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BONAPARTE IN EGYPT
AND THE EGYPTIANS OF
TO-DAY

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the Egyptians of To-day

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*Bonaparte in Egypt and the Egyptians of To-day:**

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Haji A. Browne

Bonaparte in Egypt and the Egyptians of To-day

*"In proportion as we love truth more and victory less,
we shall become anxious to know what it is which leads
our opponents to think as they do."*

Herbert Spencer.

Preface

Eight years have passed since I first conceived the idea of writing this book, but it was not until about two years ago that I was able to find time to put together a first rough outline of the form I wished it to take. In the interval I have been obliged from time to time to lay it aside altogether; and, at the most favourable times, have never had more than a few hours a week to devote to it. I had just completed what I had intended to be the last chapter, when events occurred that obliged me to rewrite it, and, that I might do so fitly, await the issue of those events. As the book now stands it is at best but a mere outline. A larger volume than this might easily be written upon each of several of the subjects I have but glanced at, yet I hope I have succeeded in giving a connected and intelligible sketch and one sufficient for the attainment of the chief object I have had in view, that of presenting the Egyptian as he really is to the many who, whether living in Egypt or out of it, have but few and imperfect opportunities of learning to understand him. For over thirty years I have given of all I have had to give, for the promotion of two objects: first, that Pan-Islamism, which I conceive to be the true interest of the Islamic world; and, secondly, the development of friendly relations between the Moslems of the East and the British Empire. How much, or how little, I have been able to accomplish towards the fulfilment of my aims it is impossible

for me to estimate, but from boyhood I have had an earnest faith in the belief that right and truth must in the end prevail, and that he who works for these, or for what he honestly believes these to be, never works in vain.

Knowing the Egyptian as I know him, I cannot but think that he is greatly misunderstood, even by those who are sincerely anxious to befriend him. His faults and his failings are to be found at large in almost any of the scores of books that have of late years been written about him and his country; but, though not a few have given him credit for some of his more salient good points, yet none that I have seen have shown any just appreciation of him as he really is.

Cairo, *May, 1907.*

CHAPTER I

THE STORY OF ONE HUNDRED YEARS

It was the 23rd of June, 1898. The day in Cairo had been unusually hot and oppressive, but as the sun went down, a cool wind from the north came blowing softly over the city.

I was then living in a little corner of the old town still wholly untouched by the ruthless hand of the "reform" that, in every other part, was busy marring with modern "improvements" the old-time charm of the "City of the Caliphs."

As midnight approached, I went up on the roof to enjoy the cool freshness and quiet of the night, and the stillness was almost unbroken. Now and then in the narrow lanes below, the watchmen, who in their drab-coloured coats and with long staffs and lanterns in their hands, made one think of Old London and the days of Dogberry, called to one another or challenged some belated passer-by, and at times a murmuring echo told of the restless traffic and turbulent life yet stirring in the carriage-crowded streets of the European quarters of the town, but otherwise the silence was undisturbed.

As I stood there, leaning on the parapet of the roof, my thoughts wandered back to the night, just one hundred years before, the 23rd of June, 1798, when possibly some wakeful

citizen had stood, perhaps on the very spot on which I was then standing, and gazed upon the very scene, the same limited range of housetops and sidewalls, that was around me. That distant night is one of which the historians of the country make no mention, and yet it is one most worthy of note, as having been at once one of the most peaceful and one of the most memorable Cairo has ever known. Peaceful, for, when not lured from his slumbers by one of the night-quickening festivals he so dearly loves, the Cairene is an early and a sound sleeper, and being then, as now, blessed with an easy-going conscience and unbounded faith in the beneficence of Destiny, we may be certain that on that night he slept the sleep of the just man who is weary. Nor was that night less memorable than peaceful, for little as he could foresee it, it was the last for over a century of time on which the Cairene was to sleep so free from care or thought of the morrow. For, while the city slumbered, away in the villages on the banks of the Nile, sleepers were being unwontedly awakened and dismayed by the sounds of horsemen hurrying through the night with the rushing haste of men who are bearers of tidings of life and death.

Onward, onward they came, these messengers of the night, weary with their long forced ride from Alexandria, the city of the sea, which they had left the day before. Onward, onward as rapidly as they could press forward the steeds that, as one after another failed, were replaced by others seized from the nearest stables "for the service of the State." Onward and onward on their trying ride, spreading as they went the news they bore, news that

murdered the sleep of those who heard it, and flung a pall of panic fear over the land.

They were still on the road when the Cairenes rising, as all good Mahomedans should, with the first dawn of day, proceeded to the duties of the morning with the leisurely diligence that is one of their characteristics. But long before mid-day the messengers had discharged their task, and the fateful news they had brought was being discussed throughout the town. It was news that, to the Cairene, was fraught with most direful possibilities, for it was news that a fleet of English ships of war had arrived at Alexandria, and that the Governor of the town, feeling utterly incapable with the scanty resources at his disposal, of offering any effective resistance to a hostile landing, had sent to beg for immediate assistance in men and munitions of war. Many and fervent were the prayers said in the mosques that day, and loud and deep were the anathemas launched against the foreigner who was at their gates. It is not surprising that it should be so, for, of all evils he could imagine, a foreign invasion was, to the Cairene, as to the people of Egypt generally, the one most suggestive of personal loss and misery.

Exactly one hundred years had passed since that day, and the dying hours of that century of time left the Egyptian, as its opening hours had found him, distrustful of the English, rejecting their friendship, and cursing them as foes. That it should have been thus, is one of the problems that perplex those who attempt to know or understand the Egyptian, and as I thought of these

things, it seemed to me that living as I then was amongst the most conservative class of the people, the class that still prides itself on living the life its fathers and grandfathers led, and holds all things foreign to be abominations, and yet meeting from day to day with the modern half-Europeanised citizens, and being myself almost an Oriental in thought and sympathy, I could read the story of that one hundred years and comprehend the feelings of the people through all its incidents, better perhaps than any other European, and that by sketching the history of that century as it appears to me, I might help others to understand the people and their history better, and thus aid in promoting the mutual goodwill that is as essential to the interests of the Egyptian himself, as to those of the great army of foreigners who are dwellers in his hospitable land.

As told by the writers of to-day, the history of Egypt extends over nearly seven thousand years – three score and ten centuries – just one for every year allotted by the Psalmist to man as the period of his life. But of all that great stretch of time the hundred and odd years lying between the fateful 23rd of June in 1798 and the present day, although unfortunately the materials available for a study of it are scant and for the most part unreliable, has more of human interest as a chapter in the history of mankind, than all the long ages that preceded it.

Yet if the reader would rightly comprehend the lesson of this period, he must grasp the fact that in a very full and ample sense all history is a part of one – nay, is but one and the same story

writ in different characters. How utterly unlike in all externals are the Gospels written in the Latin, Greek, Arabic, Nagri, or Chinese characters and languages, but the essence and the spirit of all these versions are the same. So it is with the histories of men and nations. The stories of England, France, Spain, India, Egypt, how different! and yet in all that is the final essential of true history – the story of man's combat with his surroundings – the same. It is so because in the last analysis all men are the same, like the ocean, "His Sea in no showing the same – his Sea and the same 'neath all showing."

Scattered in the deserts of Persia, the traveller comes upon isolated villages wherein men and women are born, grow up, marry, beget families, and die, and never once pass beyond the mirage-haunted horizon of their little oasis. With world-encircling ideas and ambitions, the traveller thinks of the mad maelstrom of life in the crowded cities of the West, and wonders that men can be so different and still be men, and yet more so, that between himself and these Persians of the desert, drifting through life in a daily round that never changes, never varies, there should be anything in common. And the wonder is, not that they have the same shape and form as he, that they can cry with Shylock, "If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you poison us, do we not die?" All that is as nothing, since it lifts the man no higher than the brutes of the field, but in all else, in all that is the essential differentia of man, even in these, these children of the waste are such as we, moved by the same passions, stirred by the

same affections, urged by the same desires, however variously all these may find expression.

Further yet afield. The miserable Mahars and Mangs of the Indian Deccan, who, living or dead, are held by all the peoples around them as not less vile than the carrion they do not scorn to eat. Even there among these if you will, you may trace, as the venerable missionary Wilson did, deep buried under the man-debasing foulness of their lives, the humanity of the man as the dominating, all-controlling element, severing them by an immeasurable and impassable distance from the noblest of the animals, and linking them by an inseverable bond to the noblest of their fellow-men. All that may characterise the individual outside of this is but the accident of his life and being; the essential element, guiding and swaying him in all things, is this fundamental, ineradicable humanity.

It is the fashion nowadays to speak of the "Brotherhood of man," but how few realise how absolutely, how completely the phrase expresses the simple truth! a truth that nullifies all the arrogantly-arrayed arguments and fancy-founded fallacies of Haeckel and the whole field of Monists and Materialists. If, then, we would understand the Egyptian or any other people, we must start by recognising that, however wide and apparently unbridgable may be the gulf that divides us from them, whether physical, mental, or moral, it has been caused by the rushing flow of the multitudinous circumstances that have moulded the life and character of each, and, as Mill and Buckle have said, not to

any originating difference in our natures.

As a boy at school to me history was the dullest of dull tasks, but when I came to mix with the peoples of foreign lands, and, fascinated by the charm of the living kaleidoscope of Indian life, sought some clue to the myriad-minded moods and manners of its peoples, I longed for a history that should tell me how and why these peoples were so different from, and yet so like, my own. But histories, as they are written, are rarely more than chafing-dish hashes of the "funeral baked meats" of court chronicles served up with a posset of platitudes and pedantry for sauce. From such histories we may gather a great array of useless, and, for the most part, perfectly uncertain and unreliable "facts," but of the true story of a people scarce anything more than a few doubtful indications. For true history is no bald chronicle of events but the history of man's, too often blind but always intuitive, struggle towards happiness. Back in those memory forsaken ages, of which even myth and legend now tell us nothing, men strove in the same ceaseless, never-ending struggle. What if the immediate aim of that struggle varied then and now with time and place? What if the dweller in the ice-cold lands of the North should be ever seeking the warmth from which the sunburnt inhabitant of the torrid zone would fain escape? To neither is the heat or the cold a thing to be desired or shunned save only as either serves to swell the total of his enjoyment of life. But just as the nature of the climate in which they dwell modifies their conception of enjoyment, so

also a host of other circumstances, some minute and scarcely traceable in their influence, others broad and plainly visible, mould the ideas and ideals of men and nations. Thus, and thus only, is it that the Egyptian and the Englishman are so far apart in all that constitutes the individual or national characteristics of each. Thus it is that the restless activity and energy of the one is abhorrent to the other, and that the Englishman to-day finds the Egyptians, as Herodotus found them so long ago, men "distinguished from the rest of mankind by the singularity of their institutions and their manners." I would, therefore, have my readers avoid the error of judging the Egyptians merely from comparison with their own standards and without due regard to the study of the causes that have made them what they are. If the Egyptian be found lacking in qualities upon the possession of which we justly pride ourselves, he is not for that reason alone to be condemned or despised. He has, even as we have, faults and imperfections that may be justly censured. Like Meredith's Captain de Creye, we are all "variegated with faults." These but attest our common humanity, and for the Egyptian it may at least be said, that he has that charity that covereth a multitude of sins, the charity of heart that far outvalues the charity of the purse. Judged with equity he compares favourably in many points with many other men. Less backward than the Spaniard, less bigoted than the Portuguese, less fanatical than any other Oriental, not embittered in spirit as the Irish Celts, "patient in tribulation," "long-suffering," placable, forgiving, hospitable;

honest and withal one who, like Abou ben Edhem, loves his fellow-men, there is much, very much, in the Egyptian that may well serve to gain him the friendship and goodwill of those who seek to know him as he really is. But with all this there is one difference between the Egyptian and all European peoples that, as it seems to me, forms an almost impassible barrier to the growth of close friendship, or even intimate companionship, between the European and the Egyptian. This difference is in their modes of thinking and reasoning, for not until the Ethiopian changes his skin will the Oriental think or reason as a European does.

There are hundreds of volumes wherein the Egyptian is portrayed as he has been seen or known by the authors, but like all other Easterns, the Egyptian is, and perhaps always will be, something of a mystery to the European. The thoughts and reasonings of the two peoples are so constantly and so utterly at variance on points and matters that seem to each to admit of little or no controversy, that any attempt to reconcile them must be abandoned as impossible. It is a natural result of this incompatibility that the Egyptian as commonly described by Europeans is a very different being to the Egyptian as he really is. It is so all over the East, through all the widely differing races, nationalities, and religions of the Asiatic continent with, perhaps, the single exception of the Armenians, who in this respect are as distinctly allied to the races of Europe as the Egyptians are to those of Asia. Tourists wander for an hour or two through the

bazaars of Egypt or India and flatter themselves that they have seen and can describe the people: young officials tell you glibly that they can read them as a book: the veteran who has grown grey in their service will tell you that the longer he has known them the less is he able to comprehend them.

Orientalists generally are capable of a high degree of education or training according to our standards: in India we have men who, in debate and authorship in our language, are entitled to rank with some of our own best men; but mentally even these are apart from us, and in this respect, as Kipling says, "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." Nor is it we only who cannot understand them, since they stumble as often and err as widely in their efforts to comprehend us, and even, as I think, more grossly and more hopelessly. None the less, it is, I believe, quite possible for a European to at least partly bridge the gulf and become familiar with Eastern thought and sentiment, but to do so he must pay a heavy price, for it is to be done only by one who will give not merely years of time, but years of self-abnegation, of self-suppression, of self-isolation to the task. Abandoning all that he has been he must seek to become that which he is not, and severing his life from all that has made it his, forego his tastes, stifle his prejudices, ignore his predilections, suppress his emotions, thwart his inclinations, and laughing when he would weep, weep when he would laugh. And with this slaying of his own individuality he must in all things strive to identify himself with those alien to him, ever seeking to

see, hear, think, and act as they do. And he must do this not for a week, a month, or a year, but for many years. Not in one city, town or country, but in several, not merely mixing as best he may with the wealthy and the poor, the illiterate and the learned, but learning to be at home in the abodes of the prosperous and the haunts of the miserable, become equally so with the merchant in the bazaar and the wandering fakir in the desert. And through it all he must ever be other than his home life and training have made him. Ceaselessly on the alert to detect the nature, feelings, and impulses of others and to hide his own. And he must be and do all this day and night, in the loneliness of the desert as in the busy haunts of men. And in doing this he is treading a road over which there is no return. The further he goes, the more perfect is his success, the more impossible it becomes for him to regain his starting-point. Never again can he be that which he has been before. He may quit the East, return to the home of his childhood and mix again with his fellows as one of them, but he can never recover the place he has left and lost, for he who goes down into the East, though his heart never cease to yearn for home and the things of home, is daily, slowly, imperceptibly, yet surely, being estranged, and he goes home to find that he no longer has a home, that neither in the East nor in the West, is there any rest for him. Thenceforth and for ever he is alone in the world and, with his own sympathies enlarged and enriched, can hope for no sympathy, no fellowship, amidst all the teeming millions of the earth. Friends and kindred may crowd around his

board, ties of love and affection may be renewed, but even with the nearest and dearest the fulness of old-time sympathies can never be revived, for though the East is a bourne from which the traveller may return, it is one from the glamour of which he may never free himself, and as in the East his heart for ever looked yearningly to the West, so from the West it will for ever look back with desire to the East. To him the whole world is clothed with the horror with which "the lonely, terrible streets of London" so bruised the heart of the Irish poet. Such is the price that he who would know the East must pay for his knowledge, a price that few have paid, that none would willingly or wittingly pay. "I speak that which I know," for over thirty years have passed away since I first went down into the East, and as "a mere boy," as Lady Burton disdainfully described me, set myself the task I have never abandoned. Consequently, as it is my object in this book to try and show what, as he appears to me, the Egyptian of to-day is and how he has become that which he is, the picture I shall draw of him will necessarily be unlike those drawn by others, but, although I freely admit that it will be my aim throughout to seek to gain for the Egyptian more generous consideration than he is commonly accorded, my sketch will be as faithful to truth as I can make it: should it fail to be interesting, the fault will assuredly be with the writer and not with the subject.

CHAPTER II

LINKS WITH THE PAST

To understand the Egyptian as he is, we must go back to that memorable 23rd of June in 1798, and learn not only what he then was, but how he had become that which he was. Happily, it needs no long historical details, or wearisome discussion of remote or doubtful causes to gain this necessary knowledge. A few words to show how the Egyptian of to-day is linked with his ancestors of far distant ages, and a short sketch of the social and political conditions existing in the country at the close of the eighteenth century will tell the reader all he need know to enable him to comprehend the story of the years that have since elapsed.

Although the people were then well established in the land and possessed a high degree of civilisation, their history, as we now know it, dates only from the reign of Menes, somewhere over five thousand years before the birth of Christ. From that date down to the present time we have a continuous record, the whole course of which may be divided into three clearly distinguished periods. Of these the first was not only by far the longest, but in every way the most brilliant. In it Egypt was an independent country with a social system of an advanced type, the spontaneous product of the genius of the people, and it was the one in which, under native rulers, the land was filled with the marvellous pyramids,

temples, and sculptures that, though now in ruins, still excite the admiration and wonder of the world.

The second period began in 529 B.C. with the conquest of the country by Cambyses. In it after nearly two hundred years of Persian rule, interrupted by a brief restoration of the native power, Egypt was for a little more than three and half centuries in the hands of the Greeks, from whom in the thirtieth year of the Christian Era it passed to the Roman Empire. Six centuries later, in 638, when the flood tide of Islamic conquest first swept westward from Arabia, the country became a prey to the Arabs who, in 1171, were in their turn succeeded by their revolting slaves, under whom as the Mameluk Sultans it remained, until, in 1517, it became a province of the Turkish Empire. In this period, under the sway of foreigners, the country suffered from all the ills we are accustomed to associate with the idea of the dark ages of Europe, and everything that was great or noble in the people or their civilisation perished. It was, indeed, during this time that the world-famous cities of Alexandria and Cairo were built as well as the magnificent mosques that are the pride of all Islam, but these were all the work, not of the people themselves, but of the foreigners by whom they were held in thralldom, and are therefore monuments not of the country's glory but of its shame.

The third and present period began in 1798 when the landing of Bonaparte was the first of the series of events that by the introduction and gradual development of European influence have brought about the now existing social and political condition

of the country. In this period Egypt has ceased to be a province of the Turkish Empire, and having acquired the semi-independent position of a tributary State, has been lifted from an appalling condition of social and commercial destitution produced by the ruinous misgovernment and reckless tyranny of a dominant class, to one of unexampled prosperity and of social and political freedom not exceeded in any country of the world.

The three periods into which I have thus divided Egyptian history are then distinguished by differences so deep and so far-reaching that almost the only links by which they can be bound into one consistent whole are the persistence of the people and the preservation of the monuments that testify to their former greatness.

That the Egyptian of to-day is in truth the lineal descendant of those who inhabited the country six thousand years ago is beyond all doubt. Wherever we go in the Nile valley or in the Delta we meet with men and women whose faces and features are living reproductions of the portraits of the kings and people of the most ancient times as sculptured by the artists of their days. And in their habits, manners, and customs, we find to-day striking traces of those that seem to have prevailed when four thousand years before Christ, Ptah-hotep wrote his book of "Instructions," now believed to be the oldest book in the world. And from their building in those far-off ages down to the present day the pyramids, temples, and tombs have stood surviving witnesses of the early greatness of the country, and,

though but heedless spectators of its vicissitudes, silent guardians of its departed glory, ever linking its present with its past.

Closely united as the living Egyptian thus is with his earliest ancestors, all the men and almost all the events that preceded the French invasion are as nothing to the Egypt of to-day. Not a single ruler, patriot, statesman, demagogue, artist or author, in short, no man or woman that lived before the dawn of the modern period, has been instrumental in the making of Egypt or the Egyptians what they now are. Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Turks; all these have held the people in bondage, but their influence never reached below the surface of the life of the country, and has vanished completely with the men upon whom it depended, and though some of these have left monuments, all but imperishable, of their greatness and glory, these to the Egyptians, heirs of their creators, are but idle relics of a forgotten and unheeded past. And as it has been with the men almost so has it been with events, for there are but two of these that, preceding the French invasion, have exercised an influence of such vitality as to survive the great change in the condition of the country that has since been wrought. These two events, with four that belong to the modern period, are indeed all that the whole history of the country presents to us as still clearly and prominently exerting an important and permanent influence upon both the character of the people and the existing circumstances and condition of their country. Of these six events the two that belong to the second period are, the conquest of the land by the Arabs and its

subsequent seizure by the Turks. The other four are, the French invasion, the rise of Mahomed Ali, the English occupation and the evacuation of Fachoda by the French.

Each and all of these six events have played important parts in moulding the present-day aspect of Egypt and its people, and the more closely do we study the existing conditions, the more strikingly do these six events stand out from all others as the great and dominating landmarks in the history of modern Egypt. Compared with these all the other incidents of that story of seventy centuries – the long procession of dynasties of Pharaohs, Ptolemies, Caliphs, Sultans, Khedives – are all but shadows that have come and gone. It is not so with the landmarks I have named, for not only are these events that have influenced and are still influencing the thoughts and feelings of the people, but the influence they exert is recognised by the people themselves and must be taken into account in any endeavour either to understand the present condition of the country, or to forecast its future. Although, therefore, the third of these landmarks forms, as we have already seen, the starting-point of the story of modern Egypt, to rightly comprehend that story it is necessary we should have a clear conception of the effects wrought by the first two events and of the influence these have had and still have upon the affairs of the country.

Let us remember here that Egypt, like most civilised countries, has in reality two stories, one the history of the nation as a political body; in other words, its history as history is

commonly understood and written, the record of the rise and fall of its rulers, the tale of their triumph and of their failures, and chronicle of their wars, victories, defeats, and all the events that have made or marred their destinies: the other the story of the people themselves, of the growth of their character and institutions, and of the development of their social and moral surroundings. It is with this latter story that we have to deal, and it is, therefore, from the point of view thus assumed that I have estimated the importance of the events of which I have just spoken.

In the history of some countries the two stories, if rightly told, are so interwoven that they become as one, but in the first and second periods of Egyptian history they have scarce anything in common, for so long as the people remained under the rule of the Pharaohs or of the foreigners who succeeded them they were little more than passive victims of the varying fortunes that affected their rulers, and almost the only fluctuations in their state during the long ages stretching from the time of Menes to the French invasion were those occasioned by the varying degrees of the tyranny to which they were subjected. Now and again under some ruler of more humanity or of greater laxity than others their condition may be said to have for the time improved, but such changes were far too slight and their possible duration always far too uncertain for these benefits to be more to the people than as the grateful but passing pleasure a fleeting morning cloud brings to the traveller in a sunburnt desert.

Hence, such as the fellaheen or peasantry were when Cheops was building his pyramid, such they remained in almost all respects down to the arrival of the French. The history of the country has, therefore, in the first two periods little to say of the people. In the modern period the two stories touch each other more closely, for in it the people have begun to have a political existence. They have not, indeed, a representative government, and so they have no direct power, but they have a press, the freedom of which is absolutely unrestricted, and they have a "Legislative Council" as a body of elected representatives, through whom, though they cannot control the action of the Government, they are at least able to make their voices heard and their wishes known. More important still, they have begun to comprehend the right of a people to be governed, not only justly, but with a regard to their interests as well as to those of their rulers – a fundamental principle that in the past would have been deemed an unpardonable heresy.

The first step towards the realisation of this improvement, though one for long wholly unproductive of any political benefit to the people, was the Arab conquest, which by the resulting conversion of almost the whole population to the Mahomedan religion, brought about a change still fruitful in its influence upon their ideals and aspirations. To fully describe the importance of this event it would be necessary to enlarge upon the character and tendency of the Mahomedan religion at a length my limits forbid, and I must here therefore content myself with noting that, great as

was the moral and mental revolution this conversion occasioned, it was by no means commensurate with that which followed the introduction of Islam into other countries. On the everyday life of the people it seems indeed to have had but little effect other than that of altering their moral standard and modifying in some slight degree their habits and mode of living. It was, perhaps, inevitable that this should be so, for of all the peoples of the East the Egyptians were, and are, the least susceptible of imbibing the spirit that marked the early spread of Islam, gave it the energy that carried it to victory, and still gives it such vitality as it continues to possess. Christianity had been for a long time the State religion of the country, but it seems clear that the great majority of the people were never more than mere nominal followers of the Cross, and the arrival of the Arabs was, therefore, quickly succeeded by the voluntary adoption of Islam by all but the small minority to whom Christianity was something more than a name and whose descendants constitute the Coptic Church of to-day. The political condition of the people was little, if at all, affected by the change in their religion; and consequently, under the Caliphs and their successors, the Egyptian continued to be as he had been before – a man with no higher ambition than that of passing through life with the least possible trouble. From year to year his one prayer was for an abundant Nile and a plentiful crop, not that he might thereby enrich himself, but that he might thereby secure a sufficiency for himself and his family and suffer less from the rapacious tyranny

and heartless cruelty of those never-resting oppressors, his rulers and all who, as officials or favourites, were lifted even a little above his own level. It was, and is, of the essence of Islam that it appeals to freemen and favours that love of freedom that is the birthright of every man; but Islam brought no freedom to the Egyptians, save, indeed, the spiritual and moral one their rulers could not rob them of. So such as he had been before, such he remained after the Arab conquest, but with a loftier sense of the dignity of manhood, a nobler conception of life and of its duties, and a stronger faith in a hereafter that should compensate him for all his sufferings and privations in this life. As an individual, therefore, he was somewhat altered, but as a member of the State – if we may apply that term to one who had no political existence save that involved in yielding to his rulers the utmost pennyworth of value they could wrest from him by tyranny and cruelty – he was the same helpless, hopeless, downtrodden being, less valued and less cared for than the beasts in his fields. But the conversion of the Egyptians has filled them with that intense attachment to the faith of Islam that, shared by all Mahomedans, has given rise to the charge of fanaticism so commonly brought against them – a charge that, in the case of the Egyptians, if not wholly unjust, is too often exaggerated, although none the less there is nothing excites the wrathful passions of the people or, in milder moods, sways their actions more than their fidelity to their religion. It is the fact that this is so that renders the Arab conquest the first great landmark in the story of modern Egypt, for it is not too

much to say that this attachment of the Egyptians to their faith is to the present day the most important factor with which all who are concerned in the administration of the country have to deal.

If socially and otherwise the Egyptians profited but little from the establishment of the Caliphate, they gained still less from the domination of the Turks. To the people, indeed, this change was scarcely more than a mere nominal one. It left them practically under the same rulers, for though the system of government was modified, it placed the executive power, if not in the hands of the same men as before, at least in those of men of the same stamp, who ruled them as their predecessors had done, in the same manner, through the same agents, and with the same cruelty and wanton oppression. Yet the Turkish, like the Arab, conquest wrought one important effect, the influence of which time has strengthened so that it is only second to that in the urgency of its bearing upon existing conditions. Under the Arabs the Egyptians had been ruled by foreigners, but by foreigners who were in some degree allied to them. Under the Turks their sovereign was, and is, not only a foreigner, but one of an utterly alien race, wholly separated from them by language, character, habits, by everything, indeed, save the bond of their common religion. None the less a spirit of loyalty to the Turkish Empire has grown and spread among the people, which, though it would be an error to credit it with the intensity popular writers of the country ascribe to it, has unquestionably a powerful influence upon the views and opinions of the great majority of the people.

To Europeans this loyalty, which, it is worthy of mention here, is shared by the Moslems of India, has always appeared somewhat of an enigma. No one, however, who knows the peoples of the two countries can doubt that, apart from the fact of the Sultan being the official head of their religion, their loyalty to him is largely due to the desire of peoples who have lost the place they once held in the comity of nations to associate themselves with such kindred peoples as have in some extent maintained their ancient status. The Indian and the Egyptian Mahomedans alike look back to the time when Islam was the one dominant, unopposable power in their native lands, and, conscious of their own fallen condition, would fain relieve the darkness of their destiny by seeking a place, however humble, within the only radiance they can claim to share. While, therefore, the loyalty of the Egyptians to the Turkish Empire is only a part of their loyalty to their religion, it has this, from the political point of view, important difference – that it is not irrevocable, but more or less dependent upon the Sultan maintaining his political supremacy in the Mahomedan world, for should he lose the position he holds as the most powerful ruler in Islam, not only the Egyptians, but his own immediate subjects, would feel justified in transferring their allegiance to any ruler who might succeed him. But absolutely as the Sultan may depend upon the loyalty of the Egyptians as against any non-Moslem Power, yet, as we shall have occasion to see, not only can he not do so as against a Moslem rival, but he can only ensure their loyalty and obedience as his subjects

by ceding to conditions they hold they have a right to impose upon him. Were, therefore, the hopes of the large section of the Mahomedans which is filled with the desire for the restoration of an Arab Caliphate to be realised it would entirely depend upon circumstances that it is quite impossible to foresee – whether the Egyptians would or would not remain faithful to the Empire. Meanwhile the revival of the Arabic power being a possibility too far removed from probability to take a place in the politics of the day, the loyalty of the Egyptians to the Turkish Empire must be accepted as a controlling feature in the affairs of the country.

Such, then, are the links that bind the Egypt of the present day to the Egypt of the past, but important as has been, and is, the part that the Arab and Turkish conquests have played in shaping the present and will yet have in moulding the future of the people, it was not to these events but to others occurring outside the country that we owe the inauguration of the modern period of Egyptian history.

What these events were and how they affected the making of the Egyptian what he now is we have now to see.

CHAPTER III

THE DAWN OF THE NEW PERIOD

The period which was to be that of the regeneration of Egypt and its people was ushered in by social and political storm and tempest. But the first warning note of its coming, after a brief moment of panic, was unheeded by the people. Nearly three centuries had passed since the country had been invaded by an enemy. That enemy was now the sovereign Power, and under the grasping, selfish rule of its executive the trade and commerce of the country had almost entirely disappeared, and thus isolated from the rest of the world the people had no conception of the growth of the power and civilisation of the European nations. They were, therefore, completely ignorant of the events and political impulses that were, though for the moment indirectly only, shaping the future that lay before them.

There were both Englishmen and Frenchmen in the country at the time, but the rulers of the land, arrogant in their petty might, and the people not less so in their degradation, alike held all foreigners in contempt, and thus profited nothing from their presence. They had, therefore, no means of knowing what the relations between the two great European Powers were, or of anticipating how those relations were liable to affect their country. Yet the fact that brought about the opening of the

modern period in their history and thus decreed the ultimate fate of the country was the mutual hostility that swayed the two Powers. This hostility had no relation to Egypt or its people, and, but for contributing causes, could never have affected these, yet it was the desire of the French Government to strike what it fondly hoped would prove a decisive blow at the growth of English power in the East, that was the chief inspiring cause of its decision to order the invasion of Egypt. The Directory, which was at the time the governing body in France, had indeed more than one reason for taking this step, nor was it under the Directory that the eyes of the French had been turned to the valley of the Nile for the first time. Leibnitz, in 1672, had urged upon Louis XIV. the conquest of the country as an object worthy of his attention, declaring that the possession of it would render France the mistress of the world, and though nothing was done at that time to realise the far-seeing policy he advocated, there can be no doubt that the idea was never abandoned. Talleyrand, indeed, said that on his accession to office, he had found more than one project for its accomplishment lying in the pigeon-holes of the Foreign Office, and he himself entered heartily into the scheme, believing that it would be a most important move towards the fulfilment of his theory that the future of France depended upon the extension of her influence along the shores of the Mediterranean. Volney, the traveller and author of the "Ruins of Empires," having visited Egypt had, in 1786, reported that it was in a practically defenceless condition, and Magallon,

the French Consul at Alexandria, having for years urged the Government to interfere on behalf of its subjects in Egypt, had, in 1796, made a voyage to France with the express purpose of protesting against the indignities and ill-usage from which they were suffering, and fully confirmed the views of Volney and Leibnitz. The Directory were thus at once shown the possibility of acquiring a colony of the utmost value and provided with a reasonable excuse for its annexation. These and other arguments, against which the fact that the French nation was then at peace and on good terms with the Sultan of Turkey, the sovereign of the country, weighed as nothing, decided the Directory. In March, 1798, therefore, the order to organise an expedition for the conquest of Egypt was given to Bonaparte, and two months later, on May 19th, he set out in command of a vast armada, sailing from Toulon and other ports of the south of France.

Thus it was the aspirations of the French nation for the extension of its influence in the Mediterranean and for the acquisition of new colonies and its conquest rivalry with England, and not events in the country itself, that heralded the dawn of the new period, and eventually, though chiefly indirectly, produced the greatest change in the condition and prospects of the people that their history records.

The rapidity with which the French expedition was prepared, and the secrecy with which its destination was concealed, led the Directory and Bonaparte himself to hope that it would escape all risk of interference on its way to Egypt. In this they were not

disappointed, but hearing of the assembling of a great military and naval force in the south of France, and believing that it was intended to make a descent upon the Irish coast with a view to co-operation with the rebels there, Lord Vincent warned Nelson to watch for, and, if possible, destroy it. The people of India were then, however, like those of Ireland, in negotiation with the French, and in particular the famous Tippoo Sultan, "The Tiger of Mysore," longing to be revenged for the defeat and losses Lord Cornwallis had inflicted upon him, had sought their aid. Nelson was aware of this, and having a strong sense of the danger to English interests in India and the East generally the possession of Egypt by the French would be, guessed the real destination of the expedition, and finding that the French had got away to sea, immediately started in pursuit, and, acting upon his own conception as to its aim, steered straight for Egypt. Bonaparte had, however, after leaving the French coast, proceeded to Malta, which he seized, and being thus delayed some days on his way to Egypt, Nelson passed without falling in with him, and thus it was that on June 21st the Alexandrians were startled by the approach of the English Fleet.

As soon as the character of the ships thus unexpectedly appearing on their coast became known the town was thrown into a state of the greatest excitement, and the Governor, believing that the fleet was a hostile one, sent off to Cairo the messengers whose arrival there I have already chronicled, and at the same time sent other messengers to summon the Bedouins, or nomad

Arabs, inhabiting the neighbouring deserts, to assist in the defence of the town.

Nelson lost no time in sending ashore to seek news of the French, but the reception given to his officers was far from friendly. Refusing to credit the statement that the English came as friends and protectors and not as enemies, the Governor openly expressed his distrust, and in doing so simply voiced the feelings of the people. Utterly ignorant of everything outside the narrow range of their own experience, it was indeed impossible for these to comprehend how the occupation of Egypt by the French could be a matter of vital importance to the English. So when Nelson's officers assured the Governor that they asked nothing more than to await the arrival of the French and to buy a few supplies of which the fleet was in need, he answered them that they could have nothing. "Egypt," said he, "belongs to the Sultan, and neither the French nor any other people have anything to do with it, so please go away."

It was a bold speech, and as foolish as it was bold, for no one knew better than the Governor himself that he was quite powerless to oppose the English if they wished to land, or to take what they needed by force. It was a speech, too, worth noticing, for it affords a clue to much that puzzles the ordinary critic of Egyptian history. Judged by any known canon of social or international courtesy or policy, it was not less inexcusable than indiscreet, for it was as likely to enrage an enemy as to anger a friend, but it was just what one knowing the people might have

expected – the utterance of the impulse of the moment, and, therefore, a full and truthful statement of the speaker's thought. For to the Egyptian mind the visit of a fleet of foreign ships of war could have no other object than the conquest or raiding of the country, hence the English Fleet must be a hostile one. It was neither lawful nor wise to give provision or succour of any kind to an enemy, therefore they had nothing to say to the English but "Please go away."

It was thus that the people of Alexandria argued then, and it is thus that the people of Egypt generally still argue. For they have always been incapable of taking a broad or general view of any subject. No matter how many-sided a question may be, they, as a rule, can see but one aspect of it at a time. They look, in fact, at all things through a mental telescope that, bringing one narrow and limited aspect of a subject into bold and clear relief, shuts from their vision all that surrounds it. Hence when, as they can and sometimes do, they change their point of view, the change is commonly as abrupt as it is thorough, and those who see only the surface tax them with fickleness. Of late years there have been signs that, at all events, the educated classes are learning to reason on surer and safer grounds; but if the reader would understand their story, he must ever bear in mind the narrow basis of their judgments and, therefore, of their actions.

While the answer of the Governor to the English is thus illustrative of a point to be remembered in the character of the Egyptians, the life-story of the man himself also helps us

to more fully grasp their mental attitude under the changing circumstances of the period. This Governor, Sayed Mahomed Kerim, was an Egyptian of humble birth, but one of Arab blood, claiming to be a Sayed or Shereef; that is to say, a descendant of the Prophet Mahomed's family, and thus one of the Arab nobility. In his early manhood this man, who as a Sayed, was and is blessed and prayed for by every Mahomedan in the world at every time of praying, was glad to fill the modest post of a weigher in the Customs. Gifted with intelligence and other qualities that commended him to his superiors, by their favour and his own ability he rose rapidly to become the local Director of Customs, and eventually, as we find him, Governor of the town. That in this position he had the confidence and respect of his townsmen seems clear; and it is thus evident that, tyrannical and oppressive as was the rule under which they lived, there was an open path to place and power for able men. Bribery and corruption, it is true, were rife, so much so, that we may safely assume that Sayed Mahomed did not attain his high position wholly without their aid, but they did not play the dominating part assigned them by historians of the time.

We shall see but little more of this Sayed Mahomed, for though still a young man, he had but a short span of life to run, yet the little we shall see makes him a notable man, and one that should be studied. Bold, impulsive, proud and fearless, with that decision of character so praised by Foster; quick to decide and unalterable in his decisions, deciding rightly from his own

standpoint, but often with too limited a view – emphatically more of an Arab than an Egyptian type, and yet in the few glances we get of him, illustrating, most aptly, the Egyptian character. Thus, as his answer to the English was essentially Egyptian and not Arab in substance and manner, so also was his subsequent action. For an Arab in such a strait would have sought to gain time by fair-speaking, so that he might take such measures as he could, or at the worst secure better terms, whereas Sayed Mahomed spoke in a manner that, had the English been, as he supposed, enemies, must have precipitated hostilities, and having done so, again Egyptian-like, made no adequate attempt to protect the town from the possible consequences of his rashness.

Whether fortunately or otherwise no man can say, Nelson, too intent upon the object he had in view to be moved from his immediate purpose, took the rebuff offered him calmly, and, after a day's rest off the port, sailed away, leaving the Alexandrians to congratulate themselves upon their own astuteness and to indulge themselves in vain-glorious anticipations of the prodigies of valour they were to perform should the French land upon their shores.

A week having passed by without the appearance of an enemy, the people had regained their wonted calm, when as unexpectedly as though no warning had been given of its coming the French fleet of twenty-one vessels of war and over three hundred transports was seen in the offing heading for the port. This sudden and unlooked-for proof of the reality of the danger

they had refused to credit produced the utmost consternation.

Once more the Governor despatched messengers in all haste to the capital, and describing the French fleet as one "without beginning or end," begged earnestly, but all too late, for aid.

The people of Cairo, like those of Alexandria, when their first alarm at the arrival of Nelson's fleet had passed away, seeing in his departure a confirmation of their own conception of his visit, ceased to think of the matter save as the subject of jest, but were overwhelmed with dismay at the new alarm, even the Government, which had been but little moved by the first, being now stirred to activity and a sense of danger.

The Government of Egypt was then, at least nominally, such as it had been constituted after the Turkish conquest in 1517 by Sultan Selim. Keenly recognising the impossibility of enforcing his authority in a province of the Empire so far off and so difficult of access from his own capital, the Sultan had, not unwisely, contented himself with organising a system of government that was, in his opinion, the one most likely to ensure the permanency of his sovereignty and guarantee him the receipt of a goodly share of the wealth of his new possession. Egypt was placed, therefore, as the other provinces of the Empire then were, and still are, under the government of a Pacha, who was in effect, though he was accorded neither the style nor the honour of that rank, a viceroy. But the Sultan, anxious to hold the Pacha in check by some power ever present and active, divided the territory under his charge into twenty-four districts, and placed each of these, as

a kind of local governorship, in the hands of a Mamaluk chief or Bey. Of the Beys chosen for these posts seven were to form a Dewan, or Council of State, nominally to advise and assist, but in reality to control the Pacha, whose decisions this Council was empowered to veto. All real power was therefore vested in the Mamaluks, who, it is perhaps scarcely necessary to recall, were the troops that, originally brought into the country as slaves by the Fatimite Caliphs, had gradually developed their power and influence until their chiefs had become feudal lords, holding lands and keeping, according to their individual means, troops of mounted followers, whose physical qualities and effective training rendered them one of the finest bodies of cavalry that has ever existed. As must invariably happen when a weak and incompetent Government seeks the aid of slaves or mercenaries to sustain its failing dominion, the Mamaluks had eventually acquired such power that they were enabled to usurp the government of the country, and had, as we have seen, maintained their position as Sultans of Egypt from the time of Salah ed Deen up to the Turkish conquest. Under the system of government established by the Sultan Selim, though unable to regain the absolute independence they had lost, they soon recovered almost all their former influence and power, and as they controlled the military strength of the country, the small Turkish garrison being quite helpless to oppose them, they soon became, as before, the real rulers of the land. Being invariably foreigners, or the immediate descendants of foreigners, Circassians, Armenians, or

other slaves, it was but natural that these Beys should have no sympathy for the people of the country, and, with the arrogance characteristic of a military body that has attained political power, despised all outside of their own ranks, and held it a disgrace to intermarry with the Egyptians. Actuated by none but the most selfish aims, they sought and cared for nothing but their own interests, each of them being a veritable Ishmael, looking upon all men as his enemies, only accepting the co-operation of his fellow Mamaluks as a necessary measure of defence, confiding in the loyalty of his immediate followers only so far as he was able to control them by rendering their faithfulness to him conducive to their own interests. Among themselves they of necessity accepted the domination of the one who by force of arms, intrigues, or other favouring circumstances, was in a position to enforce his will against that of the others, and, as might be expected, the Bey who held this prominent position was the one to whom the post of Sheikh el Beled, or Governor of Cairo, was accorded, that being the post of all others the most coveted by them, this Bey being, in practice, the real Governor of the country, his power being only limited by the necessity he was under of consulting and conciliating the wishes of the other members of the Dewan.

It may seem strange that with the power they thus possessed the Mamaluks should continue to offer even a faint show of respect to the Pacha, or of loyalty to the Empire, for light as was the yoke these laid upon them, it was sufficiently galling to men

who lived as they did each wholly absorbed in the prosecution of his own personal aims and interests, and the more so that, as the wealth of the country declined under their greedy and ruthless rule, the remittances of revenue exacted by the Sultan was a yearly draft that seriously limited their resources. But if the Mamaluk hated and despised all men not of his own class, he was in turn hated by all others with a hatred all the fiercer and more bitter that it had no outlet. Thus, with no friend upon whom he could rely save his own right arm, the Mamaluk chief, however powerful, was fain to accept the patronage of the Sultan as the only aid he could look for in his combat with the world, and he must needs, therefore, be content to pay for that aid with a certain tribute of grudging loyalty. Nor must it be forgotten that, ever ready to combine and co-operate against a common foe, each Mamaluk was equally ready to turn his hand and sword against his fellow if thereby he might gain aught for himself. Had it not been for the mutual distrust the knowledge of this fact forced upon them, they might easily have regained the independence wrested from them by the Turks. This had, indeed, been momentarily accomplished by Ali Bey, who, in 1766, not only succeeded in setting himself up as Sultan of Egypt, but aspiring to extend his rule, had attacked and conquered the Mahomedan holy cities of Mecca and Medina in Arabia. His triumph was, however, but shortlived, for Mahomed Bey, the most trusted of his favourites, to whom he had confided the command of an army for the conquest of Syria, abandoned his

task, and revolting, took his master Ali prisoner by a treacherous ambush. Unable alone to maintain the power he had thus for the moment seized, the traitor at once tendered his submission to the Sultan, and was, in reward for his "fidelity," appointed Pacha of Egypt. His tenancy of this office was, however, but brief, his death soon after, leaving the country once more a prey to the mutual rivalries of the Beys. In the contest for supremacy that followed, two of these, freed slaves of his, though constantly opposed to and frequently in arms against each other, eventually agreed to share the power between them, the one, Murad Bey, becoming the military chief of the Mamaluks, and the other, Ibrahim Bey, the Sheikh el Beled.

Under the joint sway of these two men the country enjoyed a brief period of greater quiet and peace than it had known for a long time, and although the tyranny and oppression from which they suffered was little if at all abated, the people had been so completely despoiled before and had so little to lose that, as "He that is down need fear no fall," they had but small anxiety for the morrow.

This was the condition that existed on that memorable night of the 23rd of June in 1798, the eve of the day upon which Cairo had its first warning of the approach of the French. Could a plebiscite of the hopes and fears of the people have been taken on that evening, we may be sure that it would have been unfavourable to any change, and that they would have elected to bear the ills they had, rather than face the possibly far worse any

change might bring to them.

CHAPTER IV

A COUNCIL OF STATE

As soon as the news of the arrival of the French Fleet had been received by Murad Bey, he rode to the country house of Ibrahim Bey, now the Kasr el Aini Hospital, on the east bank of the Nile overlooking the Island of Rhodah.

There a council of the leading men of the city was hastily summoned to consider the steps to be taken for the defence of the country, and it was characteristic of the conditions under which the people were then living, that all those present, with the single exception of Bekir Pacha, the Governor and representative of the Sultan's authority, belonged to one of two classes – the military rulers and the religious leaders of the people. The excitement that prevailed in either class was plainly evident at the meeting, though the feelings and fears induced in each by the news they had met to discuss were very different.

The military element consisted entirely of the Mamaluk Beys, who formed, as we have seen, the real ruling power, their title of Bey – or, as it is written in the Turkish language from which it is taken, Beg – being fairly equivalent to that of Baron as used in our own country in the days of King John, though it has long since ceased to signify any more than the French Legion of Honour, save that, like our Knighthood, it carries a personal title. By the

people generally, these Beys were spoken of as Emirs, a title properly nearly equal to that of Prince, and the one employed by the rulers of Afghanistan, so well known to us as the Ameer of that country. I have already spoken of the dominant position the Beys held, but I may add here, as further illustrating their character, that if they had not, as the French nobles had in the days of Louis IX. and Philip the Fair, the right of carrying on war among themselves, they did not hesitate to put their rivalries to the test of battle. Confident in the prowess of their own body, these men had treated with indifference the alarm occasioned by the arrival of Nelson, but when the warning he had given was confirmed by the presence of the French, and the extent of the fleet that was gathering at Alexandria was known, not only through the exaggerated terms in which Sayed Mahomed had described it, but also by the arrival of reports from Rosetta and Damietta to the same effect, they awoke to the necessity for action.

Centuries had then passed since the Arabs or their Mamaluks had measured their strength against that of European armies, and altogether unacquainted with the advance their ancient foes had made in the art of war, it was perhaps natural enough that they should be a little over-confident in their own might, especially as such stories of the Crusades as still lingered among them were not of a kind to excite any very lively fears of an enemy that, according to these traditions, they had never met but to defeat. Moreover, ignorant as they were of the progress

of the world outside their own country, they knew that the Moslem corsairs of the Mediterranean were a constant terror to all ships of Christian countries that had to pass the inhospitable coasts of the Barbary States, and that throughout the north of Africa European Christians were found as the slaves of Moslem masters. Added to this the fact that the insulting treatment they themselves accorded to European ships visiting their ports, and their tyrannous behaviour to European subjects resident in the country, long continued as these abuses had been, had brought no effective or warlike protest from the nations thus gravely injured and insulted, and we can easily conceive that they placed no high value upon the military or naval power of peoples who thus meekly, as it seemed to them, submitted to such outrages upon their subjects. Hence, while they regarded the present occasion as one calling for active measures of defence, they had no presentiment of the disastrous fate that was so soon to overtake them, and so, undismayed by the news of the arrival of the French, cried vauntingly, "Let them come that we may trample them under our horses' feet!"

As to the second class of those present at the Council, the Ulema, or "learned men," that is to say, those who in virtue of their proficiency in the study of the laws of Islam were the acknowledged and duly graduated religious leaders of the people, these looked upon the danger with very different eyes. Unlike the Mamaluks they were men of the country, allied by blood to its people, and therefore, though like priests and ministers of

all religions in all countries, forming a class severed from the great body of the people by special and mutually conflicting ideals, aims, and interests, they were not, and could not be, wholly indifferent to the welfare of the people, of whom, by kinship of every degree, birth, marriage, and parentage, they never ceased to form an integral part. These, therefore, had a lively fear of the inevitable distress any warlike operations in the country must bring upon the people, while the fact that the enemy approaching was a Christian one, gave to their anticipations a personal character they would not have borne had the invader been of the Moslem faith. Like those of the Mamaluks their conceptions of the character of the European peoples were mainly founded upon the traditions of the Crusades – traditions that included only too many incidents, such as that of the soldiers of the Cross, at the taking of Jerusalem, dashing out the brains of innocent infants; traditions that are still recalled in Moslem lands, and are in no small degree responsible for the anti-Christian and anti-European spirit that exists among Mahomedan peoples. Their feelings at the thought of the possibility of a French victory were, therefore, quite apart from those of the Mamaluks, if, indeed, these ever gave such an idea a moment's thought. If they did, they still had before them three possibilities – victory, which to them meant gain in many ways; defeat and flight, leaving them at least the hope of retrieving their fortune later on, or in some other land; or death in honourable and glorious warfare, warfare too, that being in defence of Islam, would give them the rank

and, better still, the rewards of martyrs for the faith. On their part the Ulema could see only two possibilities: a victory that, however glorious, would have to be paid for at a heavy cost of suffering to the people, or a defeat involving all that they could imagine of dire disaster and woe.

That we may fully comprehend the influences swaying the members of the two classes of which the Council was composed, we must recall their mutual relations. The Mamaluks, then, being Mahomedans in little more than name, yielding their loyalty to the Sultan and to Islam simply from a regard to their own interests, were commonly looked upon by the Ulema, as well as by the people generally, as scarcely better than heretics, while their ceaseless rapacity and heartless cruelty made them at once feared and hated. Conscious of these facts, but not daring to place themselves in open opposition to the Ulema, they sought in every way to gain these to their support, and more especially by their professions of loyalty to the faith, and by treating the Ulema with all dignity and respect. This, indeed, they were bound to do, since not only was it in the power of the Ulema to incite the people against them, but with the aid of the Ulema of Constantinople to secure the Sultan's action on their own behalf in case of need. In a word, therefore, while despising the Ulema with the man of action's contempt for the mere student or scholar, the Mamaluks found it essential to their own safety to cultivate their toleration, knowing well that this was all they could obtain from them.

As to the Ulema, fully recognising the insincerity of the

Mamaluks, they were fain to accept their homage as the only course for them to follow except one of open hostility, which, however little they, as a body, need fear its results, to each one individually involved risks not lightly to be run.

Having no power of excommunication, such as that possessed by the priests of the Catholic Church or the Brahmins, the Ulema had no direct means of coercing those who displeased them, and were thus not infrequently obliged to accept or adopt a line of conduct that under other circumstances they would have refused to follow. It is, therefore, to their credit that throughout the history of their class, they have always been an independent and, on the whole, a fearless set of men, and that it is but rarely indeed they have been opposed to reason or right as they have understood it, though, unhappily, their conceptions of these have not always been such as enlightened minds could approve. Like the clergy of all Churches, with, perhaps, the exception of the Catholic, they have not seldom been compelled to choose between interest and principle. That they should never err in such a case, they must have been more than human.

Diverse as were the interests of the Beys and those of the Ulema at this Council, the aims and hopes of the two classes were in the most perfect accord, both being dominated by the single desire to concert such measures as should seem best for the protection of the country.

In this they were heartily joined by Bekir Pacha. As the representative of the Sultan's authority, his chief duty and

personal interest lay in seeing that the annual remittances to the Sultan were made as early and as large as possible, and that the country was kept as free from wars and seditions as might be. So long as he could in some fair measure secure these aims, though always, like all servants of the Empire, at the mercy of intriguing aspirants, he might hope to retain, if not his post, at least the Sultan's favour. Although thus constrained to court the goodwill of both the Beys and of the Ulema, his personal sympathies were strongly with the latter, and were not weakened by his keen sense of the treacherous nature of the friendship for himself and of the loyalty to the Empire professed by the former.

The relations thus existing between the three parties at the Council – the one-man party of Bekir Pacha, and those of the Mamaluks and Ulema – had then been in force for some years, and, coupled with the fact that Ibrahim Bey was a man who, though of approved courage, was withal a constant promoter of peace and concord, had contributed not a little to gain for the people the few years of comparative immunity from care and trouble they had been enjoying.

Murad Bey was a man of different stamp. Of great energy, proud and ambitious, ever ready to sacrifice friends as well as foes for his own profit, he is said to have been at times daring to foolhardiness, and again timid to poltroonery, but always consistently selfish, grasping, and tyrannical. From the time that he and Ibrahim Bey had agreed to work together in the government of the country they had shared between them the

greater part of the revenue; and Murad, while constantly adding to his private property large areas of land confiscated from the people under various pretexts, spent large sums of money in developing the military resources at his disposal, constructing cannon, storing ammunition, and building vessels for military service on the Nile. Passionate, impulsive, and keenly conscious of the fact that the Sultan looked upon him and his fellow-Mamaluks with no friendly eye, upon hearing of the arrival of the French he jumped to the conclusion that they had come, if not as the allies of the Sultan, yet with his connivance. For Bekir Pacha, both as an individual and as the Sultan's representative, he had a contempt that, though veiled under the courtesy of pretended amity, lost no opportunity of wounding his feelings or depreciating his authority. Swayed by these sentiments, he did not hesitate on joining the Council to charge the Pacha with being privy to the invasion, alleging it as inconceivable that the French should venture upon such an undertaking if they had not some reason to look for the support, or at least the countenance of the Turkish Government. The spirit and tact with which the Pacha repelled this accusation showed that had he been in a position of greater power he might have proved himself a man better able to deal with the danger they had to meet than was his accuser. It was soon evident, however, that the Pacha had the confidence of the assembly. Murad was obliged, therefore, to accept his denial, and the attention of those present being turned to the more practical aspects of the subject that had brought them together, after a

brief consultation it was arranged that Murad should advance to meet and oppose the French, and, as they all hoped, drive them back into the sea, while Ibrahim Bey was to remain at Cairo and provide for the defence of the capital in the event of the enemy pushing their way so far.

Had the Council limited itself to the discussion of these points I might have passed it with briefer notice; but perhaps the only really debatable issue brought before it was one the reception of which throws some light upon the important question of the feelings of those present towards the Christians then living in the country.

Urged, mainly, in all probability, by the desire not to remain a mere silent member of the Council, one of those present suggested, as a measure of defence, a massacre of all the Christians in the town. There is, I believe, no record as to who made this wild proposal, but we may be certain that it was one of the youngest, and a man little read in either the history or teaching of his religion.

To the tolerant spirit that now happily prevails in England and the West of Europe, such a suggestion, made, even as it was, in an hour of panic, seems savagely revolting. But in our criticisms of this and other incidents in history we too often overlook the lapse of time and compare the Egyptians and other peoples of the past to that which we are at present, and not to that which we ourselves were at the same time. Thus when we condemn the fanaticism of those who made and supported this proposal at

the Kasr El Aini Council, we forget to remember what was even then passing in our own country. This Council was held on the 4th of July, in 1798, and on that day the Irish rebels who had been defeated at Vinegar Hill, on the 21st of June, the very day on which Nelson had reached the Egyptian coast, these rebels were still trembling fugitives sheltering in the mountains and bogs of their native land from the ruthless "no-quarter" pursuit of the vengeance-wrecking soldiers of the Crown. Nor let it be thought that in speaking of this I am taking a partial or party view of the events of those days, for my ancestors were with the pursuers, not with the pursued. And if it be objected that this was in Ireland, and that the atrocities perpetrated by both parties were due rather to political than to religious rancour, let us go back but eighteen years, for was it not in 1780 that for four days the Gordon rioters held London in their hands, and, crying "Death to the Catholics!" sacked and pillaged, burned and wrecked the churches, shops, and houses of Catholics and of those who favoured the cause of Catholic emancipation? Let it be remembered, too, that the fanatics of Cairo had at least this excuse, that they were in terror of an approaching foe to whom those they proposed to slay were friendly, while the only danger that the London mob had to face was at most a political one, and that one based upon mere possibilities, and not even on probabilities. Let us – but no! the Reign of Terror in France, the echoes of which were then still ringing throughout Europe, the one unsurpassable horror of all time, that was the maniac

outbreak of a people frenzied by the long pent-up wrath of their endless wrongs and sufferings, a horror only possible when the inhumanity of a class had shattered the humanity of the mass. But we may recall the crimes of the Commune, which in our own days washed the streets of Paris with blood, and was an unreasoning, insensate outburst of political fanaticism, and also the recent massacres of Jews in Russia.

These events have had but little in common, except that they were alike the products of fanaticism – whether political or religious – but they show that in condemning the fanaticism of the Cairo Council we must make allowance for time, place, and circumstances, and, remembering how much more grievously we ourselves and our European kinsmen have sinned, hesitate to accept such incidents as these as stamping the people as in this respect other than ourselves.

Bearing these facts and dates in mind, let us now learn what was the fate of the bloodthirsty proposal thus brought before the Cairo Council, but first a word as to who and what the Christians were whose lives were thus endangered.

The Christians then resident in Cairo, as in other parts of Egypt, were of two classes, distinguished from each other and from the Mahomedan inhabitants by the different political conditions under which they lived. These classes were the Copts and the Franks. The former were the descendants of those Egyptians who, after the Arab conquest, remained faithful to their religion, and the latter Christians of European origin. The

Copts were, and still are, the purest descendants of the early Egyptians left in the country, as since the Arab invasion they have intermarried almost exclusively with their own race, whereas the Mahomedans have freely mixed themselves with the Soudanese and other wholly alien peoples. Under the Mamaluks the Copts almost entirely monopolised the service of the Government as clerks and accountants, and wherever mere clerical skill was an essential. Docile, or rather servile, in their submission to all in authority over them, they were in spirit and act hostile to the people generally, and readily availing themselves of their power as petty officials to further the tyrannous oppression of the rulers, at the same time enriched themselves at the expense of all unable to resist their rapacity. The Franks, who were mostly Levantines, were almost all engaged in trade. Like the Copts they were compelled to live within certain fixed limits of the town, the Frank quarter being the street still known as the Mousky, and now the "Cheapside" of Cairo. This locality was chosen for the accommodation of the European Christians by Salah ed Deen, who, in 1173, granted to the Republic of Pisa the first of the long list of "Capitulations," or Treaties, which the Turkish Government has accorded the European Powers, with a view to encourage their subjects to visit and settle in the country, and which grant to those who do so, special rights and privileges for the protection of their lives and property, and the freedom and encouragement of their trade. As the Copts then did and still do, the Franks then wore the costume of the country, and at the

time of the French invasion, almost all of those who remained at Cairo had been born in Egypt. Earlier in the century there appears to have been a considerable number of foreign-born Europeans residing in the capital, but in 1770, owing to the gross oppression of all foreigners by the Mamaluks, who did not hesitate to despoil them by the imposition of taxes and charges of all kinds whenever the Government was in need of funds, the number of French subjects resident at Cairo had fallen so low that there were but fifteen houses there engaged in trade, and a few years later, the French Consul having withdrawn, the number continued to decrease until, in 1785, only three French firms were left, and the English, who had been endeavouring to utilise the desert route between Cairo and Suez to develop trade with India, finding it impossible to contend against the constant raiding of their caravans by the Bedouins and the oppressive exactions of the Government, had likewise abandoned the town.

The Christians whose massacre had been demanded at the Kasr el Aini Council were therefore practically all natives of the country, but natives subject to the same vile treatment, gross injustice, and wanton outrage that the Christians of Europe then and even now were, and are, inflicting upon the unhappy descendants of Israel. Indeed, no one who has read the accounts of the recent persecutions of the Jews in Europe and will compare them with those of Christians in Moslem lands, can fail to admit that the balance to be drawn is in favour of the Moslem. And there has constantly been, especially in

Egypt, this important distinction between Christian and Moslem persecutions, that persecution in Christian lands has almost invariably originated with the people, while in Moslem lands, when not occasioned by the fanatical bigotry of some despotic ruler, it has almost as constantly been the result of a weak and impotent Government fomenting fanaticism for the promotion of its own ends. In both cases it is indisputably true that the greater the fanaticism has been, the more clearly and surely can it be traced to the teaching of the spiritual leaders of the peoples concerned. Not that these leaders have necessarily or directly advocated persecution, but that their teaching, even when professedly and honestly denouncing it, has been such that it could have no other effect than that of rendering those who accepted it fanatical in spirit, for of what avail can it be that the ministers of a religion should preach toleration, if at the same time they vehemently denounce the followers of other religions as the "enemies of God," doomed to eternal damnation?

Now let us take note that the suggestion of a massacre of the Christians was made at this Council at a moment when almost every possible condition that could favour its acceptance was present, and that in spite of this the proposal was rejected.

There was not a man at that Council who did not know that the withdrawal of the protection of the Government from the Christians would have been hailed with delight by the populace, not from fanaticism, but for the sake of the plunder that would thus have been brought within their reach. It is, therefore, to the

credit of Bekir Pacha and Ibrahim Bey that, waiving the mutual want of sympathy that separated them on ordinary matters, they in this instantly joined in protesting against the suggested massacre. Each of them knew that in thus acting he was risking his own personal interests. On his part Bekir Pacha was only too well aware that, although he was the accredited Governor of the country, the small semblance of authority he was permitted to exercise was accorded to him by the Beys only for their own purposes; that it was their delight to thwart his aims, tarnish his honour, and diminish his influence on every possible occasion and in every possible way, and that it was to the Ulema that he had to look for any local support in any contest with his powerful foes. This knowledge, and the fact that, as we have seen, Murad had openly taxed him with being accessory to the arrival of the French, although his denial had been accepted, might well have caused him to hesitate to speak in defence of the Christians. None the less he did so, promptly and boldly, and, referring more particularly to the Copts, he reminded those present that as subjects of the Sultan they paid the Capitation tax, and that while their doing so exempted them from military service, it gave them a right both by the laws of Islam and by the laws and customs of the Empire to the fullest protection. Happily for the Christians of Cairo the good counsels of these men, supported by the better informed and more enlightened of the Ulema, prevailed, and the Council, not satisfied with simply deciding the matter thus, issued proclamations prohibiting any

interference with the Christians.

This matter having been thus settled, the Council broke up never to meet again, and thus the last official act of the Beys and Ulemas of Cairo acting together in a Council of State was one for which Christianity and Humanity should never cease to have a grateful memory, the more so that the protection given to the Christians was not limited to mere words, since, finding that the people, whether instigated by fanatics or acting for themselves, were assuming a threatening attitude towards the Franks, Ibrahim Bey had these all brought from the European quarter and placed under the care of his own and other reliable men. For the ladies of the Frankish colony the Bey's wife opened one of his residences, a palatial building in the southern part of the city known as the Birket el Feel, or Elephant's Pond, then one of the best and pleasantest portions of the town. Thus the safety and decent comfort of the whole community was provided for.

CHAPTER V

THE PROCLAMATION THAT FAILED

As soon as Bonaparte's flagship, *l'Orient*, had arrived sufficiently near to the shore a boat was sent into the harbour to bring off the French Consul, Monsieur Magallon. With their usual want of tact in a sudden emergency the people at once protested against his leaving, and would have prevented his going had it not been that the commander of a Turkish warship then in the harbour, having probably a keen sense of the possible results to himself and his ship a refusal might produce, persuaded the Governor to allow him to go. From Monsieur Magallon, therefore, Bonaparte learned the little serious opposition the town could offer, since not only was the garrison limited to a body of about five hundred janissaries, a species of militia possessing scarcely any military training or experience, but it was so wholly unprovided with ammunition and other necessaries that at the most it could make but a momentary resistance. Bonaparte, influenced no doubt by the fear that Nelson returning might surprise him in the act of disembarking, decided upon landing immediately. It was in vain that Admiral Brueys pleaded for a brief delay, urging that the weather was most unpropitious, and that the roughness of the sea, their distance from the shore, their

ignorance of the coast, the rocky and dangerous nature of the landing-place, and the approach of night, all combined to render the operation a most hazardous one. Bonaparte would hear of no delay, and so, the fleet having been warily drawn close to the shore, the task of landing the forty thousand men of the expedition was commenced.

The spot chosen for this purpose was one about three miles to the west of the town, and the first boatloads reached the shore at ten o'clock at night. The beaching of the boats was a work of the utmost danger and difficulty, the darkness upon the rocky beach rendering the scene one of the greatest confusion. Fortunately for the French, no attempt was made to oppose their landing, for had the full resources of the town been brought to bear upon them at this critical point, slight as those resources were, the invaders must have suffered heavily. As it was, Bonaparte himself landed a little after midnight, and having slept for an hour or so upon the sands, set out on foot for the town with a party of four hundred men. He was, we are told, in the best of spirits, and marched gaily along with no ear for the surges beating on the beach, and never recking that, even then, other surges were drearily droning on the shores of St. Helena the melancholy music that was to be the doleful dirge of his dying days.

Just as the day was breaking a number of Bedouin Arabs attacked the little force, but after exchanging a few shots retired beyond range, and Bonaparte, followed near at hand by additional troops, continued his advance without further incident until close

under the walls of the town.

Although quite conscious of the hopelessness of their position, the Governor and the townspeople determined to resist, and the arrival of the French was therefore saluted with a brisk but ineffectual cannonading from the walls. Promptly dividing his force into three divisions, Bonaparte commanded a general assault to be made, and soon, in spite of the fusillading of the enemy and the showers of stones and burning materials thrown upon them, two of the divisions succeeded in scaling the walls, while the third forced its way through one of the gates. A sharp but brief contest followed in the streets of the town, but the Governor and the militia having retired to one of the forts, the people, accepting the assurances that Bonaparte had conveyed to them, that he came to re-establish the authority of the Sultan and to overthrow their oppressors, the Mamaluks, by whom it had been usurped, and that their own lives, property, and religion would be respected, threw down their arms.

The town thus occupied by the French, the Governor, short of ammunition, and without hope of succour or aid of any description, yielded to the inevitable and surrendered with his troops. Anxious to conciliate the people as much as possible, Bonaparte at once offered to reinstate the Governor upon the condition of his consenting to remain faithful to the French, and the offer having been accepted he was replaced in charge of the town, but subject to the supervision of General Kleber, who having been wounded in the attack was to remain for the time in

command of the French garrison.

Having thus easily established himself upon Egyptian soil, Bonaparte lost no time in preparing for an advance upon Cairo, and the landing of the remainder of the troops, together with the horses for the cavalry, and the whole of the baggage and equipment of the expedition, was pressed forward as rapidly as possible. Both as a measure tending to facilitate this movement and as an important part of the policy he had resolved to follow in his dealings with the people, Bonaparte set himself to gain their friendship. Strict orders were, therefore, issued that the people were not to be molested in any way, and some soldiers having been detected in looting after the surrender of the town, he seized the opportunity to give a proof that his assurances were not intended to be an idle parade of words, and had the offenders summarily and severely punished. In this, as in other ways, it is evident that Bonaparte was under the impression that he could gain, if not the full allegiance, at least the passive neutrality of the Alexandrians, and, indeed, it was clear from the preparations that he had made prior to his actual arrival in the country, that he had looked forward to being received by the Egyptians as a deliverer and saviour. Two of these preparations deserve special mention here. One, curiously characteristic of the French spirit of the day, was the provision of an immense number of tricoloured cockades to be distributed to, and worn by, the people as evidence of their reconciliation with the French; the other was the composition and printing of a proclamation in

Arabic which was to serve at once as a declaration of the aims and intentions of the French in entering Egypt and as an appeal to the friendship and support of the people. This proclamation has, with great justice, been described as a most extraordinary document. Of considerable length, it was framed throughout with the object of soothing the religious susceptibilities of the Egyptians, and was so worded as to represent Bonaparte and the French, if not as Mahomedans, at least as the special friends and protectors of Islam. Beginning with the well-known formula, "In the name of the most merciful God," invariably prefixed by Mahomedans to all important writings, it proceeded to state that the French had arrived in Egypt with the intention of punishing the Mamaluks for their ill-treatment of the French and other foreign subjects resident in the country; to restore to the people themselves the rights of which they were deprived by their tyrannical rulers, and to re-establish the authority of the Sultan of Turkey, the legitimate sovereign. Had the proclamation stopped here it would in all probability have been accepted by the people as a genuine expression of the purport and scope of the invasion, but it went on with great elaboration to promise boons to the people that these were quite incapable of either comprehending, or had they done so, of appreciating. These promises were couched in the spirit then dominant in Paris, and, indeed, throughout France, that is to say, the spirit of the Revolution, the "Gospel" of "Liberty, equality, and fraternity," that was to turn the world into a paradise. Thenceforth, it declared, it was to be possible for

all to arrive at the most exalted posts; public affairs were to be directed by the most learned, virtuous, and intelligent; and thus the people were to be made happy. All this was in perfect accord with the theory and teaching of the Mahomedan religion, but it was in some respects very far indeed from the practice to which the people had for centuries been accustomed. As to the promise of opening out facilities for advancement, we have seen that in the Governor of the town the people had a convincing proof that these already existed, and it is not at all probable that it ever occurred to them that the facilities at which the French General hinted were of a very different nature to those of which Sayed Mahomed had availed himself. It is not surprising, therefore, that these promises seemed to the Egyptians nothing more than mere idle bombast, and were by them promptly put down as simply a valueless bid for their favour. What followed was still less calculated to win their confidence, for, as evidence of the friendly spirit of the invasion, Bonaparte went on to declare his faith in the unity of God, his respect for the Prophet Mahomed and the Koran, and to claim that he had "destroyed the Pope" and the Knights of Malta because they were the enemies of Islam. Such professions as these to the Egyptians carried on their face their own contradiction, for, if Bonaparte was in truth a Moslem, or a friend of Islam, how was it, they asked, that he had entered the dominions of the Sultan without some acknowledgment from him of the claim thus made to be acting upon his behalf?

The concluding phrases of the proclamation came, too, rather

as an anti-climax to the lofty spirit of benevolence and high aim that the body of it was intended to express, for the whole rigmarole – I can scarcely find a better word for it – came to an end with a commonplace promise that those who submitted to the French should be "exalted," while those who opposed them should be "utterly destroyed." One can fancy how the Egyptians smiled to themselves at this conclusion and accepted it as in itself the whole object and purport of the document. But whatever may have been their private feelings on the subject, and their own historians have told us how little reliance they put upon the professions and promises thus offered them, it is certain that outwardly the Alexandrians discreetly accepted both the cockades and the proclamation without any show of feeling other than that of amused curiosity. So little, indeed, did they betray their true feelings, the French were unquestionably deceived, and did not realise how different these were from those which they had expected the proclamation to excite. But it is certain that none of the Egyptians were in the least deceived by its plausible tone, and while they refrained from any display of hostility to the French, they were looking forward with high hopes to their early annihilation by the Mamaluks.

Large numbers of this proclamation having been printed by the aid of the Oriental type and printing presses, with which the expedition was provided, Bonaparte not only had it freely distributed in Alexandria, but forwarded copies of it to Cairo and elsewhere, using as his messengers for this purpose some

Mahomedans he had released from the prisons of Malta, and had brought with him to Egypt, with the object of utilising them as interpreters, and in the hope that gratitude for their release would cause them to espouse and advocate his cause.

That Bonaparte's conception of the probable attitude of the Egyptians towards the expedition was entirely erroneous, is clearly evident from the whole tone of the proclamation. Thoroughly well-informed as he appears to have been, as to the actual state of the country and the deplorable misgovernment from which it was suffering, he and his countrymen seem to have jumped to the conclusion that they would be received and welcomed by the people as deliverers. That they should have so thought is a very noticeable fact, for it plainly proves that all the information that they had received, including that furnished by the Consul Magallon and other French residents, afforded no ground for any suspicion that the French would incur any risk or danger from fanaticism on the part of the people. That they were keenly awake to the absolute necessity of conciliating the intense attachment of the Egyptians to their faith, is not more clearly evident than is the fact that they had no conception of hostile fanaticism as a factor to be considered in their relations with the people. It was with self-satisfied bigotry and not fanaticism that Bonaparte considered he had to deal, and as we shall see in the course of our story, he was so far perfectly correct. But in arguing from this assumption, he was led by ignorance of the facts with which he had to deal, to absolutely erroneous conclusions. The

fundamental error into which he fell is one that, notwithstanding the warning his experience might have conveyed, was repeated by ourselves in the beginning of the present occupation of the country, and distinguishes even the recommendations of the brilliant statesman, Lord Dufferin. This error was the assumption that a people so sorely oppressed and downtrodden as were the Egyptians could not fail to be grateful and friendly to any one who should deliver them from their oppressors, yet it needed but a slight acquaintance with the people, with the evils from which they suffered, and the light in which they regarded those evils, to show that this could not be so. As we have seen, the dominant trait of the Egyptians' character was, and is, their loyalty to Islam, and, as a consequence, their fidelity to the Sultan. Knowing nothing of the Christian religion or of the political condition of Christendom, they looked with contempt upon Christians generally as in every way their inferiors, and recalling how great but unavailing had been the struggle of the Christians for the possession of the Holy Land, they regarded their long abstention from all further effort for its conquest, as a proof and tacit admission of their inability to face the armies of the Sultan. Thus the Egyptians of that day, as indeed the great mass of them still do, believed the Sultan to be the greatest and most powerful monarch in the world. That his rule in Egypt was little more than nominal they did not perceive. In their eyes it was a real and substantial power. That they should thus be blind to what seems to us self-evident truth, is largely to be attributed to the

fact that almost all that was done in the country, was done in the name of the Sultan. It was in his name and, as they were often assured, by his authority that the taxes and exactions by which they were ruined were imposed; and since Beys, Ulema, and all who represented these, were never tired of preaching that all resistance or disobedience was rebellion against the Sultan, it was but natural that they should regard his rule as very far indeed from being the mere fiction it in reality was.

Nor did the tyranny and oppression from which they suffered in the least militate against their loyalty, for they never for a moment attributed their woes or troubles to any more distant cause than the officials by whose immediate action they were inflicted. That the higher officials did not protect them was, as they thought, due solely to the misrepresentations, indifference, or ill-faith of those through whom alone they had access to them. There was not a fellah in the land in those days, nor is there one to-day, that did not or does not believe that if he could only lay his grievances before the Sultan or the Khedive in person, he would receive perfect justice and ample compensation for all his tribulations. They were confirmed in this opinion by the nature of the oppression from which they suffered, for this necessarily varied in different places and at different times, according to the personal character of the officials through or by whom it was inflicted. Moreover, among the worst of their tyrants of high degree, however callous these might be to the miseries of the people, there were but few, indeed, who did not

consider it a matter of policy, and therefore in some measure one of pleasure, to pose now and then as a minister of justice, or as a benevolent benefactor. To render justice to the poor and oppressed, and to be profuse in liberality, have ever been the surest means of gaining the real and sincere approbation or devotion of the Egyptians, as of all other Oriental peoples. None knew this fact or appreciated it more thoroughly than some of those from whose heartless cruelty they suffered most. Nor was it difficult in the roughly organised administration of the country, for the worst of their oppressors to play the part of an innocent victim of the wrong-doing of others, for when appealed to, the higher officials threw the blame upon their subordinates, while these in their turn professed to be the unwilling but helpless agents of their superiors. Thus finding all complaints useless, the sufferers always nourished the thought that if they could only plead their case personally to the Sultan, the one and only person who could not urge his own impotency to remedy the evils they complained of, or grant them the relief they sought, they would be assured of the justice and mercy they so sorely needed, and which they could gain from no other. That this should be their idea is not surprising, for they have never as yet risen beyond the idea of personal government, and therefore while their belief in the immaculate justice and merciful disposition of the Sultan was liberally fed and encouraged by all around them, even by those from whose tyranny and greed they suffered most, they attributed his evident indifference to their griefs to the impossibility of

his knowing and dealing with all the acts of all the officials of his Empire. Of an organised system of government, in which the controlling power is able to exert itself through all grades of its officials from the highest downwards to the lowest, they had no knowledge, and indeed could have no conception, nor even in the present day, after more than twenty years' experience of the working of such a Government, have they any just idea of its organisation or of the principles or methods upon which its efficiency is based. Nor did the Egyptians see the cruelty and tyranny from which they suffered from the same point of view as the French did, or as we do. However limited and imperfect were the services that the Government rendered them, they were conscious that they were in some respects dependent upon it. It at least afforded them a certain amount of protection for life and property, and gave them a rude system of justice. As a return for these benefits they admitted its right to tax them, and being thus entitled to tax them, it naturally, as it seemed to them, taxed them to the uttermost penny, while they as naturally paid as little as possible.

It was simply a contest between the Government and the governing, not unlike the bargaining that was their sole method of carrying on trade in the bazaars and markets, and they had and could have no conception of any other manner in which the Government of a country could be conducted. It was not possible, therefore, for the people to grasp the ideas Bonaparte was anxious to press upon them, nor was it possible that during

his short stay in Alexandria they should have any opportunity of gaining a better comprehension of his Republican ideals, so utterly at conflict with all their conceptions of the relations of a people with those who governed them. It is true, that having confirmed Mahomed Kerim as Governor of the town, Bonaparte had appointed a Dewan, or Council of seven members, to aid in the administration of its affairs; and to these he, no doubt, gave sage advice and strict injunctions as to the duty of governing for the benefit of the people; but while to him this Council was suggestive of the Directory of Paris, and thus of the spirit of the Republic, to the Alexandrians it was but a reproduction of the Dewan at Cairo, which to them was typical of nothing but tyranny and torture. Further, the strict discipline necessarily enforced upon all the members of the expedition, and rendered all the more evident and striking, in that all ranks were ceaselessly engaged in the work of receiving the stores from the ships and preparing for the advance, when contrasted with the laxity that prevailed in the ranks of the Mamaluks and of all other troops that the people had previously had any knowledge of, was not at all calculated to point with any but sarcastic emphasis the doctrines of equality and fraternity presented to them.

And not only the spirit, but even the wording of the proclamation, was fatal to its success. In it Bonaparte had declared that "all men are equal in the sight of God." This, to Mahomedan ears, was nothing short of rank and absolute blasphemy, for the Koran, which to the Mahomedan is the

veritable and literal "Word of God," emphatically asserts, and in the plainest terms, the contrary. This clause was, therefore, in itself sufficient to stamp the whole document with impotency, and showed how imperfectly Bonaparte and his advisers were informed on some of the points most affecting the sentiments and spirit of the people. To the Moslem all mankind is divided into two classes – the Moslems and the non-Moslems. Between these they admit of no equality whatever. Among themselves they are theoretically equal. As a Moslem the Sultan himself is no more than his meanest servant. Hence the democratic spirit that exists everywhere in Islam, and hence the freedom with which servants and even slaves address their masters. But in contradiction to this, the man who rules, whether as Sultan or as his deputy, or in any minor degree as the master of a household or otherwise, is, from the mere fact of his ruling, regarded as being invested with a Divine right to do so, since, although one subject to limitations, it is equally a doctrine of the Koran, that all power is from God, and therefore to be respected as such. Thus in Islam democracy and despotism go hand in hand; and while the Moslem of Egypt, as the Moslem of other lands, sees no incongruity or difficulty in this, to the European mind the concurrent operation of these two conflicting theories gives rise to many puzzling problems. Yet the solution is simple enough, for the democracy of Islam is the democracy of the grave, the recognition of the truth that all must die, and that in death all are equal; for though this belief be shared by all men as the one great truism of life, among Mahomedans

everywhere there is an active sense of its verity that ever present with them modifies all their views of life and death in a manner wholly foreign to the European mind.

To the Egyptians, therefore, the proclamation was a mere flood of futile folly, and so little confidence was placed in its promises or in the French protestations of amity, that many of the people who could afford to do so made haste to quit the town and seek shelter in Rosetta or elsewhere, wherever they could speed by boat or by land as opportunity offered.

CHAPTER VI

A LONG MARCH AND A SHORT BATTLE

That the advance to Cairo might be made as rapidly as possible, Bonaparte decided that the bulk of his army should proceed direct to Damanhour, a town thirty-three miles to the south of Alexandria, and on the most direct road to the capital. As it would have been most difficult to convey the heavy baggage of the expedition by this route, lying as it did across desert and inhospitable lands, General Dugua was commissioned to proceed by the longer but more practical and agreeable one, usually adopted by the people of the country. This led by Rosetta, a town situated four miles from the sea on the west bank of the Nile, and forty-five miles from Alexandria. Thence as soon as the town had been effectively occupied the General, accompanied by a flotilla of boats, which were to be sent round from Alexandria as transports for the troops and stores, was to proceed up the Nile to Ramanieh, where his division was to meet the main army under the immediate command of Bonaparte.

Short as was the distance to Damanhour, the march over the barren, burning desert was a most trying one for the troops of the expedition, who suffered severely from the want of food and water. Meat and bread were alike unobtainable, and the famished

soldiers at the end of their day's march had to satisfy their hunger with rude cakes of grain crushed between stones and roughly baked on open fires. Nor did their arrival at Damanhour bring them any very sensible relief or encouragement, for there, as everywhere on their advance, the plain evidence the miserable homes of the people afforded of the chronic poverty in which they lived, was such as to wholly damp the ardour of the troops and fill them with dismay at the prospect of a sojourn and campaign in such an inhospitable country. Fortunately for them it was the season of the water-melons, and on these and the coarse cakes of bread I have mentioned they had to support the fatigues of their march as best they might. To add to their distress, small parties of Arabs hovered perpetually around the wretched column and, while keeping at a safe distance from the main body, lost no opportunity of slaughtering every weary straggler who got separated from his companions.

These Arabs were all Bedouins, or nomadic Arabs belonging to tribes inhabiting the deserts that skirt the Delta and valley of the Nile, and, possessing all the characteristics of their race, were nothing more than restless, roving bands of robbers, ever ready to prey upon all unhappy enough to fall into their hands. Arabs by race and Mahomedans by religion, they yet acknowledged no ties of kinship or brotherhood outside of their own tribes, and were as ready to plunder, ill-use, and massacre the Egyptians as the French, or to unite with either against the other as the interest of the moment might dictate. In attacking the French, therefore,

they were actuated by no other desire than that of securing the spoil of arms and other loot to be reaped from the bodies of their victims.

Of the people of the country the French during their advance saw almost nothing; for fearing, not only the loss of everything they possessed, but that they themselves might be seized and compelled to work as slaves in the service of the army or be sent for sale in foreign lands, and dreading that their women would be outraged and their children massacred, they had, at the first warning of the approach of the French enemy, hastened to forsake their homes and seek safety in distant towns or villages, taking with them their flocks and herds and as much as possible of their portable property.

After spending a couple of nights at Damanhour in taking the rest it so badly needed, the army set out for Ramanieh by a route leading almost at right angles to that which they had been following. On the way they fell in with a small party of the Mamaluks, with which they had a brief skirmish, Bonaparte himself narrowly escaping capture while separated, with a few attendants, from the main column of the force. At Ramanieh the army again halted for a rest and to await the arrival of the division for Rosetta.

Meanwhile General Dugua, with the force under his command, had arrived at Rosetta. This town, now fallen into decay and yearly decreasing in population, was then a place of considerable importance, owing to its position at the mouth of the

Nile, and the fact of its being the chosen terminus of the journey by boat of those travelling between Cairo and Alexandria. In many ways one of the most pleasant spots in the whole of Egypt, surrounded by gardens and cultivation, and having markets well filled with all the produce of the country, it was at that time probably of all the towns of Egypt the one most attractive to foreigners.

Here as in other parts of the country there was a small colony of Christians, including some few Europeans, and when the fugitives from Alexandria began to arrive with the news of the landing of the French and their occupation of that town, these were thrown into a state of the greatest alarm by the prompt outbreak of a fanatical cry for their assassination. There were in the town a number of Candiotes who had been drawn to it by the fact that the acting Governor was a countryman of theirs, and these had brought with them the fanatical spirit common in their own country. It was among these that the demand for a massacre of the Christians was started, and the Governor himself appears to have been favourable to the project, which was in fact one of plunder rather than of murder, conceived in the hope that it would provide the Candiotes with an opportunity of enriching themselves safe from all danger of retribution. That the Egyptians did not readily accept the proposal is clear, as otherwise it would undoubtedly have been put into immediate practice. Happily for the Christians the opposition offered was strong enough to delay the carrying out of the plan

the turbulent bigots had formed. The matter was still being heatedly discussed when messengers arrived from Alexandria with copies of Bonaparte's proclamation. These testified that so far the people of that town had not only received generous treatment from the French, but were being liberally paid for all that the French required from them.

The assurances they thus received that they had nothing to fear as to the safety of their lives or property were accepted by the people of Rosetta with the thoughtless impulsiveness of the true Egyptian. From a condition of panic and despair they passed at a bound to one of scarcely doubting satisfaction. Difficult as it may be for us to realise it, this was but the natural consequence of the character of the people and of the circumstances in which they lived. As we have seen, their rulers, the Mamaluks, were foreigners, to whom they were united by no ties, whom they hated and feared, and from whom they could expect no benefit or advantage of any kind. When, therefore, they learned upon the testimony of their own countrymen the generous behaviour of the French to their vanquished enemy, they had reason rather to welcome than to oppose them, their hostility to the idea of being ruled by Christians being for the moment wholly outweighed by the rapture of their release from appalling alarm.

The panic that had arisen being thus allayed the counsels of the tolerant Egyptians were promptly accepted, and so heartily was the suggestion of an attack upon the Christians repudiated by the people in general, that the Governor and some others who

had been foremost in the agitation for the massacre hastened to leave the town, and set out to join the forces of the Mamaluks. As soon as their departure became known it was decided to offer no opposition to the French, and when, therefore, General Dugua approached he was met by a deputation which presented the keys of the town to him, and gave him an assurance of the peaceful disposition of the inhabitants.

Of the attitude of the people of Alexandria and Rosetta towards the French after their first glad acceptance of the terms accorded them, we can learn little from the native historians; it is not, however, difficult to conceive what that attitude really was. Assured for the time of the peaceful possession of their lives and property, and freed from the terrors that had assailed them at the first coming of the enemy, they were in no mood to criticise or question the good faith of the newcomers, but as their feelings regained their wonted calm doubts began to arise. It was to them an altogether unheard-of thing that a military force should occupy a country and not at once seize upon its wealth, or at least exact tribute of some kind or other from the people. Nor could they forget that the Mamaluks when moving in the country, alike in time of peace or in time of war, ruthlessly took all they needed as a right to which they were entitled. How came it, then, that the French not only did not despoil them, but paid and paid well for what they required? Why should they pay when they could if they would help themselves freely? That, in the abstract, it was but justice the people knew well enough, but

that any people could possess so keen a sense of justice as to thus conciliate its claims they could not understand, for, after all, they could not but regard it as a voluntary foregoing of what seemed to them a clearly defined and evident right. Hence they were not long in coming to the conclusion that the forbearance of the French might be a mere trick to enable them to more effectually carry out some deep-laid scheme for the complete spoliation of the people. But the honest man has an inborn sense of the false and true that is seldom misled. Rogues batten upon rogues. And the Egyptian, by nature honest in thought and deed, is not slow to recognise honesty in others, so the straightforward sincerity of the French beat back his doubts; and baffled and perplexed he took refuge in a halting attitude, a kind of moral armed neutrality, neither fully accepting nor yet rejecting their proffered friendship. As to the French, though they could not but be conscious that they had not been received with the open arms they had expected to greet them, and were sensible that the people were acting under some restraint, they had no just conception of the real position, and believed that only a little time was needed to enable them to gain the full confidence of the people.

On the whole, therefore, things went smoothly enough in the early days of the occupation, and General Dugua lost no time in establishing at Rosetta a provisional administration on the lines of that set up by Bonaparte in Alexandria. This having been done the work of preparing a flotilla for the ascent of the Nile was

carried on with the utmost despatch. It took but a few days to do all that was necessary, and General Dugua, leaving a small force as a garrison, started with the division under his command for Ramanieh, which he reached without encountering any difficulty or opposition.

From Ramanieh the French army continued its advance upon Cairo, and keeping always within touch of the west bank of the Nile, was accompanied by the flotilla laden with the stores and provisions. As is usual at that time of the year, the ascent of the river was facilitated by the strong winds which blow across the country and up the river with a strength more than sufficient to counteract the swift downward flow of the stream. Coming from the north these winds naturally tend to moderate the temperature, but though thus beneficial to the troops, who had already suffered so much from the parching heat of the desert, they proved an unexpected source of danger, for, its progress exceeding that of the troops, the flotilla unexpectedly encountered near Shebriss a fleet of gunboats from Cairo that, borne by the downward current of the river, was approaching it at a speed not less than its own, and was supported on either bank of the river by large bodies of the Mamaluks. The French finding themselves thus running right into the midst of their enemies, while their own troops were as yet too far behind to succour them, the boats of the flotilla were hastily anchored in the positions they happened to occupy at the moment. A brisk engagement followed, in which the invaders were so sorely pressed that had not the explosion

of a powder magazine on one of the Egyptian boats suddenly thrown the enemy into confusion, it is more than probable the whole flotilla would have fallen into the hands of the Egyptians. As it was, several of the French boats were captured, and their crews either driven into the river or ruthlessly cut down, and their decapitated heads exposed to the horrified gaze of their companions. So evident was the danger that pressed them that Bertillon, one of the *savants* who accompanied the force, began to fill his pockets with stones gathered from the ballast of the boat in which he happened to be, and when asked why he did so replied that he might sink rapidly rather than fall into the hands of the enemy. Fortunately for the French, ere the Egyptians had recovered from the confusion the explosion had created the fall of night put an end to the contest.

Meanwhile, intelligence of what was happening having been sent to Bonaparte, he had hastened to the aid of the flotilla, but only succeeded in reaching it too late to take any part in the battle. Early the next morning, however, the two armies were drawn up in battle array, and the Mamaluks, with the fearless and impetuous bravery which had always been characteristic of them, lost no time in opening the attack and charged right up to the French line. Their accustomed dash and reckless courage proved, however, of no avail, and they were speedily repulsed by the veterans to whom they were opposed, who kept their ranks unbroken, and waited for the near approach of their foes to pour upon them a galling and destructive fire. Baffled by the

stolid calmness of the French, and puzzled by the impotency of their own wild charge, the Mamaluks hastily withdrew beyond the French line of fire and halted, apparently uncertain what course to pursue. In the pause that followed an incident occurred curiously illustrating the widely different ideas and spirit by which the two armies were animated. One of the Mamaluk Beys rode unaccompanied towards the French line, and boldly challenged his foes to single combat; but, for the French at all events, as a French historian cynically remarks, the time for such chivalrous exploits was past, and to the disgrace of the French the daring Mamaluk was shot down on the spot. Discomfited by the repulse they had sustained and with the whole of their forces thrown into disorder, the Mamaluk chiefs decided to abandon the field, and turning their horses' heads retreated precipitately towards Cairo.

Thenceforth the expedition continued its advance without further opposition until within sight of Cairo, always keeping close to the river, not only for the sake of the water, but for that of the more abundant supplies obtainable in its vicinity, and for the mutual support of the army and the flotilla. To carry out these latter objects more effectually a strong detachment was sent across the river to guard the east bank, and to forage in the villages of the Delta. On both sides of the river the troops continued to be harassed by small parties of the Bedouins, who, following all their movements, availed themselves of every opportunity of cutting off stragglers. One of these raiding parties

having surprised a junior officer, whom from his uniform and appearance they mistakenly supposed to be a man of high rank, carried him into their camp with a view to holding him for ransom. Bonaparte at once sent a messenger to offer a few guineas for his release. Thereupon a dispute arose among his captors as to which of them should receive the ransom, and was continued so heatedly that the chief of the party, enraged at their obstinacy, declaring that none of them should have it, shot the unfortunate prisoner and sent the ransom back.

As the force moved onwards towards Cairo the heat became daily more and more oppressive and enervating to the troops, to whom, fresh from the genial spring climate of Southern Europe, the fierce and dazzling glare of the sun in the shelterless lands through which their route lay, was little short of an agonising misery. To add to their sufferings the food obtainable was, as before, neither adequate nor adapted to their needs.

It was not until the 20th of July that the army caught its first sight of the pyramids and of the Mokattam hills overhanging the city of Cairo. As they had drawn nearer the capital, the evidence of a greatly increased density of population, and the greater abundance and variety of the supplies they had been able to secure, gave the jaded troops fresh energy and hope. They were still much more than a long day's march from the pyramids when Bonaparte received intelligence that the Mamaluk army was encamped at Embabeh, a village on the west bank of the river, at the spot where it is now crossed by the railway bridge. As

it was then evening the army was halted and bivouacked for the night at the hamlet of Om el Dinar, but only to rise and resume its march before the first dawn of day. Animated by the prospect of the combat now but a few hours before them, and which, as they confidently expected, was to gain them a fair reward for all the hardships they had been enduring, the troops pressed onward eager for battle, but it was not until two o'clock in the afternoon that at the end of a twelve hours' march, they found themselves in touch with the enemy.

Learning that the Mamaluks had entrenched themselves in front of the village of Embabeh, and had planted a battery of forty guns in position behind their trenches, Bonaparte decided that it would be necessary to advance in such a way as to be able to attack the enemy's position upon its flanks, and he therefore so disposed his forces that, each division marching in the form of a hollow square, the whole would approach the enemy's position in the form of a crescent, and so that, while the right and left wings would threaten the Mamaluks' flanks, the centre would be prepared to repulse the front attack he expected them to make according to their custom.

Murad Bey, who, with his long white beard covering his breast, was in personal command of the Mamaluks, was not slow to detect the aim of the French General, and quickly ordered Eyoub Bey, one of the best and bravest of the Mamaluk commanders, to advance and attack the division of General Desaix, who was moving round towards the west with a view to

outflanking the left wing of the Egyptian position. Eyoub, who had under him a large and fearless, but wholly undisciplined, body of cavalry, at once bore straight down on the French without seeking cover of any kind, and, when within charging distance, dashed upon the French square with the wild cries, brandishing of arms, and tumultuous crowding customary to all Oriental warfare of that day.

Faithful to the orders they had received, the French withheld their fire until the enemy were close upon them, so close that the ruthless rending of the ranks of the Mamaluks by the fierce hail of shot poured upon them was all insufficient to stay their headlong charge, which, bearing down the resistance of their foes, carried them into the centre of the broken square. But the French veterans, always cool and prompt, turned about, and the Mamaluks, finding themselves encircled by their enemies' fire, fought their way back and out of the square, but only to bring themselves under a heavy crossfire from the square and the division of General Kleber, who was moving up to its support. Eyoub's party being thus routed, the French made a direct attack in force upon the entrenched position in front of the village of Embabeh and carried it at the bayonet's point, while the divisions forming the left wing of the attack pushed on between the village and the river. The Mamaluks were thus caught between the horns of a crescent that was threatening to close and entirely surround them. Seeing the danger, Murad Bey at once withdrew his men, and sought the scanty shelter of a grove of date-trees at a little

distance from the village. In doing this he was compelled to leave behind him some hundreds of the Mamaluk troops who, caught between the French and the river, utterly unable to defend themselves or to fly, were deliberately shot down by the French or perished in an attempt to escape across the river. As one historian says, it was no longer a fight but a massacre; and thus ingloriously ended what is termed by the Egyptians the "Battle of Embabeh," and by the French the "Battle of the Pyramids," a battle by which the power of the Mamaluks was shattered, and Bonaparte was left for the moment master of Egypt; a battle in which the steady discipline of modern warfare proved once and for all its immeasurable superiority over the wild chivalry of the past; a battle which, apart from this and the vast consequences that have resulted from its issue, is scarcely worthy of remembrance.

The whole combat had lasted rather less than an hour, and when it was over the French soldiers, forgetting their fatigues and weariness, turned the field into a vast mart, bartering and selling the spoils of rich armour, weapons, apparel and other things they were able to reap from the bodies of their vanquished foes.

Murad Bey, finding it impossible to recover his position, and that his forces were too disorganised and dismayed by a system of warfare so strange and incomprehensible to them to make any further effort, abandoned the field and hastened away to his summer palace at Ghizeh, whence, after collecting his most portable valuables, he set out for Upper Egypt.

The justice that never fails had thus overtaken the iniquities

of the Mamaluks. For centuries they had desolated the land, sacrificing all else to their own ambitious greed, and now they were "shattered and broken," never again to recover. For a short time they were to struggle and hope vainly for a return to power, but it was not to be. The fiat of Heaven itself was against them, and the decree of their doom went forth as infinitely more inexorable than the laws of the Medes and the Persians as Omnipotence is to impotency. Some years afterwards, when the British were encamped upon the banks of the Nile near Beni Souif, a poor, half-blind, wholly-destitute fugitive sought protection and a pittance at their hands. It was Ibrahim, the last of the great Mamaluk Beys, a man by no means typical of the baser of his class, with many faults, yet with some good points, one who under happier circumstances might have left an honourable record of service for the welfare of his fellow-men. As it was, his fate was but a part of the answer of that wrath that had at last heard the cry of the distressed, and avenged the wrongs of the widow and the orphan.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER THE BATTLE

Before leaving Cairo to meet and oppose the French advance, Murad Bey had arranged that a large chain was to be stretched, as a boom, across the river, and batteries erected upon the adjacent shore to play upon the enemy in the confusion he anticipated would arise from their meeting with this obstacle. It was not, however, until the news of the defeat of the Mamaluks at Shebriss had thrown the capital into the utmost confusion, that any serious efforts were made to prepare the defences of the city. When that news came to the people, who had been looking forward to receiving tidings of the destruction of the French, then Ibrahim Bey and Bekir Pacha, filled with alarm at this first note of disaster, jointly called upon the whole population to take up arms and hasten to the riverside for the defence of their homes and families. Weapons and ammunition were served out as long as they could be got to all comers, and when the supply of deadlier arms ran short, the deficiency was made good in intention, if not in fact, by the distribution of naboots, long staffs of hard wood, which the Egyptians of the lower classes are accustomed to use much as our distant forebears used their quarter-staffs. Other impromptu weapons were provided by the people themselves, such as knives lashed to the end of long sticks, this primitive arm

which could be either wielded as a lance or thrown as a javelin being destined at a later date to deprive the French of one of their ablest generals.

Cairo was at that time separated from the river by an open stretch of ground, now covered by the avenues lined by the villas and mansions that form the Kasr el Aini and Ismailia quarters of the town. At the north end of this space was the small town of Boulac, which served as the port of the city then as it still does. This was the spot chosen by Ibrahim Bey as the headquarters for the defence of the town, and here and around the people were gathered, and quantities of stores and ammunition of every kind collected, whatever was needed or desired, if not found in the magazines of the State, being seized without ceremony wherever it could be got. For several days the space between the two towns was covered with the crowds coming and going, engaged in the transport of the various materials required; and so great was the haste to finish the work and the desire to help it on, that men of almost all degrees assisted in the task. As it was impossible to find accommodation for everybody at Boulac, a large number of the people returned to their homes in the city to pass the night and gain well-earned repose, but only to return at the first dawn of day. Unwonted and severe as was the labour they had to undergo, all worked not only willingly but with the greatest enthusiasm, and with all the needless noise and tumult that is a never-failing part of any exertion the Egyptian worker is called upon to make. Not unnaturally the workers encouraged

each other by vaunting cries of contempt and derision for the enemy they were expecting, and thus incurred the censure of the Egyptian historian Gabarty, who condemns such conduct as lacking in the dignity that should distinguish the defence of Islam.

The Ulema, who, like the Druids of old, have always been exempt from military service and taxation, were like them, not backward in encouraging others in their toil or in assisting in such ways and manners as befitted their character. Very properly they busied themselves especially in prayer, and at all the stated hours of worship offered up fervent supplications to the Deity for protection and victory, and, the children of all the schools being under their charge, they gathered these and led them in processions reciting invocations suited to the occasion.

The dervishes, or, as they are often incorrectly termed, the "Monks of Islam," who are in reality simply members of lay confraternities, such as those of the Catholic Church, also assembled themselves and paraded the streets flying their banners and accompanied by the weird Arab music of pipes and drums that, unwelcome to European ears, has a strange fascination for the Arab and Egyptian, and, like the "Ça ira" or "Marseillaise" in the streets of Paris, fills its hearers with a fierce longing for action and excitement, a wild craving to be up and doing they know not what, or why.

Some of the wealthier citizens left the town to seek refuge in the neighbouring villages, others simply sent their families and

valuables away and joined the gathering at Boulac, and the town being thus practically deserted – even the Sheikhs el Harah, petty officials appointed in all the quarters of the town to look after public order, being engaged at Boulac – the streets, which in ordinary times were swept and watered daily, were neglected, and business of every kind being of necessity at a standstill, the poorer classes, who lived from hand to mouth on their daily earnings, no longer finding any employment, were driven by sheer starvation to seek in robbery and crime a means of living.

The Dewan having been broken up by the departure of Murad Bey and others of the Mamaluk chiefs, no regular council could be held; but Bekir Pacha, with some of the Ulema and leading men who remained, held frequent consultations and were in constant communication with Ibrahim Bey, who remained at Boulac day and night to supervise the work there and along the river, by the side of which batteries were being erected for a distance of nearly three miles north of Boulac.

Ibrahim Bey appears to the last to have preserved his confidence in the certainty of the Mamaluks proving victorious, but Bekir Pacha, when the news of the near approach of the French was received, decided in conjunction with some of the Ulema to make an attempt to treat with the enemy. With this object in view they sent for a Monsieur Bandeuf, who was regarded as the leader of the French colony, and begged him to tell them candidly what he thought was the object of the invasion. He, of course, was no better informed upon this point than they

were themselves, but he could at least form an idea, and his reply was that he believed it most likely the French desired nothing more than a free passage through the country to enable them to proceed to India to join their countrymen there in their struggle with the English. Accepting this as, at least, a possibly true explanation of the invasion, they proposed to Monsieur Bandeuf that he should go as an envoy from them to Bonaparte, and assure him of their willingness to facilitate him in every way if such were his object. Not without some hesitation occasioned by his fear that it would not be possible for him to reach the French camp in safety, Monsieur Bandeuf consented to do this, and was preparing to set out, with an escort of the Mamaluks of Ibrahim Bey for his protection, when the reverberations of the cannon at Embabeh were heard, and they realised that it was too late for such an embassy as they had proposed.

As soon as Ibrahim Bey heard the commencement of the battle he began to take such steps as he could to forward assistance to Murad Bey, but long before any effective move in that direction could be made the battle was over, and Ibrahim Bey, hearing of the flight of Murad, hastened back to Cairo with Bekir Pacha, to take their families and valuables and flee.

Words fail to describe the panic that overwhelmed the people. Utterly helpless, and unaccustomed to think or act for themselves, unarmed and without any possible means of defence, they saw themselves, deserted by their leaders, at the mercy of a foe from whom, as they thought, they could expect no

quarter and no pity, while the military force, in the protection of which they had felt such unbounded confidence, was in full flight leaving them to their fate. To any unwarlike and helpless people to be thus suddenly abandoned as a prey to an unknown foe must have seemed an appalling disaster, but in this case no circumstance seems to have been wanting that could by any possibility add to the natural terror of the people at the calamity that had so suddenly befallen them. In less than an hour they were plunged from an exulting ecstasy of triumphant anticipation to the crushing despondency of the direst despair. The consternation that had been occasioned by the first news of the defeat of the Mamaluks at Shebriss had been largely, if not wholly, dissipated by the representations of the Mamaluks, and so loud and blatant were the vauntings of the people that Gabarty, whose Arab blood had but little sympathy for any open expression of the emotions, speaks in the most contemptuous terms of their conduct as wholly unworthy of a people deserving of any esteem. Nor had the Mamaluks, knowing well how little love the people bore them, neglected to contribute all they could to their fear of the French by attributing to these the lust of rapine and bloodthirsty cruelty. And with the news of the defeat and flight of Murad Bey came the tale of the slaughter of the Mamaluks by the riverside to confirm and augment the worst fears of the people. Later on reports were spread that the French were still busy slaying and destroying all before them, and, Ibrahim Bey having ordered the burning of all the boats

to prevent the French using them to cross the river, the people, ignorant of this, took the dense columns of smoke arising from the riverside as confirmation of the ruthless ravage the French were said to be wrecking. In the dire madness of the despair that seized them no room was left for any other thoughts than those of self-preservation, and, as the evening closed in and night fell, the whole population, laden with all they could carry of their goods or wealth, streamed out of the city gates. In the maddened rush for safety, all the claims of blood and friendship were forgotten, and men and women alike, frantic from their fears, fought their way through the fleeing crowds heedless of parents, wives, brothers, sisters.

More than one writer has taken this wild exodus as a text to accuse the people of cowardice. Nothing could be more unjust. They were flying from what to them was a very real and immediate danger, and for the most part on foot from mounted foes. They could see no other choice but fly or die, and the darkness of the night, the suddenness of the danger, everything helped to urge them onward. Not more sure was Christian that he was fleeing from the City of Destruction than were they. It was a panic such as seizes a people with all the more uncontrollable force in that it comes as a sudden revulsion from peaceful ease; one such as those that in our own days in London, Paris, New York, and San Francisco have turned laughing, joyous crowds of pleasure-seekers into mobs of frenzied fugitives. When in the days of the dynamite scare in London the crash of the Scotland

Yard explosion was heard in the Strand, men dashed here and there for safety from the danger that had passed. Not long after I saw a roomful of men hurl themselves headlong down a narrow flight of stairs, fleeing madly from the report of a detonating cigar! I have seen panic seize a thousand emigrants on board a German ship in mid-ocean; another, the pilgrims for Mecca on an Austrian ship in Bombay Harbour; another, the coolies working on the Hurnai Railway in Beloochistan. In these cases the panic-creating danger was an imaginary one, and yet in real danger these same victims of panic remained calm and collected. It was so, as we shall have occasion to see, with the unhappy Cairenes.

I have spoken already of the fears that the coming of the French had awakened in the hearts of the people, and to the Cairenes it must have seemed on that most miserable of nights as if the realisation of all the worst of those fears was but the question of a few moments. As the evening had fallen had they not seen the columns of flame-emblazoned smoke that to them were a proof of the ferocious fury of the foe? Had they not seen the Mamaluk Chiefs, the bravest of the brave, fleeing for life with breathless haste? With no arms, no leaders, nothing but instant flight as the only means of safety they could conceive, surely a people who had not been panic-stricken in such dire peril would have been a nation of heroes such as the world has never yet seen!

But if safety for them lay outside the city, it was not beneath its walls, for there the Bedouin tribesmen, whom Ibrahim Bey had

summoned to assist him in the defence of the town, disappointed of the plunder of the French army to which they had looked forward as their only inducement to take part in the contest, with untroubled consciences turned to the pillage of the unhappy fugitives as a heaven-sent compensation for their unrealised hopes. Nor were they content with the rich plunder that thus easily fell into their hands, but with wanton savagery murdered the men and outraged and slew the women. Thus finding at the hands of their co-religionists, who had been summoned for their defence, no better mercy than the unrestrained cruelty they feared from the French, the unhappy people, or at least so many of them as escaped from the Bedouins, returned to their homes, while the Mamaluk Chiefs and their followers rode away through the desert indifferent to the fate of all they had left behind them.

Meanwhile the French army, after a short rest, had advanced along the left bank of the river as far as Ghizeh, a village lying in the line between the city and the pyramids, where Bonaparte decided to encamp. On their way from Embabeh the troops had an opportunity of seeing across the river the town of Cairo and the nearly mile-wide stretch of open land lying between, studded with the gardens and summer residences of some of the wealthier of the Beys. Elated by their victory, and perhaps still more so by the rich loot they had gleaned from the dead bodies of their fallen foes, they forgot the fatigues of their long advance, and set themselves to enjoy the rest they so much needed and the comparatively luxurious fare they expected to compensate them

for all the hardships they had endured. Many were the castles that rose in the air as they sat around the bivouac fires, and joked and jested until, wearied by the labours of the day, "Nature's soft nurse" lulled them to the repose she withheld from their vanquished enemies.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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