Cromer, 1st Earl of Biography

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Biography

The English statesman Evelyn Baring, 1st Earl of Cromer (1841-1917), ruled Egypt from 1883 to 1907.

Evelyn Baring was born on Feb. 26, 1841, at Cromer Hall in Norfolk. He entered Woolwich in 1855 to train for the Royal Artillery and in 1858 went with his battery to the Ionian Isles. After service in Malta and Jamaica he entered staff college in 1867, later moving into intelligence work for the War Office. In 1872 he was appointed private secretary to his cousin Lord Northbrook, the viceroy of India.

Baring returned to England in 1876, and the next year he was sent as commissioner to Egypt to represent British bondholders. But Khedive Ismail was attempting to rid himself of Anglo-French financial control, and in 1878 Baring resigned. When Ismael was deposed and Khedive Tewfik enthroned, Anglo-French control was reestablished, and in September 1879 Baring became British controller. Six months later, however, he returned to India as finance member on the viceroy's council.

In September 1883 Baring, now knighted, went to Egypt as British agent and consul general. Britain had occupied Egypt in the previous year and crushed the nationalists under Urabi. The country was bankrupt, and the Sudan in full rebellion under the Mahdists. To limit costs, Baring wished Egypt to evacuate the Sudan. His Egyptian ministers were opposed to his plan, but Baring forced them to obey, thus establishing British colonial control over theoretically independent Egypt.

By 1888 Baring had balanced Egypt's budget, which went into surplus in 1889. In the following years he abolished forced labor, reformed the systems of justice and administration, and extended direct British control over all aspects of interior government. Baring (who had already earned the nickname of "Overbaring" in India) became an almost viceregal figure.

In 1901 Baring was created Earl of Cromer. He opposed the growing Egyptian nationalist movement, which demanded that Britain's promises of withdrawal be fulfilled. The 1906 Denshwai incident, in which several Egyptian peasants were executed, incensed the Egyptian nationalists and gained them sympathy in Britain, where Henry Campbell-Bannerman's Liberal government insisted on progress toward self-government in Egypt. But Cromer could not adjust to these new policies and, his health failing, he resigned in March 1907.

Cromer took his seat in the House of Lords as a Liberal in 1908 but devoted most of his time to his writing. He died on Jan. 29, 1917.