

Danger

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A grave danger indeed is this that now besets the political relationship between Egypt and England in these days, thanks to the question of proselytising and the missionaries — for this question has begun to be pushed out of its natural condition into another, one into which the English drive it with all the skill and cunning they possess for seizing opportunities and exploiting circumstances to serve their own ends and secure what they desire. Certain foreigners have transgressed, and perhaps continue to transgress, against the Egyptians in their children and their weak, turning them away from their faith — be that faith Islam or Orthodox Christianity — by temptation and intimidation, by enticement and coercion. The Egyptians, one and all, denounced this transgression, and have not ceased to denounce it; the Egyptians, one and all, pressed the government, and have not ceased to press it, to take the shortest path, and the one most befitting right, justice, dignity, and the public good, toward halting this transgression and closing off its way. And the government, under the pressure of popular insistence and by order of His Majesty the King, was compelled to take certain measures toward achieving what was demanded of it, while remaining powerless, until now, to take certain others.

The natural state of this question, then, is that it should remain exactly as it now stands: a people demanding protection for freedom of belief, and a government doing what it can to fulfil some part of what the people want. But the English made haste to draw this question out of that state into another. Their Foreign Secretary declared in the House of Commons some weeks ago that he had authorised the High Commissioner to speak to the Egyptian government concerning the supervision of proselytising and the missionaries. This means nothing less than that England has installed herself as guarantor of the rights of the foreigners she defends — and thus it is refused to the Egyptian government to supervise the missionaries, or rather, it may do so only with the missionaries' own permission.

We denounced this, and drew the government's attention to it, and waited for the government to say some word on the matter, long or short, strong or weak, and to take up toward it a firm stand that would preserve

for Egypt her right to protect her own people from foreign transgression — for the Egyptians want nothing but that their government protect them from the transgression of foreigners against them, and it is the Egyptians who stand in need of protection, since they are exposed to the danger of sedition in matters of faith, indeed already fallen into it. But the government said nothing and did nothing, save for the matter of the orphanages and institutes, which is a purely social matter — one that the government ought to have taken up, and still ought to take up, whether or not missionaries exist, whether or not the aggression of missionaries has occurred, since among the first duties of government in a country like Egypt is to spend of the people's wealth to shelter the orphans, the weak, the poor, and the destitute among the sons of the people, and to protect them from hunger, homelessness, and deprivation.

The government, then, gave no answer on the matter of the orphanages, nor on the expulsion of a certain missionary woman from Egypt, and the government said nothing, then, of what we had asked it to say. The English, for their part, spoke and acted. Their Foreign Secretary said what he said in the House of Commons, and the European Director of Public Security bestirred himself with a strange energy in the protection of the missionaries.

And now here we are, reading a long piece published by the Daily Telegraph from its political correspondent, containing detail, explanation, and confirmation of what the Foreign Secretary had summarised: that the English government wishes to open negotiations with Egypt, and with the other states concerned with the missionaries, to organise whatever supervision may be imposed upon these missionaries.

And the meaning of this is that the English government wishes to settle, once and for all, one of the reservations whose determination was made contingent upon free negotiation between herself and Egypt — namely, the reservation touching the protection of foreigners in Egypt. England wishes to settle this reservation now, seizing upon this opportunity of proselytising, and to settle it in whatever suits her own interest and her own ambitions, and contrary to the interest of the Egyptians, their clear right, and their independence, upon which no shadow of doubt should fall. She wishes to settle this reservation exactly as she pleases, and to have the Egyptian government and the foreign powers agree to whatever she herself desires. She wishes to obtain from the government and the foreign powers an acknowledgment of her right to protect foreigners, and a regulation of that right. And what all

Egyptians know, what the present ministry knows, and what England's own statesmen know, is that the negotiations which took place between Egypt and England did address this reservation, and that the negotiations of the Egyptian delegation held in the year 1930 secured this right for Egypt, and secured it in a clarity so decisive and plain as to admit neither doubt nor dispute — for an article among the articles of the draft agreed upon at that time stipulated that the protection of foreigners belongs to Egypt alone. This matter, then, is settled and done with; the Egyptian point of view upon it is plain. The English themselves accepted it and confirmed it, and it was not this article that led to the breaking-off of the negotiations. Every Egyptian ministry, then, that squanders this natural right — without which independence has no meaning, and which the English themselves have acknowledged as ours — sins against the nation, forfeits its independence, wastes its dignity, and lends a foothold to foreign dominion within it.

And so we should like to know what our ministry means to do or say when the English speak to it concerning the organisation of this supervision that is meant to be imposed upon the missionaries. We should like to know what the government means to do or say. Or what has the government already done or said, if the English have in fact already begun this conversation with it? We wish to ascertain the government's position in this matter, for it has ceased to be merely a matter of a group of foreigners transgressing against the Egyptians, and has become something far graver than all this, and further-reaching in its effect upon our political life — namely, negotiation over a portion constituent of Egyptian independence, a matter on which negotiation had already been concluded, and concluded in a manner that preserved for the Egyptians their right, their dignity, and their independence.

We do not wish our ministry to prefer silence, nor to persist in muteness, for the matter is graver than can be met with silence or muteness. We wish the government to declare, in whatever manner, Egypt's exclusive right to the protection of foreigners, and to the issuing of whatever laws their protection, or the protection of Egyptians from them, may require. Any silence from the ministry on this subject, from this day forward, is frightening and disturbing, and provokes suspicion and doubt.

Let the ministry speak, then, and let the statesmen take heed — for who knows? Perhaps behind this sad and painful tale lies some hidden design of the colonisers, who wish by it to catch Egypt unawares, and to

lure her by it to where she ought never to be lured. And who knows? Perhaps the persistence of the English press in temptation, sedition, and incitement upon this matter has no source but this hidden and dangerous portent.

As for what follows: the stance which the Egyptian ministry ought to take on this matter admits of no concealment and no obscurity — the right is plain and the government's duty is clear. It is that the ministry should enact whatever laws it needs for the supervision of these missionaries, and negotiate these laws with the states enjoying the Capitulations in direct negotiation, with no English mediation in the matter; for it is not fitting for an Egyptian ministry to regard the English, in this question, any differently from how it regards the other nations that enjoy the Capitulations.