

The Fight against the "Capitulations" in Egypt.

By J. B. (Jerusalem).

Egypt is the only country, apart from China, in which there still formally exist capitulations, that is to say special rights and privileges for the citizens of foreign imperialist States. The origin of the Egyptian capitulations is to be traced to the capitulation rights which were enforced upon the Turkish Empire by the European States in the 19th century. And although Egypt was the first country to be freed from the "yoke of Ottoman despotism" and to be converted into a protectorate of the great civilising power, Great Britain, nevertheless even under the English protectorate the regime of capitulations still continues. This was the compensation which England had to pay to her rivals — France, Italy and Germany — for the latter's recognition of the British protectorate. By means of the capitulations, not only the ruling English, but also more or less big colonies of other European powers exist as parasites on the living body of the Egyptian people.

This state of affairs was in no way altered when the Ottoman Empire finally collapsed after the world war. Everywhere in all provinces of the former Ottoman Empire the capitulations were abolished shortly after the conclusion of peace. With a stroke of the pen the special privileges of foreigners were abolished by the French mandatory power in Syria, and by the English in Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq. The English and French administrations which were set up in these countries realised only too well to what an unbearable state of affairs, from the political and economic standpoint, the retention of the capitulations would be bound to lead. Apart from America, which also was granted certain compensations, there was no Power in these countries which have placed obstacles in the way of the abolition of the capitulations in these countries.

In 1922, under the Lausanne Treaty, the capitulations were also abolished in the territory of the newly-arisen national independent Turkey; nor did the rulers of Arabia think of granting special rights to foreigners.

Egypt alone remained burdened with the capitulation regime. The independence of Egypt was formally proclaimed; the country received its own king, its own government, a parliament and a Senate. But this independence was reduced to an empty formula, not only by the continued occupation of the country by British troops, the retention by British officials of all the most important administrative posts, but before all by the continued existence of the capitulations.

It is to be seen, therefore, that the fight for Egyptian independence is closely bound up with the abolition of the capitulations. All the Egyptian parties have included in their programmes the demand for the abolition of this institution which is so disastrous and humiliating for the country. But all attempts to abolish the capitulations have up to now been frustrated by the resistance of the interested Powers. England, France, Italy, Greece, Spain and the other countries plainly and emphatically declare that they will not renounce the rights of their citizens to be free from taxation, to recognise only the Consular courts and to be exempt from the jurisdiction of the Egyptian courts.

It is in vain that the Egyptian government proves by means of statistics that the capitulations render Egypt a perfect paradise for foreign criminals, smugglers, swindlers etc. It is in vain that it points out the tremendous injury caused every year to Egyptian national economy by the capitulations. Equally vain are the attempts to bring about a temporary compromise solution, as for instance, extension of the jurisdiction of the so-called mixed courts (in which foreign and Egyptian judges take part), limitation of the jurisdiction of the Consular courts to exceptional cases, liability of foreigners to pay certain taxes. The Powers obstinately refuse to give way an inch in this matter.

It is characteristic how quickly Germany, whose capitulation rights were abolished in the war, but were then given back by the English, has again resumed her place in the imperialist united front. The German representative refused the request of the Egyptian government that the capitulations be abolished just as emphatically as did the representatives of the other countries. Germany cannot alone renounce her privileges.

In view of the failure of the negotiations, the Egyptian press is pointing out more and more the necessity of using other means in order to force the obstinate foreign powers to give up their privileges. At the same time the Egyptian press does not

fail to call attention to the Chinese example, and there are tendencies to continue the campaign against the capitulations with revolutionary means.