

Audacity

(“Iqdām” — Kawkab al-Sharq, 23 March 1933)

Taha Hussein

But it is a dangerous audacity, one that may drag us toward evil and end in what the bold ones themselves do not desire; and one that the very health of this ministry may also be unable to bear — a ministry that maladies have seized by its various extremities, rendering it incapable of carrying out any great work, whether such work be beneficial or harmful.

Yes, it is a dangerous audacity, suspect and unseemly — this, whose marks and first signs have begun to appear in the administration’s conduct in Upper Egypt. For the administration in Aswan had been calm; it had been settled, hearing and seeing, suffering and growing angry, yet without becoming agitated or excessive in its agitation; rather it left people to themselves, to feel and to sense, and then to express what feeling and sentiment they found — so they celebrated and applauded and cheered, and everything was calm, and order was settled — unless the showing of sentiment and the enjoyment of that natural liberty which the constitution guarantees be counted a breach of order and a disturbance of the peace and the calm.

The administration had been calm and untroubled in Aswan when the venerable President visited it, and nothing — or almost nothing — of consequence occurred. But the most sober of temperaments may grow flighty, and the weightiest may turn frivolous. It appears that the administration’s patience, however long, has a limit; that its forbearance, however wide, is narrow; that it may see what it itself dislikes — even though the constitution, the law, and order do not dislike it — and may bear it for an hour or hours, and endure it for a day or days, and then before long turn against it and rage at it, and set upon the people, seizing them so as to stifle their feeling, suppress their sentiment, and make them relinquish their natural right to come and go, and to do what they please by way of honoring those they love.

It appears that the administration cannot continue in patience and endurance for very long, and in this it furnishes the clearest and strongest proof that its competence to carry out the tasks it undertakes is open to doubt and a place of suspicion.

For governance is not violence nor oppression; governance is not defiance nor confrontation; governance is not the display of force and might. Rather, governance is patience and endurance; governance is provision against emergencies and readiness for incidents — not the hastening of them, nor the inciting of people to bring them about.

Yes, governance is not violence nor oppression. Governance is, rather, that capacity which enables you to observe and to watch while you are calm and untroubled, and while you are strong and prepared to repel evil should it occur or should its occurrence be feared.

Everything indicates that, had the administration adopted these principles of governance — had it grown calm and settled, content with readiness for emergencies and not entangling itself in provoking them — nothing would have happened, and no individual or group would have come to harm. But this — as I have said — is no easy thing, it seems; and it can be neither easy nor possible save on the day when the nation and the government live a single life, feel a single feeling, and share truly in interests, in hopes, and in the loftiest ideals.

Then the nation can live free, and the government can protect this free way of life — sustaining it, and strengthening whatever it holds of the means of life and the elements of liberty.

But the matter in Egypt is otherwise in every respect: the nation has its own life and hopes, and the government has its own life and hopes, and between these two kinds of life and hope lie vast distances that there is no way to shorten or to bring closer.

The nation wishes to live free, and the ministry insists on clipping the wing of that liberty. The nation loves whom it loves among the leaders, and meets them rejoicing, gladdened by their coming, placing its hopes in them; and the ministry detests these leaders whom the nation loves and in whom it invests its hopes. The ministry detests them, and so bars them from movement and travel if it finds in itself the power to do so, and leaves them to what they want if it is unable to confine them to their houses; but it disguises itself, and bares its fangs, and defies, and confronts, and displays such kinds of harshness and such shows of force and might as provoke and incite to evil — until, when evil has occurred or nearly so, it takes this as a means to confiscate the liberty of the leaders and the people, and as an argument that the stability of order requires

that the nation be made still, so that it neither feels, nor senses, nor lives!

This is not how governance is done, nor how order is established. What are these reports that have begun to arrive from Upper Egypt — of the clash between the people and the police in Luxor, of the wrecking of automobiles and the wounding of individuals among the people and the police, of the besieging of some houses and the storming of others, of the issuing of orders by the Public Prosecution for the arrest of certain people? What is all this? And to what end is all this? And to what danger is the country being exposed, that the administration should take up this stance toward the people and provoke their feelings in this manner?

What is the meaning of placing the stations under siege? And what is the meaning of escorting the venerable President and his companion on the train? Does the government wish the people to feel that it is strong, that it has a police force armed with rifles and clubs, and that this police force is able to disperse the assembled, scatter the celebrants, and silence those who cheer? For no one has doubted that the government has a police force and an army, that it possesses rifles and clubs, and that behind this police and this army stands yet another army — strong and foreign — ready to lend victory and support. But the work of the police and the army is only to answer when they are called: so who was it that called them? And who was it that asked them to set upon the people while they were safe and at peace?

No one has doubted that the government, if it wishes, is able to deal violently with the people; and it has wished this more than once, and so has dealt violently with the people and made them taste all manner of harm. But the thing we all doubt — nay, we do not doubt it but are certain of it — is that there is no good in this violence; rather it is evil, all evil, and danger, all danger.

The government has dealt violently with the people more than once, and there were the slain and the wounded, and there were calamities and horrors; yet after all this, and despite all this, the government has gained nothing of what it wanted. It has not drawn the hearts of the people to itself; it has not quieted the people's wrath against it; it has not turned the people away from those they love; it has not made the people renounce what they love. Rather, the policy of defiance and provocation has brought it to the very opposite of what it wanted.

For never have the people loved their liberty as they love it today; never have the people clung to their independence as they cling to it today; never have the people's hearts been attached to their old constitution as they are attached to it today; never have the people trusted their leaders and chiefs as they trust them today; never have the English despaired of the policy of trickery, evasion, oppression, and violence as they despair of it today; and never has the rule of terror and exhaustion failed as it fails today.

Let the government look and listen wherever it wishes and whenever it wishes: it will see and hear nothing but mountains of liberty unequalled by any love, an ardor for true democracy unequalled by any ardor, a disdain for calamities, a contempt for the blows of fortune, and a readiness to endure and to bear what is hateful.

Despair has not yet reached, and will never reach, the hearts of the people. So what is the use of the government's clinging to what cannot be? And what is the use of its wearing itself out over what holds no good? This nation lives its life calm and untroubled, regarding events with patience, holding fast to its faith, confident in the future, turning away from the government, leaving it to follow its crooked path. So why does the government not, in its turn, live its own life, and leave the nation to what it wants?

Yes, in Egypt there are two different lives: one is the life of a nation that is all hope, and so it endures and smiles; the other is the life of a ministry that is all despair, and so it rages and turns hostile, and stirs up and provokes the people. And what wonder is there that one whose heart is filled with despair should be vexed by one whose heart is filled with hope?

A dangerous audacity, this, whose marks are appearing in Upper Egypt; restraint would be better than it. How greatly the ministry needs to think of itself, to attend to its health, to treat this paralysis that has struck its limbs, and to give itself over to this disease that has crept into its parts; for in all of this there is enough to occupy it and keep it from the visit of the venerable President and his companion to Upper Egypt.

Let the government busy itself with its own affairs, small and great, and let it rest assured: neither order nor security will be exposed to danger, nor to anything resembling danger, if only it takes its

administration's men in hand with calm, and restrains the hand of the administration from the people.

The stability of order is bound up with the stability of the administration. So if the government must do something, let it pull hard toward itself the reins of the administration; for it may well appear that in the administration's horses there is an inclination to bolt.