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EGYPT: A Constitution

On November 18, 1914, Britain declared a Protectorate over Egypt in order to prevent that country from joining (as Turkey did) the side of the Central Powers in the war. On February 28, 1922, the British Government announced that the Protectorate was abolished, but that there should be: maintenance of British Empire communications; defense of Egypt against foreign aggression; protection of foreign interest in Egypt and minorities; guarantees for British interests in the Sudan. On March 1, 1922, Sarwat Pasha formed an Egyptian Cabinet. And on March 16, Fuad, Sultan of Egypt, was proclaimed King Fuad I of Egypt—the first independent ruler of Egypt since the death of Cleopatra on August 29, 30 B. C. The British, who had ruled the country by martial law since 1914, then promised that such law would be withdrawn as soon as a constitution had been framed and agreed to. Last week King Fuad formally signed the constitution which now becomes effective, and British martial law comes to an end.

King Fuad, Ahmed Fuad Pasha, G. C. B., is the eighth ruler of the dynasty founded by Muhammad Ali in 1811, and is the son of Khedive Ismail Pasha, whom the French and British forced to abdicate in 1879. He is 55 years of age, became Sultan of Egypt on October 9, 1917, and married Princess Nazli on May 24, 1919. He is a man of large stature; handsome after the manner of Egyptians; inordinately proud of a mature Kaiser moustache; of considerable intelligence, but with pronounced leanings to despotism, believing that his subjects should heed the Spanish proverb: "With King and Inquisition . . . hush!"

When Dr. Howell, first United States Minister to the Egyptian Court, was received by King Fuad with a full complement of oriental pomp and ceremony, he said: "I wish your Majesty a long reign in which your Majesty will be known to all men as a just, beneficent and kingly ruler." The King replied: "It pleases me to assure you that you may always count upon my entire support and the amicable cooperation of my government in improving the good relationship existing between Egypt and the United States of America."

The constitution which has just been signed is a signal victory of democracy over the would-be autocracy that the King wished to impose on the country. In it Egypt is defined as a "free and independent State" with an hereditary monarchical constitutional Government, and the throne is reserved to the members of the family of Muhammed Ali, the founder of the present dynasty. Education is made free and obligatory for both sexes. All power is derived from the people and the legislative power is to be exercised conjointly by King and Parliament. The King and the Court did not, however, wish the Sovereign to be the sort of king "who reigns but does not govern." They held the constitution up for some time by claiming that the legislative power should be solely with the monarch and that he should in no way be responsible to Parliament. In the face of public opinion and a threatened revolt, both the King and the Court capitulated, and Fuad I, by signing the constitution, becomes a constitutional monarch.

The question of the Sudan, at present under Anglo-Egyptian rule, at first caused considerable difficulty. The Egyptians claimed full sovereignty over it, but the British stated that they were unwilling to abandon their interest in that country. The constitution now holds that Egypt's rights in the Sudan are unaffected and that the King's titles will be defined after Anglo-Egyptian negotiations have definitely decided its status.

On the death of Cleopatra in 30 B. C., when the Ptolemaic dynasty came to an end, Egypt became a part of the Roman Empire and was governed by the Romans until 639 A. D. From that date until 1517, Egypt passed through a series of quasi-independent dynasties under the suzerainty of the Abbasid Caliphs at Bagdad (the second of the two great dynasties of the Mahommedan Empire). From 1517 until 1914 Egypt was an integral part of the Ottoman Empire, with the exception of the years 1798 to 1801, which mark the period of Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. Up to 1841 Egypt was governed by Pashas—a Turkish title conferred by the Sultan; but on February 13, 1841, the Sublime Porte (Constantinople, the seat of the Sultan) made the government of the pashalik (territory governed by a Pasha) of Egypt hereditary in the family of Muhammed Ali, with the Turkish title of Vali (Viceroy). On June 12, 1867, the Sultan of Turkey authorized the change from Vali to the Persian-Arabic of Khedive, meaning prince or sovereign. This title was kept until 1914, when on December 19 the British deposed Abbâs Hilmi because he supported the Kaiser, and installed Hussein Kâmil, the eldest living prince of the Muhammed Ali family, as Sultan of Egypt, thereby marking an end to the subjection of Egypt to the Ottoman Empire. Hussein died in 1917 and was succeeded by his brother, the present King, who became Sultan of Egypt, October 9, 1917.

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