

MODERN EGYPT

BY

THE EARL OF CROMER, Evelyn Barin,

In his first interview with the Governor of St. Helena, Napoleon said emphatically: "Egypt is the most important country in the world."

ROSE, *Life of Napoleon*, vol. i. p. 356.

Earum proprie rerum sit historia, quibus rebus gerendis interfuerit is qui narret.

GELLIUS, *Noctes Atticae*, v. 18.

τὰ δ' ἔργα τῶν πραχθέντων ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ παρατυχόντος πυνθανόμενος ἡξίωσα γράφειν, οὐδ' ὥς ἐμοὶ ἐδόκει, ἀλλ' οἷς τε αὐτὸς παρήν, καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀκριβεῖα περὶ ἐκάστου ἐπεξελθών.

THUCYDIDES, i. 22.

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and draws a potent influence from them. The Mohammedan religion is iconoclastic. Painting and sculpture, when they represent any living creature, are condemned. Music is never heard in a Mosque.

The Christian will sometimes be cleanly because he thinks that it conduces to his health and comfort. He puts cleanliness next to godliness, but does not associate the two ideas together. The Moslem will be cleanly after a fashion because his religion enjoins him to be so.

→ Turn now to the mental and moral attributes of the two races. It will be found that the antitheses are striking.

Sir Alfred Lyall once said to me: "Accuracy is abhorrent to the Oriental mind. Every Anglo-Indian official should always remember that maxim." Want of accuracy, which easily degenerates into untruthfulness,¹ is, in fact, the main characteristic of the Oriental mind.

The European is a close reasoner; his statements of fact are devoid of ambiguity; he is a natural logician, albeit he may not have studied logic; he loves symmetry in all things; he is by nature sceptical and requires proof before he can accept the truth of any proposition; his trained intelligence works like a piece of mechanism. The mind of the Oriental, on the other hand, like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in symmetry. His reasoning is of the most slipshod description. Although the ancient Arabs acquired in a somewhat high degree the science of

¹ "Pour nous, races profondément sérieuses, la conviction signifie la sincérité avec soi-même. Mais la sincérité avec soi-même n'a pas beaucoup de sens chez les peuples Orientaux, peu habitués aux délicatesses de l'esprit critique. Bonne foi et imposture sont des mots qui, dans notre conscience rigide, s'opposent comme deux termes inconciliables. En Orient, il y a de l'un à l'autre mille fuites et mille détours. . . . La vérité matérielle a très peu de prix pour l'Oriental; il voit tout à travers ses préjugés, ses intérêts, ses passions."—Renan, *Vie de Jésus*, p. 283.

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dialectics,¹ their descendants are singularly deficient in the logical faculty. They are often incapable of drawing the most obvious conclusions from any simple premises of which they may admit the truth. Endeavour to elicit a plain statement of facts from an ordinary Egyptian. His explanation will generally be lengthy, and wanting in lucidity. He will probably contradict himself half-a-dozen times before he has finished his story. He will often break down under the mildest process of cross-examination. The Egyptian is also eminently unsceptical. He readily becomes the dupe of the magician and the astrologer. Even highly educated Egyptians are prone to refer the common occurrences of life to the intervention of some supernatural agency. In political matters, as well as in the affairs of everyday life, the Egyptian will, without inquiry, accept as true

¹ It is well known that the Arabs of the eleventh and twelfth centuries exercised a considerable influence on European thought by their teaching of the Aristotelian philosophy. See, *inter alia*, Milman's *History of Latin Christianity*, vol. ix. ciii. Also Symonds' *Renaissance in Italy*, p. 68. Dante (*Inf.* c. iv. 143) speaks of Avicenna and of "Avverroës, che 'l gran commento feo."

Renan (*Averroës et l'Averroïsme*, pp. ii. and iii.) makes the following remarks:—"Les Arabes ne firent qu'adopter l'ensemble de l'encyclopédie grecque telle que le monde entier l'avait acceptée vers le VII^{ème} et le VIII^{ème} siècle. . . . La philosophie Arabe offre l'exemple à peu près unique d'une très haute culture supprimée presque instantanément sans laisser de traces, et à peu près oubliée du peuple qui l'a créée. L'Islamisme dévoila en cette circonstance ce qu'il y a d'irréremédiablement étroit dans son génie. Le Christianisme, lui aussi, a été peu favorable au développement de la science positive; il a réussi à l'arrêter en Espagne et à l'entraver beaucoup en Italie, mais il ne l'a pas étouffée, et même les branches les plus élevées de la famille chrétienne ont fini par se réconcilier avec elle. Incapable de se transformer et d'admettre aucun élément de vie civile et profane, l'Islamisme arracha de son sein tout genre de culture rationnelle. Cette tendance fatale fut combattue tandis que l'hégémonie de l'Islamisme resta entre les mains des Arabes, race si fine et si spirituelle, ou des Persans, race très portée à la spéculation; mais elle régna sans contrepoids depuis que des barbares (Turcs, Berbers, etc.) prirent la direction de l'Islam. Le monde Musulman entra dès lors dans cette période d'ignorante brutalité, d'où il n'est sorti que pour tomber dans la morne agonie où il se débat sous nos yeux."

Averroës is, of course, a Spanish corruption of Ibn-Rushd.

the most absurd rumours.¹ He will, indeed, do more than this. He will often accept or reject such rumours in the inverse ratio of their probability, for, true to his natural inconsistency and want of rational discrimination, he will occasionally develop a flash of hardy scepticism when he is asked to believe the truth.

Contrast again the talkative European, bursting with superfluous energy, active in mind, inquisitive about everything he sees and hears, chafing under delay, and impatient of suffering, with the grave and silent Eastern, devoid of energy and initiative, stagnant in mind, wanting in curiosity about matters which are new to him, careless of waste of time and patient under suffering.

Or, again, look at the fulsome flattery, which the Oriental will offer to his superior and expect to receive from his inferior, and compare the general approval of such practices with the European frame of mind, which spurns both the flatterer and the person who invites flattery. This contemptible flattery, "the nurse of crime," as it was called by the poet Gay, is, indeed, a thorn in the side of the Englishman in Egypt, for it prevents Khedives and Pashas from hearing the truth from their own countrymen.²

¹ "The note of the primitive mind is amazing inaccuracy, coupled with wonderful receptivity."—Lyll, *Asiatic Studies*, Second Series, p. 193.

² The extent to which servile flattery may be carried at an Oriental court is well illustrated by the account given by Creasy (*Ottoman Turks*, p. 261) of the relations between Sultan Ibrahim (A.D. 1640-48) and his Grand Vizier. His first Vizier was Kara-Mustapha, an honest and courageous man, who dared to tell the truth to his Sovereign. After a short career, he was dismissed from office and strangled. His successor, Sultanazade Pasha, determined not to err on the side of frankness. Even Ibrahim, who was one of the worst of the degenerate Sultans, could not help noticing his servility. "How is it," he said, "that thou art able always to approve of my actions, whether good or evil?" "My Padishah!" replied the Minister, "thou art Khalif; thou art God's shadow upon earth. Every idea which thy spirit entertains is a revelation from Heaven. Thy orders, even when they appear

Perhaps there is no point as to which the difference between Eastern and Western habits of thought comes out into stronger relief than in the views which are respectively entertained by the Oriental and the European as regards provision for the future in this world. The European, especially if he be a Frenchman, is usually economical, and his economy will not unfrequently degenerate into meanness. He will pause before he gives pledges which, whilst providing for his immediate wants, may embarrass him or even reduce him to penury at no distant date. He will usually make provision for his old age, for the wife, who may, and for the children, who probably will survive him. The Egyptian generally cares for none of these things. He takes little heed for the morrow which will dawn on himself, and none for the days which are in store for those whom he will leave behind him. He is, perhaps, unconsciously influenced by the frame of mind engendered in himself and his progenitors from having lived for centuries under a succession of Governments, which afforded no security to the rights of property.¹ Whether he occupies the palace or the mud hut, he will often pledge his future with scarcely a thought of how his pledges may be redeemed. His life is in the past and in the present. The morrow must take care of the things of itself.

unreasonable, have an innate reasonableness, which thy slave ever revere, though he may not always understand."

Ibrahim, Creasy adds, "accepted these assurances of infallibility and impeccability; and thenceforth spoke of himself as divinely inspired, in the midst of the most disgraceful scenes of folly, vice, and crime." He was eventually deposed and murdered.

¹ Indications are not wanting that, under the influence of good government, the improvident habits of the Egyptian population are being sensibly modified. I have alluded to this subject several times in successive Annual Reports in connection with the scheme which has been introduced with a view to lending small sums to the fellahs, and thus liberating them from the grip of the village usurers.

But these same habits of improvidence tend perhaps to develop a quality which is worthy of praise. The Oriental may often be blamed for prodigality, but he rarely incurs the charge of meanness. He is charitable to his neighbours, and the fact may be recorded to his advantage without stopping to inquire whether his charity is due to kindness of heart, or to the self-interest, which impels him, at the dictates of his religion, to lay up riches in the world to come. Moreover, the Oriental is proverbially hospitable. Indeed, his hospitality often errs on the side of being too lavish.

It may be added, whilst on the subject of kindness of heart, that the cruelty to animals, which so often shocks visitors to Egypt, is no worse than that which may be witnessed amongst Christian nations in the south of Europe, and is probably, as Lane observed in 1835, not a plant of indigenous growth, but is rather due to association with low-class Europeans. The Moslem religion enjoins kindness to animals. "There is no religion which has taken a higher view in its authoritative documents of animal life. 'There is no beast on earth,' says the Koran, 'nor bird which flieth with wings, but the same is a people like unto you,—unto the Lord shall they return.'"¹

Passing on to the consideration of another difference between the Oriental and the European, which will prove a perpetual stumbling-block to the Englishman in Egypt, it is to be observed that the ways of the Oriental are tortuous; his love of intrigue is inveterate; centuries of despotic government, during which his race has been exposed to the unbridled violence of capricious and headstrong Governors, have led him to fall back on the natural defence of the weak against the strong. He reposes unlimited faith in his own cunning, and

¹ Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, p. 255.

to some extent his chosen weapon will stand him in good stead. But its employment will widen the breach between him and his protectors, for fate has willed that the Egyptians should be more especially associated with those members of the European family who, perhaps more than any others, loathe and despise intrigue; who, in their dealings with their fellow-men, are frank and blunt, even at times to brutality; and who, though not difficult to beguile, are apt unexpectedly to turn round and smite those who have beguiled them so hardly as to crush them to the dust. From this point of view, one of the more subtle Latin races, had it occupied the predominant position held by the English in Egypt, would probably have had more sympathy with the weaknesses of Egyptian character than the Anglo-Saxon.

Look, again, to the high powers of organisation displayed by the European, to his constant endeavours to bend circumstances to suit his will, and to his tendency to question the acts of his superiors unless he happens to agree with them, a tendency which is especially marked in Englishmen, and which is only kept in subjection by the trained and intelligent discipline resulting from education. Compare these attributes with the feeble organising powers of the Oriental, with his fatalism which accepts the inevitable, and with his submissiveness to all constituted authority.

And if it be held that powers of organisation are only required amongst the educated classes, look to what, for want of a more appropriate term to express the idea, may be called the general muddle-headedness of the ordinary uneducated Egyptian, of which a few instances may be given.

On more than one occasion, a pointsman in the Egyptian railway service has been known to turn his points when the passing train had been *half*

transferred from one line to the other, with the natural result that the train was upset. An Egyptian engine-driver has been known to forget which handle to turn in order to stop his locomotive. On several occasions, railway employes have been killed owing to their having gone to sleep with their heads on the rail, that special position having been adopted in order to ensure their being awakened by the noise of an approaching train. A European would think that, where a road and a paved side-walk existed, it required no great effort of the reasoning faculty to perceive that human beings were intended to pass along the side-walk, and animals along the road. The point is not always so clear to the Egyptian. He will not unfrequently walk in the middle of the road, and will send his donkey along the side-path. Instances of this sort might be multiplied. Compare the habits of thought which can lead to actions of this nature with the promptitude with which the European seizes on an idea when it is presented to him, and acts as occasion may demand.

Then, again, side by side with the European's appreciation of arithmetic, consider that in all matters connected with number or quantity, the ordinary Egyptian goes hopelessly astray. Few uneducated Egyptians know their own age. The usual reply of an Egyptian, if asked the age of some old man, is that he is a hundred years old. What importance, he thinks, can be attached to precision about a matter of this sort, or, indeed, to any scientific or quasi-scientific subject? I once asked a former head of the El-Azhar University whether his professors taught that the sun went round the earth or the earth round the sun. He replied that he was not sure, that one nation thought one way, and another another way,—his natural politeness possibly forbidding him to

express to me what he really thought of the infidels Kepler and Copernicus and their doctrines,—that his general impression was that the sun went round the earth, but that he had never paid much attention to the matter, and that the subject was too unimportant to merit serious discussion. Tell an Egyptian cook that he puts too much salt into the soup. He will abstain altogether from the use of salt. Or, on the other hand, tell him that he does not use salt enough; he will throw in a bucketful. He cannot hit the happy mean; moderation in the use of salt, or in anything else, is foreign to his nature; he cannot grasp the idea of quantity. Again, ask an Arab from the Soudan how many men were killed at one of the numerous battles which have taken place in that country. The only thing which is certain is that he will not state the precise truth, or anything near it, except by accident. Neither will he reply that he cannot answer the question addressed to him. He will, without hesitation, blurt out the first conjecture, which flashes across his brain, as a fact coming within his personal knowledge. He may say 100, or he may say 2000. He has a very faint conception of what either figure represents, and he will be prepared to bring the original 100 up to 2000, or the original 2000 down to 100, according to the views which, by the light of subsequent conversation, would appear gratifying to his interrogator.

Again, consider the manners of the Oriental as contrasted with those of the European. We hear a great deal in praise of Oriental courtesy, and the praise is in some respects well deserved. A high-class European will be charmed with the manners of a high-class Oriental, albeit he is aware that the exaggerated compliments common in the East are merely figurative, and cannot be taken to represent the real sentiments of the speaker. But look a

little deeper and examine the ground on which these outward forms of courtesy are based. The examination will bring out a somewhat unpleasant feature of the Egyptian character. For one of the main reasons why an Egyptian, if he is in any position of authority, is courteous is that he thinks it his interest to be so. In spite of this outside courtesy to his superiors, he will not unfrequently be harsh and tyrannical to his inferiors, to whose feelings and interests he is often indifferent. There are, however, exceptions. Slaves are more often treated with kindness than severity, although in this case motives of self-interest may perhaps be traced. Amongst the middle and lower classes of Egyptians a spirit of real courtesy, not based on self-interest, is often to be found in their hospitality towards strangers. Moreover, among equals of all classes, the outward forms of courtesy are preserved.

These points have been indicated at some length because the differences between Eastern and Western habits of thought constitute a barrier interposed between the Egyptian and the Englishman almost as great as that resulting from differences of religion, ideas of government, and social customs. Indeed, this difference of mental attributes constitutes perhaps the greatest of all barriers. It prevents the Englishman and the Egyptian from understanding each other. Nevertheless, there is one saving clause, which serves in some respects as a bond of union between the two races. Once explain to an Egyptian what he is to do, and he will assimilate the idea rapidly. He is a good imitator, and will make a faithful, even sometimes a too servile copy of the work of his European teacher. His civilisation may be a veneer, yet he will readily adopt the letter, the catchwords and jargon, if not the spirit of

European administrative systems. His movements will, it is true, be not unfrequently those of an automaton, but a skilfully constructed automaton may do a great deal of useful work. This feature in the Egyptian character is of great importance in connection with the administration of the country. It is a source of strength, and also a source of weakness; for, so long as British supervision is maintained, the Egyptian will readily copy the practices and procedures of his English teachers. No necessity will, therefore, arise for employing any large number of English subordinates. On the other hand, inasmuch as the Egyptian has but little power of initiation, and often does not thoroughly grasp the reasons why his teachers have impelled him in certain directions, a relapse will ensue if English supervision be withdrawn.

Look now to the consequences which result from the degradation of women in Mohammedan countries. In respect to two points, both of which are of vital importance, there is a radical difference between the position of Moslem women and that of their European sisters. In the first place, the face of the Moslem woman is veiled when she appears in public. She lives a life of seclusion. The face of the European woman is exposed to view in public. The only restraints placed on her movements are those dictated by her own sense of propriety. In the second place, the East is polygamous, the West is monogamous.

It cannot be doubted that the seclusion of women exercises a baneful effect on Eastern society. The arguments on this subject are, indeed, so commonplace that it is unnecessary to dwell on them. It will be sufficient to say that seclusion, by confining the sphere of woman's interest to a very limited horizon, cramps the intellect and withers the mental development of

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