

ENGLAND'S ABSORPTION OF EGYPT.

BY HON. FREDERIC C. PENFIELD, LATE UNITED STATES DIPLO-
MATIC AGENT AND CONSUL-GENERAL IN EGYPT.

THE Egyptian question is perennial. But American and English readers know only that side of it which British writers prepare for them. Egypt's side of the Egyptian question is but seldom stated in cold type. All opinion coming by way of England is so treated that the casual reader is led to believe that by some diplomatic arrangement, long forgotten by him, the ancient land of the Pharaohs had been severed from the Ottoman Empire and incorporated as an integral part of Queen Victoria's realm.

This is essentially what has been done, not by diplomatic arrangement, but by methods and devices sufficiently adroit to form a dangerous departure from recognized rules in the conduct of international affairs—the acquiring of territory and dominion therein by military “occupation.” As a scheme of national expansion it has no parallel, and by reason of its audacity the acquisition of Egypt by Great Britain attracts the attention of readers and thinkers throughout the world.

The time-honored principle, teaching that territorial extension should be accomplished by discovery, conquest, treaty, or purchase, has been thrown to the winds by England. For years she has been familiarizing herself with the advantages of getting area by simple seizure and boundary dispute. These methods, direct, and at times defensible, do not carry an iota of the stigma attaching to acquisition by the specious process called “occupation,” of which the British are the ablest exponents, if not the inventors.

In matters of international comity, it has long been supposed that the term “occupation” had a significance quite as unmis-

takable as "annexation" and "protection." "Protectorate" is the name fitting present conditions in Egypt, with acknowledged dominion to follow, if the English have their way.

It is nearly sixteen years, it will be remembered, since the revolt in Egypt, which led to the sending of a military and naval force by England to suppress Arabi Pasha and his followers, who had arrogated to themselves the government of the country. The Khedivial authority was trodden under foot, and the Khedive was a prisoner in one of his palaces, the Egyptian army having sworn fealty to the fanatical Arabi. Riot and rapine were rampant, and the situation was critical.

Then came the massacre of Europeans in Alexandria, and the subsequent bombardment, in which the French declined to take part; and consequently, in 1883, the dual control of Egyptian finances by England and France came to an end. Since that time, Egypt has been in everything but name a dependency of England, the French in the meantime trying to recover their share in its control. They have more than once asked the Sultan, the actual suzerain of Egypt, to order the English from the country, and for many years they have doggedly obstructed Great Britain's administration of affairs.

The Gladstonian government, which sent the troops and ships to Egypt, asserted that British intervention was to be made solely in the interests of humanity, and for the purpose of restoring the authority of the Khedive. These pledges were accepted in Europe in good faith.

A few hours before opening the bombardment of Alexandria, the commander of the British fleet said, in a formal communication to the Khedive:

"I deem it opportune to reaffirm to Your Highness that the government of Great Britain has no intention to effect the conquest of Egypt, nor to interfere in any way with the liberties or religion of the Egyptians; its sole object is to protect Your Highness and the Egyptian people from the rebels."

Admiral Seymour must have spoken with the authority of his government in this momentous matter, as did General Wolseley, who led the campaign on shore, when, to hasten the restoration of law and order, after the rebellion had been crushed, he said in a proclamation to the people of Egypt:

"The government of Her Majesty has sent troops into Egypt with the sole object of re-establishing the Khedive's authority."

Even that able diplomatist, Lord Dufferin, then ambassador to the Sultan, formally announced, over his signature, that England, by her interference in Egypt, was

“ . . . Seeking no territorial advantage, nor the acquisition of any exclusive privilege, nor any commercial advantage for her subjects which cannot be obtained equally for the subjects of any other nation.”

The revolt, being a half-hearted affair, was quickly suppressed. Arabi Pasha was tried in Cairo for treason, found guilty, and sentenced to death. His campaign cry of “Egypt for the Egyptians” in a way stamping him as a patriot, and the people enrolled under his banner having some show of reason for their objection to the frequent interference of foreign powers, Arabi’s sentence was promptly modified to banishment for life.

English influence was responsible for the commutation of the sentence, and Great Britain, which takes upon itself the task of policing the world, sent Arabi and his chief supporters into exile in British territory, for a crime in no sense committed against England. For usurping the Khedivial prerogative—which, plainly stated, is the right to direct the administration of Egypt—Arabi was guilty of an offence punishable by death or deportation.

The British government announced, after the crushing of Arabi, that its “army of occupation” would be withdrawn as soon as law and order could be restored, and a date was actually fixed for the departure of the troops. Her philanthropic task not being completed, in her opinion, at the end of the six months, an extension of time for another six months was made. At all events, the occupation was only to last for the brief period necessary to teach the Egyptians the easy art of self-government.

But the soldiers have never left Egypt, and have been there nearly sixteen years. When pressed for a reason why the reins of government are not restored to the Khedive, and the farce of “occupation” terminated, most Englishmen will say it is because evidence is wanting that a stable administration of the country can be had without British aid. Many other reasons are given in justification; but it is only when discussing the situation with each other that they are honest enough to admit that they have no intention of ever quitting the Nile country.

Thus the word “occupation” promises for many years to be applied to a wholesale operation in territorial expansion, entered

upon in the name of humanity ; and the right of ruling Egypt, taken from the Khedive by Arabi the rebel, and wrested from him by Great Britain, will probably never again fully reside in the family of Mehemet Ali. Military occupation, indefinitely extended, as illustrated in Egypt, amounts to annexation, except for the saving clause of a shambling pretence of upholding the Khedive.

There is now and then a spasmodic demand in the British Isles that England's hands be lifted from Egypt ; that the Tory policy of grab be reversed. Mr. Gladstone declares that Britain has no right to remain in Egypt, and politicians of the Dilke, Harcourt, Courtney, Labouchere and Marriott type frequently raise their voices in condemnation of a continuance of British rule in Egypt. These men only talk when their party in Parliament is in the minority, however ; should one of them find himself a member of the government he would in all probability be as silent on the subject of the evacuation as the Sphinx itself.

Englishmen make a point of recalling that the Sultan declined to send troops to quell the Alexandrian disorders in 1882, and likewise love to point to Tunis, and assert that France is doing with that country exactly what the British are doing with Egypt. Her Egyptian policy has brought more censure upon England, perhaps, than any other movement in her external affairs during the century. By it the inherent dislike of France for England has been provoked to open hatred, and every nation in Europe has an illustration at hand whenever wishing to prove British bad faith.

Does England sufficiently profit from her retention of Egypt to warrant this defiance of public opinion, and the open hostility of such powers as France and Russia ?

Great Britain has well-nigh made an English lake of the Mediterranean ; the outlet of this lake, the Suez Canal, is the key to the whole scheme of British rule in India and the East. To control the canal, by force of arms if necessary, is the predominant reason why England remains in Egypt. It serves her purpose to have 4,500 British soldiers within a few hours' journey of the great international waterway, and a British guardship at either terminus of it. Without the absolute control of this connecting link between Occident and Orient, thirty-six million people in Great Britain could not expect long to hold in subjection four hundred millions in India, and to govern a quarter of the globe.

Monetary considerations have as much weight with an Englishman as with another. As perhaps half of Egypt's bonded debt was held in England when the occupation began, the gradual appreciation of the value of Egyptian securities has seemed to Britishers another justification for continuing their sojourn in Egypt. When they went there Egyptian credit was as low as it well could be, for Khedive Ismail had played fast and loose with national solvency from his accession to the day on which he was deposed.

English people owned bonds to the face value of \$275,000,000 in 1882, it is estimated, and these could not have been sold then for more than half that sum. "Egyptians" are now quoted at a premium of from three to six per cent., and the difference between the estimated value in 1882, and the value to-day, of England's supposed financial stake in Egypt, is the comfortable sum of \$140,000,000—sufficient to pay for the army of occupation for more than a century! This restoration of Egyptian credit has benefited all bondholders equally—French, German, Italian, Austrian and Russian, as well as English.

An incidental reason why Great Britain retains her hold upon Egypt is that the cotton crop of the Nile valley reduces more and more each year the dependence of British spindles upon the cotton-fields of the United States.

There are also several considerations of minor importance which have influenced the Egyptian policy of England. The conquest of the vast region lying south of Nubia can better be prosecuted from the north than from any other point; and geographers are agreed that whoever controls Equatorial Africa and the sources of the Nile becomes the natural holder of Egypt. Further, without Egypt firmly in hand, the ambition of British map-makers for a zone of territory stretching continuously from the Cape to Cairo, and bringing more than half the African continent under British influence, must of necessity be abandoned.

Are the people of Egypt materially benefited by English rule?

Unquestionably they are. Unpopular as it is with nearly every class in Egypt, and condemned throughout Europe, the occupation has done vast good. No fair investigator can witness the present condition of the Egyptian fellahen, knowing what it was before the advent of the English, without conceding this. For half a dozen years Egypt has fairly bristled with prosperity.