

The questions connected with Egypt and the Soudan were not less imperatively urgent than that of the Afghan frontier. The cessation of active operations in the Soudan had secured a momentary respite without removing any of the difficulties of the situation. Indeed, it seemed probable that the withdrawal of the British troops from their advanced positions might so encourage the Mahdists as to enable them to cause serious trouble in that portion of Egypt which England had undertaken to defend. The Government thought that if an appeal were made to the Sultan he might be induced to co-operate in an attempt to come to terms with the rebels, and thus to make an arrangement which would prevent the further effusion of blood. Sir Henry Drummond Wolff was accordingly sent to Constantinople as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, and instructed to confer with the Sultan on the affairs of Egypt. His mission was to solicit the assistance of the Sultan in the military protection of that portion of Egypt which had been the scene of rebellion and commotion. Sir H. D. Wolff was also desired to intimate to the Sultan that, although the Government were anxious to secure his co-operation, yet if this were withheld they would not be relieved from the obligation of endeavouring to restore order in the Soudan, and would accordingly find themselves obliged to seek other means of fulfilling their duty. It was further explained that the object of the Government was to provide an efficient Egyptian government, free from foreign dictation; and as the pretext for foreign interference in Egypt was the unsatisfactory condition of the finances, Sir H. Wolff was enjoined to inquire into this subject, especially as regards the employment of foreigners, while he was to be equally mindful of the intention of the Government strictly to observe all international agreements, and loyally to support the present Khedive. The object of the mission was communicated to the Powers, and no opposition was offered by any of them. It is true that Germany and Austria were not very sanguine as to the prospect of peace being restored to the Soudan by means of Turkish troops; but they placed no obstacle in the way of an attempt being made in this direction. The communications that took place between Lord Salisbury and M. Waddington were of a nature to assure France that her susceptibilities would be respected, while the Powers generally were informed that the solution of the whole Egyptian problem would at last be approached with firmness and determination. There was indeed good reason to believe that, had matters remained much longer as they were when the late Government resigned, the Powers would have themselves undertaken the problem which England was apparently unable to solve. The following were communicated to the Powers as the leading principles on which the Government proposed to work: (1.) They would fix no date for leaving Egypt; (2) they would not separate Egypt from the Ottoman dominions; (3) they would respect treaties; (4) they would endeavour to induce the Sultan to send a small Turkish force to Egypt, to stay there so long as the British forces; (5) they would undertake the improvement of the Egyptian Administration when peace was restored to the Soudan. On the 22nd of August Sir Henry Drummond Wolff arrived at Constantinople, where his stay was prolonged for some time by the formalities and delays of Turkish diplomacy. It is unnecessary to follow minutely the discussions which took place at Constantinople, and the difficulties they presented—difficulties which were largely increased by the outbreak of the Bulgarian revolution. The negotiations covered the whole subject of the pacification of the Soudan and the appointment of a Turkish Commission, and raised such delicate questions as the disinclination affected by the Sultan in associating his troops with those of England after the useless massacres, as he was pleased to consider them, in which the latter had been engaged, the expense of a Turkish force, the duration of the English occupation, the character of the Turkish forces, and many similar matters.

By the 14th of September matters had so far advanced as to allow Sir H. Wolff to formulate the result of the discussions in the draft of an arrangement which he requested might have the approval of the Sultan, and to intimate that it would be necessary for him to proceed to Egypt on an early day. A series of protracted negotiations thereupon took place as to the details of the draft prepared by Sir H. Wolff. After many weeks of discussion and many references to Lord Salisbury, the convention was practically concluded by the middle of October, and Sir H. Wolff was formally appointed Commissioner to Egypt on behalf of Her Majesty's Government. The Sultan himself, at the last moment, proposed alterations in the convention; but the document was formally signed on the 24th. Its main provisions are: (1.) That the two Governments will each send a Commissioner to Egypt. (2.) That the Ottoman Commissioner will consult with the Khedive, or with a representative specially designated for the purpose, as to the best means for tranquillizing the Soudan by pacific measures. The English Commissioner is to be kept currently informed of these discussions and their results, and the measures decided upon are to be adopted and put in execution in agreement with the English Commissioner. (3.) That the two Commissioners will reorganize the Egyptian army in concert with the Khedive. (4.) That, subject to existing firmans, the two Commissioners, in concert with the Khedive, will examine all the branches of the Egyptian administration, and modify them where necessary. (5.) That the international engagements of the Khedive will be approved by the Sultan so far as they are not contrary to existing firmans. (6.) That the two Commissioners will report to their respective Governments as soon as they have assured themselves of the security of the frontiers and of the good working and stability of the Egyptian Government; and that the two Governments will thereafter consult as to the conclusion of a Convention regulating the withdrawal of the British troops from Egypt within a convenient period (*dans un délai convenable*).

On his arrival in Cairo Sir H. Wolff's first duty was to make the Khedive and his Ministers acquainted with the text and purport of the convention. They received it with great satisfaction, and there is no doubt that it has done much to allay the irritation previously existing in the Mussulman mind towards England. It has placed the authority of England on an equality with that of the suzerain Power in Egypt—in fact, so long as the British occupation continues, it legitimates our position in the country, it offers fresh hope of a settlement with the Soudanese, while it lays down distinctly that England has a right to stay in Egypt until that country can be safely left to itself.