TRAGEDY AT ISMAILIA
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TRAGEDY AT ISMAILIA

The tragedy of Egypt flared up luridly yesterday in the Suez Canal zone town of Ismailia when the British attempted to disarm a force of Egyptian auxiliary police and ran into a pitched battle in which some forty-five men died. Before the five hours of fighting were over the British had brought up tanks and armored cars. The Egyptians, who made a sad spectacle of themselves in their war against the Israelis, fought hard and died bravely in this hot skirmish. They could not, of course, long resist the determination of General Erskine. The British still consider themselves responsible for the protection of the Canal. The ships must go through, and there is not the slightest doubt that the British, bringing up naval reinforcements from Malta, will be able to see that they do go through.

But force alone, on either side, is no solution of the Egyptian problem. The British came to Egypt in the first place, seventy years ago next summer, because there was rioting and murder in Alexandria and because anarchy in Egypt rendered the Canal unsafe. Anarchy in Egypt is even more of a danger to world peace now than it was then. It is a danger even though we may suppose that King Farouk and his Government, whatever their faults may be, do not wish for armed conflict with any major Power. The trouble may be in Egypt, as it is in Iran, that once the jinni of mob rule is out of the bottle it is difficult to recapture it. And the Egyptian populace does have something to complain of. The British do not harm the fellahin by controlling the Canal, but these unhappy people nevertheless are deeply impoverished, ravaged by disease and mistreated or neglected by a corrupt Government. What the nation needs is help, economic and technical, from the Western World.

At our comfortable distance there is much to be said for the compromise already proposed under which Egypt would join with Great Britain, France, Turkey and the United States in setting up a Middle East Command with the purpose, among others, of safeguarding the Canal. No one of the countries mentioned has any interest in exploiting the Egyptians. Each, on the contrary, would benefit by peace and prosperity in that corner of the Mediterranean. But nothing but misery can come to Egypt and its people out of such insane violence as has recently been encouraged or tolerated by the Cairo Government.

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