power of Allah to make them go. "Allah is great," said Adam. "We go," said Eve, "as soon as the meal is over." Long after Allah looked again, and they were there still. So he sent for Shaitan, and said to him: "Adam and Eve are delivered into thy hand. Thou hast power to take them out of My garden wherever and whenever thou wilt." So Shaitan went and found them walking. And he showed them how he had command from Allah to take them from Eden into Jehannum. "Allah has spoken," said Adam. "Oh, Shaitan, fly on and we follow," said Eve. And Allah looked again, and they were still there. So he sent a Turkish Chaoush, who found them bathing, and said: "*Git.*" And they went just as they were.

This story-telling still goes on, though the settings of the stories are modernised and Western themes introduced. And it is to this village habit of gathering to listen to anyone who will hold forth that may be attributed the sudden growth of the power of the Press. Unhappily the gathering now, as often as not, listens to the reading aloud of a leading article in which the British Lion takes the place of the "ghoul" and Sa'ad the Blessed that of the hero. But the identification of Egypt, with its favourite heroine—the designing minx—holds good. And in the story of Modern Egypt, as told in the follow-

ing pages, much that is puzzling will become plain if we read it as the story of a captive Cleopatra and of a conquering Antony or Cæsar.

The first difficulty in telling this story is to know where to begin. For a conscious Egypt appears for the first time in the movement or mutiny under Arabi in 1882. But the national character even of this movement is violently contested by nearly all contemporary authorities. Probably there would be no general agreement as to the existence of an Egyptian nation before the Great War. Yet it is obvious that there had been an independent Egyptian State for over a century before that. How was it that Egypt, which was the first of the Eastern border-lands to emerge from the Islamic State, was apparently the last to acquire a national consciousness? That the Turks have only just arrived at national independence is explained by their having been involved as a ruling race in maintaining the imperial and international institutions of the Ottoman Empire. That the Arabs have not yet achieved a national State is explained by their devotion to tribal and traditional systems, and by their being still divided between the European eclecticism of Irak and the Eastern exclusiveness of Nejd. The Berbers of North Africa are divided between French, Spanish, and Italian States. The peoples of Syria are racially, regionally, and religiously divided among themselves. But the Egyptians were united a century ago in a prosperous and powerful State that defeated and nearly destroyed both the reformed Ottoman Empire, the resurgent Greek nation, and the Arab renaissance of the Wahabis. How is it that Egypt could not only develop its own independence, but delay the national development of its neighbours for two generations before there were any Egyptians?

The explanation that will be advanced in the following pages is that a mass-mind and mass-movements did exist in Egypt from its first emergence as a State over a century ago ; that this mind and these movements were always obscurely operating thereafter, and did eventually create the modern nation as we now see it ; but that, owing to peculiarities in the people of Egypt and in its position, these operations were subconscious ; and that the development of a national consciousness was the last, instead of, as usual, the first phase of national development. Thus, during all the earlier part of its passage into our political system, we can only calculate the position of this new comet by noting how it affects the courses of those known spheres into whose orbit it enters.

The story of Modern Egypt must therefore begin from the Napoleonic wars, and not from the Great War. And it will have to indicate the nature of the new nation indirectly through its effects on the personalities and Powers with which it comes in contact. It must show how, from Napoleon and Mehemet Ali down to Cromer and Allenby, the power of foreign rulers in Egypt has been partly personal and partly popular. And how they succeeded only in so far as they conformed to an Egyptian public opinion that was often entirely overlooked and never enough understood. Wherefore the modern method of writing history, which is to ignore personalities and policies, to illustrate developments from the lives of the common people, and to explain it by economic factors and moral forces is inapplicable to Egypt. For except that cotton has replaced corn, the economics of Egypt are very much as they were in the days of Pharaoh and his foreign financial adviser Joseph. Its implements and industries are nearly all the same—the plough, the hoe, the shadouf. Until a very few years

ago the Egyptian peasantry—nine-tenths of the people—lived much the same lives as they did under the Pharaohs. Yet the status of the people and the story of the nation was, all through the last century, changing rapidly in all manner of vicissitudes. The story of Modern Egypt must therefore be told in the old manner, mainly through the careers of its rulers and the political events of the day. In a word, it is in talking about Kings, and not about cabbages, that an author must tell the real story of Modern Egypt.

But the picturesque characters and careers of these "kings" of Egypt must not be allowed to obscure those cross-currents of Egyptian nationalism and of European Imperialism on which they were floated to fortune or drifted to destruction. So when we read how Mehemet Ali made Egypt, we must also be reminded how Egypt made Mehemet Ali. When we review with pride how Cromer rehabilitated Egypt, we must also realise that this was very largely the natural convalescence of a laborious people from an imported disorder. When we realise how Kitchener could control Egypt because he had conquered the Sudan, we must remember that this was because Egypt knew that the reconquest had been done by Egyptians. When we rejoice with even more pride that Allenby prevented a war of independence against our protectorate, such as those which have disgraced other European Powers in Morocco, Tripoli, and Syria, we must recollect that the Egyptian is not like a Riffi, a Senussi, or a Druse; and that, nevertheless, we, too, have had our troubles. In short, we must bear in mind that in this story of Georgian, Arnaut and British rule in Egypt, it is Egypt that is really counting all the time. It will, indeed, be rather like writing the life of a public man with a clever wife. While she helps him he

flourishes, and as soon as she doesn't he falls, but it is not easy to show how this happened. Moreover, the people of Egypt have been, on the whole, so inarticulate and inactive, and their rulers so highly coloured and clear-cut that it will be hard to keep these supermen in their proper place as sub-titles. It is not easy to exhibit a Mehemet Ali or a Kitchener as only the manifestation of a mood in those masses of blue-clad, brown-skinned *fellaheen*.

Then we come to the second difficulty in telling the story of Modern Egypt—that is, the very tortuous track along which the new nation has reached its goal. New nations generally have to fight their way to independence. It has often been a long fight with heavy loss. But the line followed has been fairly straight and progress, though fluctuating, fairly steady. But in the case of Egypt, the first fight for national independence was fought by Napoleon when he broke up the Mamelukes and broke Egypt off from the Islamic State in order to get a base for a new European Empire of the East. The next fight was when Mehemet Ali drove out both French and English so as to get a base for a new Asiatic Empire of the East. Neither of these was a direct or even an easily discernible advance towards an Egyptian nation. The third fight was the military rebellion of Arabi that, whatever its intentions, ended by making Egypt a part of the British Empire. The fourth fight was that of the Great War that established a formal British Protectorate, and thereby, even more paradoxically, brought about the birth of an Egyptian nation. There is in all this, with the exception of the lamentable catastrophe of Tel-el-Kebir, not one straight fight for independence. And the final rebellion by which the goal was won was a mere *mêlée* of mobs and murders. There is no material in this from which an author can create a national epic.

Yet Egypt, if it gives no theme for an epic, certainly gives a thesis for a study of a very curious national development. For the national spirit of Egypt has revealed itself in a strange succession of avatars. Still more strangely these embodiments have for a century become ever younger and less mature. Thus its first exponent, when Egyptian nationalism itself was still an embryo, was Mehemet Ali, an old warrior who combined the ideas of Peter the Great with those of Pharaoh. Not even with the help of Jeremy Bentham could Mehemet Ali make a national renaissance that would survive himself. Next came middle-aged reformers like Sherif and Arabi, who tried to combine the ideas of Contism with the Koran, and also failed. Thereafter followed the young men, Abbas Hilmi and Mustapha Kamil, who tried to combine the methods of Abdul Hamid with those of O'Connell, and also broke apart and broke down. Finally, came schoolboys and students who had no idea other than that of pushing out the British and of putting in their schoolmaster Zaglul, in which simple task they succeeded.

In all these phases we English had a leading part. Palmerston and Napier put a stop to the ambitions of Mehemet Ali. Gladstone and Wolseley put a stop to the constitution of Sherif and to the conscription of Arabi. Cromer and Kitchener put a stop to the conspiracies of Abbas Hilmi and of Mustapha Kamil. Wherefore Egyptian nationalism bears us a formidable grudge. It should be grateful. We only postponed the birth of an Egyptian nation until the proper time. Until not Turks and Arnauts, not a *Turcophil effendina* or a *Gallophil effendiat*, but the first true-bred young Egyptians could establish for themselves the new nation.

Thereafter we come to the last and worst difficulty in

writing an account of Modern Egypt. The subject has hitherto almost always been approached from the angle of the British occupation. Some of the most interesting and important works, such as those of Milner, Cromer, Colvin, and other proconsuls or their partisans, have been written not only from that angle, but on the assumption that Modern Egypt has been made by the British. Again other works are an inverted form of these Anglo-Saxon attitudes, and argue that the British ruling class have spoiled the Egyptians as ruthlessly as did the Mamelukes. Such is the attitude adopted by a few English authors like Mr. Wilfred Blunt, by a majority of French and foreign writers, and by most native authors. In either case, much more attention is paid to the English, to what they have or have not done, to their difficulties, and to their disinterested or diplomatic motives, than to the Egyptian nation itself.

Now, although we are naturally most attracted by this aspect of Egyptian affairs, yet it is none the less superficial. The general course of developments in Egypt would not have been so very different in its broad lines if the British Empire had never existed. In an earlier phase it made little difference whether rule over Egypt was, for the moment, in the hands of a Circassian like Ibrahim or of an Albanian like Mehemet Ali. And in a later phase it would have made no very great difference to the course of history in Egypt if, instead of a Cromer and a Kitchener, there had been a de Blignières or a Lyautey. If this be doubted we have only to compare the course of events in Egypt with that in other North African countries. For Egypt is only a sector of the long front between the European and Eastern political systems; and the rise of the Egyptian nation takes its proper place geographically and historically in the long

political process by which the European system of racial and regional national States has, race by race and region by region, encroached on the Eastern system of the religious Super-State.

It is indeed curious to note how closely the course of events coincides in each of these contiguous countries from the end of the eighteenth century, when the expanding European system first began to invade the declining Islamic State. Take, for example, the close parallel between the early history of the Egyptian and of the Turkish nations. We see Mehemet Ali, an Albanian Turk, breaking up the Asiatic *ancien régime* of the Mamelukes and Janissaries at the same time that Mahmoud II., another Europeanised Turk, was breaking up that of the Phanariotes and Janissaries. Both these despots forced Western fashions and Western forms on their reluctant subjects. Both started European financial, military, and educational systems that were not sustained by their successors. Both were followed by a short reaction, which was itself followed by a "golden age," in which their successors squandered the millions of credit acquired by Europeanisation. In both countries spendthrift autocrats—Abdul Medjid and Abdul Aziz in Turkey, Said and Ismail in Egypt—first pawned the independence of their State to European moneylenders, and then vainly endeavoured to restore their authority and their credit by conceding constitutional liberties. In both cases a measure of foreign occupation was the result; but in Turkey this was restricted to a financial control by the cleverness of Abdul Hamid and by the competition between the Powers. Whereas in Egypt the British Empire eventually bought out its rivals.

- This parallel might be a coincidence if it were not that we find the same course of events in other regions where

industrialised Europe and islamised Asia came into contact. Thus in Tunis it is the extravagance of the Beys Ahmed (1837-1855) and Saddok (1859-1882) that ended in a European protectorate. In between came Mahomed, who granted a constitution which, however, did not save the State from foreign financial control (1869). In 1878, at the Congress of Berlin, Great Britain, for diplomatic reasons, retired from competition with France in Tunis; and a French protectorate was declared over Tunis (1881) at about the same time that the British established a *de facto* protectorate in Egypt (1882).

Morocco travelled the same road, but a little later. The Sultan Muley Hassan (1873-1894) profited by his predecessor's experiences, and was well aware of the danger. He so established the authority of the Maghzen and so excluded European penetration, that Morocco remained an outpost of Asia half a century after Turkey and Egypt had been Europeanised. But the inevitable end only came all the more swiftly when his successor, Abdul Aziz, began borrowing. Thereafter the process of establishing Spanish and French protectorates went rapidly forward, and has recently been completed by the surrender of the Riff after a siege of five years by the armies of two European Powers. So that after studying the stories of these various neighbours of Egypt we cannot but conclude that our own part in it has been one that, had we not been there, would have been played by someone else in much the same way with much the same results. But not in quite such a gentlemanly way, nor with quite such good results. Tel-el-Kebir was a murderous business, but it was a fair fight, and nothing like the massacres that went with the establishment of foreign rule in Tripoli and Algeria. The bombardment of

Alexandria was a small matter compared with that of Damascus, and our coercion of Egyptian nationalists a very insignificant affair beside the campaigns against Riff and Druses. While our recognitions of Egyptian rights of late years have been generous gestures.

This book will, indeed, have served its purpose if it convince any Egyptian who happens to read it that he owes a double debt to the English, not only for many years' economic and efficient administration during the nation's minority, but also for sparing Egypt the many years of fighting for independence that it would have had to face had it been included in the military empires with which Mediterranean Powers have expanded over North Africa and Syria. It will have served a no less useful purpose if it convinces any Englishman who reads it that he owes a debt to Egypt not only for services to the Empire and to Europe in constructing the Suez Canal, suppressing the Slave Trade, and supporting us in the Great War, but also because of England's mistakes in unnecessarily crushing the nationalist movement in its infancy, and in unjustifiably neglecting its education during a long and profitable trusteeship. But happily the relations between Egypt and the Empire are now on a sound basis. Resolution of the difficulties that still remain only requires that there should be Governments on either side capable of expressing the mutual generosity and good will of two peaceable peoples, and that on our side more especially we should have Empire builders who can—

“ Build within the mind of man
The Empire that abides.”

APPENDIX I

BRITISH OFFICIALS IN EGYPTIAN CIVIL SERVICE

SINCE completion of the preceding chapters, a satisfactory settlement has been reached between the British and Egyptian Governments in the controversy that had arisen as to the conditions under which British officials should be employed in certain services that were considered by the British Government as being concerned with safeguarding imperial communications and foreign interests, and as therefore coming by implication under the reserved points.

On the abolition of the Protectorate by the Declaration of February 28, 1922, direct British administration was terminated. The Financial Adviser then ceased to control in, or even to come to, the Council of Ministers, and the controlling posts were filled by Egyptians. The consequent change in status of British officials was provided for in an agreement made in 1923 with the Cabinet of Yehia Pasha, allowing such officials to retire with compensation up to April 1, 1927, after which the Egyptian Government should be free to retain or retire them as it pleased.

As this date drew near, the British Government opened negotiations as to how far such retentions were required under the reserved points, and an agreement between Sir A. Chamberlain and Sarwat Pasha is now reported (May, 1927) as follows :

In the Ministry of the Interior the European Depart-

ment, which is responsible for the security of foreigners, is to be under a British official with a British staff. The commandants and their assistants in Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, and Suez are to be British, with adequate British assistance to control the police. In the Public Prosecutor's Office there is to be a British inspector and an expert with assistants.

The British Financial and Judicial Advisers are to have adequate British assistance in their responsibility for safeguarding foreign interests.

In the Railways, Telegraphs, and Telephones all the control and essential technical posts are to be held by British. The head of the Port and Light Service is to be British, with adequate British assistance.

These officials are retained at their previous salaries for a term of three years.

G. Y.

June 8, 1927.

APPENDIX II

BRITISH OFFICERS IN THE EGYPTIAN ARMY

SINCE the previous pages were written a somewhat acute controversy broke out over the measure of control to be retained in the Egyptian Army by British officers in right of the "reserved points."

The issue was raised by the recommendation of the war committee of the Egyptian Parliament that the salary of the Sirdar be suppressed. Since the assassination of Sir Lee Stack no Sirdar had been appointed, and the Inspector-General, Spinks Pasha, had been acting-Sirdar. But he had never been accepted in this capacity by the Egyptian Government, and his authority had been almost nullified. It was now proposed to transfer the Sirdar's functions to the Minister of War. Other recommendations included increasing the infantry effectives and the strength of the artillery and machine guns.

This was apparently accepted by the British Government as a challenge by the Wafd of British authority, for a note was delivered, and supported by the despatch of three warships to Alexandria and Port Said because, as Sir Austen Chamberlain explained to the House (June 1, 1927), "reports indicated that efforts were being made to foment excitement."

It was apparently feared by the British Government that a systematic effort was being made by the Wafd to get control of the army for political purposes and to nullify the guarantees in the reserved points. While the Egyptian Nationalists, for their part, feared that the

British Government would use its control of the army to prevent opposition to interventions in the internal affairs of Egypt, and argued that the reserved points make no mention of the army and are not in question at all.

Thanks largely to the mediation of Zaglul Pasha as between the British demands and the defiance of the Wafd majority in Parliament, an agreement has been reached. Documents have not yet been published, but the basis of compromise seems to be that the Egyptian Government accept the maintenance of the *status quo* pending a general settlement with reservations as to ministerial authority and responsibility towards Parliament. The British Inspector-General is to fulfil his existing functions and to have adequate rank, pay, and assistance. The Egyptian Government also agrees that political influences are to be excluded from questions of promotion, discipline, etc., and welcomes co-operation for this purpose.

The significance of the controversy lies in the fact that it concerned the national army, that recourse was at once had to a naval demonstration, and that peace was patched up because neither party wanted war. Which suggests that the present diplomatic relationship between the English and the Egyptians is endangered by ill-defined "servitudes" on Egyptian authority, whose only "sanctions" are our military occupation and our Mediterranean fleet.

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