

Egypt

Kawkab al-Sharq, 14 September 1933

Egypt is a country that God created to be free and independent, honoured and noble. God granted it its right to freedom and independence, and its fullest share of honour and dignity, before other lands had felt the meaning of these words — before history had known of the existence of other lands. But now Egypt has lost its freedom and independence; its honour and dignity have been destroyed. It faces today one of those days on which freedom and independence were lost to it, and on which its honour and dignity were diminished. And its people today — as they were before — know the meaning of freedom and independence, value honour and dignity, and are most zealous in being free and independent, most earnest in being honoured and noble.

Egypt is a country that had a voice in the life of nations and generations for dozens of centuries — before other peoples knew the meaning of the word nations and generations, before history knew of other peoples for a long time. But now it has no voice in the life of any nation or people; indeed, it has no voice even in its own life. The voice in its life belongs to other people who came from beyond the sea, imposed their power upon it by force, subjected it to their authority by compulsion, and have since that day been deciding its affairs — consulting it not, asking it not, asking themselves not, asking no one whether their decisions in its affairs satisfy it or not.

Egypt is a country: ask any of its people about freedom and independence and they will tell you that they insist upon them with the insistence of one wronged in reaching his right; ask any of its people about honour and dignity and they will tell you that they guard them as the living guard life itself. And yet, for all that, it does not enjoy this right it insists upon, and does not attain this life it guards — because a people came from beyond the seas and poured iron and fire upon it, and forced it into a life utterly remote from the life of the free and independent people, and from the life of the honoured and noble people.

Egypt is a country whose people live two lives: one that is evil throughout, humiliation throughout, and degradation throughout — the

life of a people upon whom the foreigner has imposed himself and decides their affairs as he pleases. The other is a life that is good throughout, honour throughout, and glory throughout — the life of a people that felt injustice and swore to reject it, that felt humiliation and swore to cast it off, that felt degradation and swore to free itself from it, whatever the cost in effort.

Egypt is this country whose people live the life of unceasing, fierce struggle between reality and hope, between daily existence and the highest ideal; upon which the sun does not rise without its people feeling a humiliation that comes upon them, and an honour that drives them to reject it; which has learned how to be patient — but without despair; how to stand firm — but without surrender; how to endure — but without acquiescing to indignity or submitting to injustice; which has chosen for itself in life a supreme ideal it will not rest content with life before attaining — complete freedom and full independence; which has begun to strive in earnest towards this ideal, in spite of the obstacles strewn in its path, the evils poured upon it, and the various forms of cunning and scheming prepared against it — none of which has prevented it from proceeding on its path, steadfast of foot, resolute of will, sincere of purpose, preferring death to halting on this path.

This is the Egypt remembered today in a grief that kindles hope, renews vigour, stirs indignation, recalls ancient glory, and brings the highest ideal closer. It remembers that ill-fated day on which the English army entered the city of Cairo more than half a century ago.

Egypt has not forgotten that day since it was, and Egypt will not forget that day even after the English army has departed from Cairo. It is now a memorial of humiliation imposed by the foreigner in injustice and aggression — but it will beyond all doubt and question become a memorial of honour that the Egyptians impose upon time itself; for they believe in their right and they strive, and they will not cease from their striving nor slacken in it until they attain this right, and until they compel the English to retrace their steps, withdraw from their country, and acknowledge the right they once denied.

The Egyptians today are too aware of the right and too zealous in guarding it to turn away from it or fall short in pursuing it. And Egyptian youth today is too clear-sighted and too fine in character to deceive itself with words or feed itself with hopes. Egyptian youth will not believe that it is truly free while the English army remains stationed in Egyptian soil; Egyptian youth will not believe that it is truly independent while English authority extends over Egyptian soil; Egyptian youth will not believe that it is truly honoured and noble while all of Egypt's affairs, great and small, are conducted contrary to Egypt's will.

Egyptian youth today is too clear-sighted and too great in its appreciation of right and duty to rest content with anything other than what youth in every truly free and independent nation rests content with. Egyptian youth is not heedless or idle — it is perceptive and alert; it knows full well what is wanted of it, knows full well what it itself wants, knows full well how to refuse the usurpers and colonisers their usurpation and colonisation, and how to offer its life and its efforts as a slight and easy price for what it wants — the realisation of its aspirations to honour and independence.

Egyptian youth today knows Egypt's history, and knows full well the adversities that have fallen upon its country and the afflictions that have visited it, and knows full well how to benefit from studying this history: how to feel honour and pride when it reads in the pages of Egyptian history those images that portray Egypt's glory and eminence in ancient and medieval times; and how to feel patience, steadfastness, the rejection of injustice, and earnestness in the pursuit of glory when it reads in Egypt's history those pages that portray what has befallen Egypt from forms of tyranny and aggression.

And as it reads the pages of Egyptian history with all their varied bright and dark images, it learns how to love Egypt in happiness and in sorrow, how to revere Egypt honoured and independent, and how to offer its life as a ransom for this country that has tasted the sweetest that peoples have tasted of a life of happiness, honour, and ease — without being corrupted by arrogance or insolence — and has drained the bitterest that peoples have drained from the cups of injustice, tyranny,

and aggression — without being corrupted by submission, resignation, abasement, or subjugation.

Whoever claims that something, whatever it may be, distracts Egyptian youth from its national duty is either a deceiver or deceived. And whoever claims that Egyptian youth needed this day to remind it of the English occupation of Cairo, or that other day to remind it of the English bombardment of Alexandria, is either a deceiver or deceived — for in every Egyptian heart there are two images that are always in conflict and always at war: one representing the foreign aggression and the other representing national honour. Every day of the Egyptians' days has been, and will continue to be, a powerful, grief-laden memorial reviving hope — restoring to the Egyptian the memory of those dark days in which the foreigner trod the soil of the eternal, beloved homeland.

Ask no Egyptian — young or old, great or small, rich or poor — about the Egypt he loves, for whose defence he has risen, and for whose rescue he gives his life: is it Arab or Pharaonic? That is something Egyptians think about only when they want to speak in the manner of scholarship and what resembles scholarship in its discourse. As for the Egypt that fills the hearts of Egyptians and drives them to hope and to action — it is above all hypotheses, above all conjectures, above the learning of scholars, the research of researchers, and the philosophy of philosophers. It is this eternal, steadfast, blessed homeland whose earth grows us, whose sky shelters us, whose water sustains us, and which yields for us everything that life contains of the kinds of pleasure that make existence beloved and the kinds of pain that form character.

Egypt is this eternal, steadfast, blessed homeland upon which times pass with all the adversities and vicissitudes they carry, yet it neither changes nor passes with time — it remains fixed and present, smiling always. Its sweet and calm sun rises every day, kindling movement and life in everything and in every person; its strong, measured Nile flows, kindling movement and life in everything and in every person.

This Egypt is the one for which our fathers lived, whatever their original races may have been — they put no other country before it, spared it no effort, and withheld from it nothing, not even life. This Egypt

is the one for which we live, whatever our original races may be, as our fathers lived for it and as our children will live for it — we put no other country before it, whatever it may be; we spare it no effort, whatever it may be; we withhold from it nothing, not even life.

This Egypt is the one we see in ourselves today as humiliated under foreign authority — and the one we want to see in ourselves tomorrow as too honoured, too inviolable, and too noble for those who covet it to dare do so.