

## THE WAR IN EGYPT.

IF a colony from Jupiter or Saturn could suddenly be planted in our midst, they would scarcely differ from us of Christendom more widely than do the Orientals, in appearance, religion, aims of life, laws, habits, and education. Orientals and the Orient are an enigma to us so long as we pretend to judge them by the rules we are accustomed to apply to ourselves, and we shall never solve the enigma until we weigh them and their actions by their own rules. Yet they vary among themselves as much as we do among ourselves. The differences among English, French, and Germans are no greater than those among the Fellaheen,—laborious tillers of the soil, kindly, with no aim in life save to preserve a mere existence; the Arab,—hospitable, yet fond of travel and combat, ambitious of wealth, yet preferring to gain it by the strong hand and sudden stroke, rather than by patient toil; and the Turk,—hardest of masters, most unscrupulous of diplomatists, no respecter of the rights of others, sensual and lazy, yet capable, when wrought up, of the greatest energy, the most desperate efforts, and the utmost endurance of danger, fatigue, and privations.

These are only a few of the many eastern types produced and intensified by differences of race, climate, and pursuits, or by the influences of the ages during which their surrounding conditions have changed so little. But there are characteristics common to them all, wherein they differ widely from the western nations. Most prominent among these is the general nature of their various religions, of which we will now refer only to that of Islam. With the Mohammedans the Koran is the book of civil law as well as of religion; by its precepts are regulated alike public polity and individual life; they suppose it to contain the sum of all knowledge, and it is, as a rule, the limit of their education. While enjoining charity toward the poor, it omits that nobler charity of opinion peculiar to our own gospels. It teaches that the unbeliever is a dog, deserving only contempt and death, and that the Mohammedan's noblest service to his Prophet and his God is to put this maxim into operation. But as, after all, the Mohammedan is not absolutely perfect, he is in these days usually restrained from carrying his theory into practice by strong considerations of fear and self-interest; nevertheless, it is

probable that the involuntary suppression of this feeling renders it only stronger, and more apt to lead him into terrible excesses when the opportunity arises.

With the true son of Islam there can be nothing but absolute hatred and contempt for unbelievers; no servitude more galling than Christian rule; no triumph more rapturous than that which enables him to grind his heel into the Christian's face. When he is excited by success or religious fanaticism, the famished tiger is an angel of mercy in comparison with him. Moreover, he is a born dissembler; when policy requires, he can conceal his opinions and passions under an impenetrable mask. Neither subterfuge nor evasion is unworthy of his use. Even in the ordinary traffic of the bazaar he will chaffer for hours over a pipe-stem or a silver bangle. He maintains his calm and humble demeanor until the dagger is raised to strike, when suddenly the gentle lamb is transformed into the ferocious beast of prey. Ignorant, as a rule, of all except the Koran, he despises all other knowledge, and thus knows little or nothing of the power of the West, except where with his own eyes he has witnessed, or in his own person has felt, some special display of its force; and therefore, when his fanaticism is aroused, there is little to restrain him from its gratification, especially as the sentiment of fatalism is so strong within his breast. The masses of the Orientals have little but life to lose in this world, and much to gain in the other by entering it direct from a conflict with the unbeliever.

Just now the eyes of what we call the civilized world,—meaning by that the Christian nations,—are turned with intense interest upon one spot in the Orient, wondering whether the turmoil, the sounds of battle, and the shrieks of murdered Christians will be confined within the walls bounding the valley of the Nile, or whether the horrid discord will spread until it reaches all the great valleys, wide-spread plateaus, and mountain masses, where the followers of the cross and the adherents of the crescent can come in contact. Our interest is heightened when we remember that the conflict has commenced in the old land of Egypt, the seat of the earliest civilization recorded by history; that the first guns fired were those of England, an almost unknown and wholly barbarous island when first

invaded by the great Roman who, vanquished by the charms of the fairest of Egyptian queens, bestowed a few more years of life and power upon the last native dynasty of the mysterious land. If the contest is confined to Arabi, with such support as he can find in Egypt, on the one hand, and Sir Garnet Wolseley, backed by all the resources of England, on the other, the result is easy to foretell. But, if it should grow into a general, and perhaps the last great conflict between the cross and the crescent, while we feel sure as to its outcome, we cannot so clearly foresee the phases which it may assume, or the changes it may bring about.

The apparent immediate cause of the Egyptian imbroglio is the dissatisfaction of native ex-office-holders with the Anglo-French control. Arabi and his supporters have had much to say of the Egyptian national party and their impatience of foreign rule. It is difficult, at this distance, to reach the exact truth, although our knowledge of the past will enable us to arrive at conclusions having at least strong probability in their favor. It must first be remarked that there is no similarity between Eastern and Western systems of government. In the East the ruler—whether Sultan, Khedive, or what not—regards himself as proprietor of all persons and property within his control; the rate of taxation is simply the maximum that can be screwed out of the people, and any official charged with the collection of the revenue would regard himself as disgracing his profession did he not collect much more than he was required to, and put in his own pocket not only all the surplus, but as much as possible of the original amount called for. In a country ruled, as Egypt so long has been, by an alien race, this state of things is necessarily intensified and carried to the greatest extreme. The taxes are wrung from the people by forced labor and the bastinado, and a high official on a tax collection tour is accompanied by attendants bearing the stock and koorbash. Under Ismail Pacha this system was in full play, and, consequently, his government was intensely hated by the Fellaheen.

During my visit to Egypt—some seven or eight years ago—there was certainly no national feeling among the Egyptians. Neither they nor their ancestors, for nearly two thousand years, had known native rulers. During all these long centuries they had been the spoil of Roman, Arab, Turk, and Mameluke in turn; from none, since the Roman time, had they received protection of life and property, or any national benefits, and it was impossible that patriotism should exist among them, for there is no patriotism save in a

country worth loving. The conduct of the Egyptian troops in the late Russian war is a proof of this. The few battalions I saw in Egypt were fine-looking troops—well armed, instructed, and equipped, with intelligent faces and excellent physique; yet they proved utterly worthless, as it seems to me, because they were destitute of that pride which is inspired by patriotism; for them their flag had no meaning, its honor was no concern of theirs. Their conduct in Abyssinia and the Soudan was similar, and no doubt from the same cause. How can valor and patriotism be expected from men whose only knowledge of their government is that derived from the tax-gatherer, the bastinado, and forced labor? The achievements of that great soldier, Ibrahim Pacha, are not in contradiction with this conclusion, because few of his troops were Fellaheen. His conquering armies were mainly composed of Arabs, Syrians, Nubians, Arnauts—in fact, of fighting men from all the neighboring parts of the East, who were reduced to discipline by his stern will, and guided to victory by his great military genius.

To the traveler the Fellaheen of the Upper Nile seem a gentle, amiable race, child-like in their ignorance and simplicity, living in the greatest poverty, in roofless huts, destitute of all comfort. Frequently they are left on the very verge of starvation by the merciless exaction of taxes, and under Ismail they were carried off in droves to work without compensation upon the estates of the Khedive. So great was their dread of the Government, that I have known them to abstain from attempting to save lives in imminent danger, because of their fear of being imprisoned as witnesses, or punished as guilty of the death of any they might vainly attempt to save. I once saw a number of men and women upon a wreck on the rough waters of the Nile, floating down among many native boats afraid to aid them; my own men hesitated until I assured them that I would stand between them and all harm, whereupon they cheerfully exerted themselves to save those still left of the wrecked people. When they had rescued them they did all in their power to comfort them—giving them of their own food and clothes, and even of their scanty stock of money. It was clearly proved that their first hesitation did not arise from any lack of humanity and kindness, but from absolute dread of their capricious and unjust government. I have seen whole villages deserted upon the approach of recruiting parties—all rushing to the desert for safety—for the Felláh loves his native village and his family, and for him service in the army meant final

separation from all he held dear. Now, whatever its defects and demerits, the rule of the Anglo-French Control brought with it relief from many of these evils. The taxes were diminished, and seem to have been collected with system, justice, and honesty; the extravagant expenditure of the Government was curtailed or abolished, and the general condition of the peasants was much improved. One of Arabi's charges against the Control is that they ousted the native officials, and replaced them by foreigners at high salaries. This was true, but it was absolutely necessary. Honest officials were rarely or never to be found among the natives, and reform and honest administration were impossible without the employment of foreigners, who, of course, required higher salaries than the natives, but saved to the country and people a sum immensely greater than their pay, by the systematic and comparatively honest administration of affairs.

It must be remembered that the Fellaheen, or Moslem agricultural peasantry, number more than three-fourths of the inhabitants of Egypt proper. The Copts, or native Christians, come next in number; but, though numerically less, they are better educated and hold a higher position in the social scale.

From all this it appears highly improbable that the improved condition of the peasantry should have resulted in the sudden formation of a national party, whose success could only bring about a return to the very condition under which they suffered so intensely. But one can readily understand why the ex-office-holders should combine to form a "National Party," to regain the spoils of office. Such motives have not been unknown even in Christian lands, and seem to be common to men of all races and religions. Omitting for the moment the religious question, it seems probable that the origin of the Egyptian difficulty was simply a scramble for office, and that the moving spirits originally represented a small class of disappointed placemen and ambitious soldiers, but by no means the mass of the people.

It is unreasonable to assume that the interference of England and France with the financial affairs of Egypt arose from any motives of humanity and sympathy with the "spoiled Egyptians"; their purpose was to secure the payment of the debt due their own people, and the only way to attain this result led incidentally and necessarily to the benefit of the Egyptian peasants. It was not wise to count upon the good-will of the former governing classes, or upon the active gratitude of a race so abject as the Fellaheen. Once the Powers were embarked upon this course it was

absolutely necessary to keep straight on, and not to permit the existence of any obstacle within their reach. They should have been constantly prepared to employ whatever force might be necessary to retain their position and promptly repress any opposition. Their only right to be there was that of protecting the interests of their own people, and, as the debts to be collected were not incurred for the benefit of Egypt, but to gratify the extravagance of its ruler, it was fair to anticipate that it would not always be plain sailing, especially as their measures necessarily trench upon the interests of the men who had governed for a long time.

The first mutiny of Arabi, his first insolence to his master, should have been promptly and decisively rebuked, even had it been necessary to land a force for the purpose. If the mutual jealousy of France and England prevented their nipping this difficulty in the bud by combined action, it would have been better for England had she boldly taken the matter in hand, and acted promptly on her own account, taking the ground that her Indian interests and the free use of the Suez canal rendered such a course imperative. But a temporizing policy prevailed, and, closing her eyes against the future, England allowed matters to drift on from bad to worse, now and again uttering futile protests, but doing nothing to guard against the inevitable result. At length an English fleet was gathered in the harbor of Alexandria, and an ultimatum sent to the Egyptian authorities, only to be contemptuously disregarded. But, unlike the practice of England in former times, it was not promptly followed by a resort to the *ultima ratio regum*, and her ignorant and puny foe not unnaturally concluded that it never would be. Then came a bloody massacre in the streets of Alexandria, the history of which we do not fully know as yet—either how it was commenced or who suffered most from it. Statements have been published that it was commenced by Europeans. But the probabilities are that the riot was incited by natives actuated by fanaticism and love of plunder—motives not always entirely distinct.

Here again was an occasion for prompt action; but it was allowed to pass, and Arabi continued fortifying the harbor. Certainly, it was now clear that Arabi meant to fight, the only question being the extent to which his men would stand by him. By this time the English must have determined to demand the surrender of the forts, and, in case of refusal, to open fire. Their guns could destroy the forts and burn the town—one very likely to follow from the other. If the garrison retired—as would no doubt be the case when the

forts were silenced—it was certain that the spirit displayed during the recent massacre would lead to further scenes of murder, plunder, and destruction, which the guns of the fleet could prevent only by the destruction of the very objects it was desirable to save. It was very clear, then, that the attack by the fleet once being determined upon, common sense demanded that there should be present and available when it commenced a sufficient body of troops to be landed as soon as the forts were silenced, to protect the city and immediately follow up the retreating garrison, so as to destroy the prestige of Arabi, and prevent the rising from becoming a general, national, or religious movement.

The dilemma is unpleasant for any admirer of England and her institutions: either she is unable—through defective organization, mal-administration, lack of energy, or too full occupation of her resources nearer home—either, we say, she is unable to collect upon reasonable notice an expeditionary force of ten or fifteen thousand men, or her government lacked the wisdom to anticipate the inevitable necessity for such a force at a given time, and proved their incompetency to direct military expeditions abroad. The excuse that the exigencies of diplomacy tied their hands is not a good one, for in this instance there was at stake whatever of importance the Suez canal and peace in Egypt may have for England, and it was one of those cases where a strong nation is fully justified in running risks and incurring responsibility on the side of safety for its most vital interests.

To return to our narrative: The patience of the English Admiral being at length exhausted, he demanded the surrender of the forts. When this demand was made there were no troops with the fleet, and it is believed that none were yet under orders for Alexandria. It does not appear that the armament of the Egyptian batteries was such as to have rendered a further delay of the attack dangerous, if by so doing the presence of troops could have been assured. From all that occurred, it would seem to have been the opinion of the English authorities that the fleet alone could accomplish all that was desirable, and that troops were unnecessary; for it is incredible that, with all the warning they had, they could not have collected ten or fifteen thousand troops at Alexandria by the time the fleet opened fire; the fair and necessary inference is that they proposed only to silence the fire of and destroy the forts—for they had not even force enough to hold them if surrendered—and that they did not anticipate any of the results which have naturally followed, *e. g.*, the partial destruction

and plunder of the city, the murder of Europeans within it and elsewhere in Egypt, the necessity of holding the city for its preservation, the measures taken by Arabi in cutting off the water-supply and intrenching himself near the city, the danger to the Suez canal, etc.; in short, they provided against none of the necessary consequences of their action.

Before a wise ruler undertakes a war, he counts the cost, and does his best to anticipate and provide against its emergencies. If to the horrors of Alexandria and Tantah there should be added imminent danger to the Suez canal, further murders of Christians, the spread of anarchy and destruction throughout Egypt, the destruction of Cairo, with the priceless Museum of Boulak, and the loss of thousands of lives precious in English homes, men will ask where was that wisdom and prudent foresight which the British nation can of right demand from those intrusted with the affairs of its vast empire. When, at the close of the stipulated delay, the fleet opened fire, the result was not doubtful, and the affair terminated in the evacuation of the forts. Professionally the detailed report of the Admiral will be looked for with great interest, for this was the first instance in which the heavy modern iron-clads have gone into action. As we write (July 26th) the condition of affairs appears to be about as follows: The English occupy Alexandria, and no doubt in sufficient strength to hold it, should Arabi—against all probability—venture to attack, this is all they have gained. Arabi is intrenching himself strongly some seven or eight miles from Alexandria, with all Egypt and its supplies, its railways, canals, and the Nile behind him. It is for the English to make the next move, for Arabi would be well content to remain indefinitely in his present position, and would ask nothing better than the *status quo*.

Except as a base of operations, Alexandria is a barren acquisition to the English, unless they can restore its communications with the interior, for on them its value and prosperity entirely depend. Should affairs remain unchanged for any length of time, Arabi will have possession of a financial paradise, and can well afford to bring all the population to his side by a large reduction of taxation, for, in the present situation, he avoids the payment of the heavy tribute to the Porte and the interest on the foreign debt. What more can a poor Oriental ask than the undisturbed possession of such a patrimony?

The English cannot now offer any terms to Arabi, nor he to them, and it is not probable that he will recede from his demands until killed, captured, or driven into Nubia or the Soudan. The least that can satisfy the

English will be the undisturbed use of the Suez canal, and the restoration of such a control over the financial administration as will secure the payment of the debt, and such indemnity as they may demand for war expenses and the destruction of life and property in Alexandria, Cairo, and other parts of Egypt. To secure the first of these objects until the normal condition of tranquillity is permanently restored, they must gain and hold possession of Cairo and other important points. To secure the last object they must control the country and its resources at least as far as the first Cataract. In any event, their first step must be to attack Arabi wherever they may find him, and, if possible, to destroy him and his army. Failing in the latter, the character of subsequent operations must depend upon the extent to which Arabi proves to be supported by the people, and also the extent to which the religious element enters into the struggle. In other words, there are three possible phases which the contest may assume :

*First.* A struggle against Arabi, supported only by such troops as are now with him.

*Second.* A struggle against Arabi, supported by the Egyptian people.

*Third.* A war of Islam against Christianity, which may spread from the banks of the Nile to those of the Ganges on one hand, and to the shores of the Atlantic on the other.

For reasons already given, it is improbable that the second contingency will arise, unless Arabi is shrewd enough to repudiate the foreign debt and the tribute to the Porte, thus promising a large reduction of taxation to the people. If the religious question is prominently brought to the front at the same time, the Egyptians may be led to unite in support of Arabi; and it must be borne in mind that there is no necessary incompatibility between a religious war and refusing tribute to the Porte—for a part of the programme may be the substitution of a Caliph for the Sultan, and they may thus consistently sever all connection with the decaying power of Constantinople. In fact, for some years the air has

been full of signs that the Moslem world is losing faith in the Sultan as head of their religion; his losses of territory in Europe and Asia Minor, the slender hold by which he retains the remnants of the former possessions of the Porte in Africa, the disturbances in Arabia, the misery arising from misgovernment, rapacity, and oppression throughout his Asiatic dominions, all point in the same direction. Prophecies of the speedy advent of a new Moslem messiah are rife throughout Islam—here and there the very man is indicated. The Moslems feel that the advance of their religion has ceased, except in Central Africa, and that they are pressed closely on every side by Christian arms, energy, and activity; they well may feel that the time has arrived for a last desperate effort to throw back their enemies and restore the waning fortunes of the crescent, or to let it set forever in a sea of blood. It has even been said that one of the chief candidates for the messiahship has already reached Assouan, followed by a motley but formidable crew of warlike barbarians. Even should he not prove to be the coming man, and should he fail to make good his claim to the Caliphate, he may—if it be true that he has reached Egypt—terribly complicate affairs for the English, and greatly increase the difficulties of their task.

Under the most favorable circumstances, England has serious work before her. Even a march on Cairo—if the first attack upon Arabi ends the fighting—is no trifling affair in the hottest season of the year, and it will be no little work for her flying columns to put down brigandage, restore order, and maintain communications. Her delays and indecision have greatly enhanced the difficulties to be encountered, and it is probable that the expedition will finally reach dimensions not as yet anticipated. Contemptible as the Felláh has proved himself as a soldier, there are others who may gather under Arabi's standard who would prove themselves no mean antagonists when fighting for their religion. Even the tame Egyptian, under the influence of fanaticism, may fight more steadily and sturdily than the Zulu or the Afghan.

George B. McClellan.

