

Responsibility

("Tab'a" — Kawkab al-Sharq, 18 April 1933)

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Some have claimed that resistance in Egypt to foreign domination has been weakened, that lassitude has crept into it, and that a kind of torpor has settled upon it, preventing it from producing in the cause of national hopes what had been expected of it; that Egypt has not advanced far along the road to independence since the national movement of 1919; and that the capitulations remain in force, which Egypt cannot abolish unless England herself undertakes to protect foreign interests and to abolish the capitulations on Egypt's behalf — for Egypt is too feeble to stand up to Europe and the English, and too short of reach to proceed to abolish the capitulations on her own, as the Persians and the Turks have done ...!

Some of our friends have taken to explaining this weakness of resistance, tracing it to its sources and seeking out those who must bear responsibility for it. They have hit upon the true cause of this weakness and put their finger on the malady that should have been excised from the moment its symptoms appeared, and whose excision has now become a national necessity that cannot be avoided — if the leaders of opinion in this country, as we believe, still have faith that independence is Egypt's right and that it is their duty to lead her to it.

And this malady to which our friend was led and upon which he placed his hand is the proliferation of parties without any real cause for such proliferation. For the Egyptians, all of them, seek independence, strive for it and insist upon it, and wish they could find the opportunities that would enable them to achieve it, even to make the supreme sacrifice in the cause of achieving it. They gave clear proof of this, proof that admits of no doubt, on the day they rose in 1919, demanding independence and revolting, fighting the Protectorate until they abolished it.

The Egyptians, then, all demand independence and insist upon it; their parties do not differ in this, and there has arisen among them no cause of disagreement that calls for the parties to proliferate and diverge. It is rather — as our friend says — passions, temperaments, and interests

that create parties and shift individuals between them. And there is no doubt or ambiguity about it: power alone is what created the parties in Egypt, after the word of the Egyptians had been united in demanding independence, insisting upon it, and sacrificing in its cause.

You can trace the history of the parties that were created in Egypt after the Wafd was formed to demand independence and the whole Egyptian nation rallied behind it — with no dissenter and no deserter — and you will see that the hope of reaching power, dominating affairs, and securing benefits for certain groups and certain individuals is what assembled these parties one after another, and what placed in Egypt various political bodies that fight among themselves and fall upon one another, each doing harm to the others, each inciting against the others, each plotting against the others — while all of them are striving to achieve one and the same objective: independence.

And these parties, proliferated as they are, are not many, and their history is not so distant as to require great effort and toil in its study and investigation. You can enumerate what has arisen among them since the national movement, inquire into the causes that led to its emergence, inquire also into the causes that led to its development, and inquire also into the causes that pushed it at one point northward until it drew close to the Wafd and nearly merged with it, and pushed it at another point rightward until it split away from the Wafd and declared war upon it. You can inquire into all this, and you will need neither hardship nor effort for this inquiry to lead you to one single thing: that ambition for power created the parties, and that ambition for power tipped the scales of the parties so that they tilted rightward at one time and leftward at another.

And since matters are thus, individuals must needs move between the parties: among them are those whom self-interest entices, so that they tilt from left to right; and among them are those whose hearts grow weary of manoeuvrings and manoeuvres, of placing private interests above public ones, and of using the people as a means to power when power ought to be used as a means to liberate the people — so that they tilt from right to left.

Yes, a single cause created the parties, and that cause is power; a single cause led to the parties' development, and that cause is power; and a single cause made coalitions desirable and made them undesirable, and

that cause is power. How fitting it would be for the parties that arose after the national movement to revisit their recent history all at once, in a spirit of remembrance — for remembrance is sometimes useful. And how fitting it would be for the parties that arose after the national movement to return to the sound idea upon which parties ought to rest: that power is a means, not an end; that the happiness of the people is an end, not a means; that the efforts of individuals and groups must be devoted purely to liberating the people if they are oppressed, educating the people if they are ignorant, and enriching the people if they are poor. And that it is a sin to use the deception and misleading of the people as a means to enjoying power and monopolizing wealth, status, and authority.

Our friend who discovered this malady and placed his hand upon it has observed that the English were compelled to suppress the national movement by their English power after the Wafd arose and before the parties arose. But once the parties arose, the English dispensed with their power and enlisted Egyptians to humiliate Egyptians; they found parties that reached power through the English, and once settled in their posts used the soldiers and the funds of the state to weaken Egyptian resistance and to entrench the power of the English — and this, with the deepest regret, is a truth of which there is no doubt.

But discovering the truth is one thing, and profiting from that discovery is another. And if it is good to know the malady, it is obligatory to cauterize it and cure the patient of it. And what cauterization of this malady, which our friend discovered and placed his hand upon, is better than the restoration of national unity to what it was before the parties arose, than the reuniting of the national voice as it was united before the parties arose, than the dissolution of these parties and the return of their members to working for the people and with the people, with no one having any advantage over another save in competence, sincere endeavour, and good conduct in the cause of independence?

This is the cure after the malady has been discovered. But profiting from this cure, though it is a national duty, seems to have no way forward — because the English continue to dangle power, and because souls continue to yearn for power. And as long as the English dangle their lure, and as long as souls yearn and long, the dissolution of the parties may be impossible; indeed, the coalition of parties in pursuit of purely national interest may be difficult. And so the nation must needs be tested through

its sons as it is tested throughout its entire life; and the nation must needs wage two struggles: it must struggle against the English on one front, and struggle against the English' friends among its own sons on another.

And the nation must endure against the English until its endurance confounds them; and the nation must bear the trial of its sons until the hopes of these sons for power are cut off, or until their living consciences restore them to the ranks. And if there is a duty which it is good for peoples to perform, with courage and dignity, in order to reach a dignified and independent life, it is this: that these peoples not deceive themselves about themselves, and not deliberately remain ignorant of the points of weakness within them. And so it is incumbent upon the Egyptian people, if it wishes to live free and with dignity, to acknowledge before itself that it has a point of weakness: these parties that arose after the national movement, that leaned rightward at one time and leftward at another, and that refuse to walk the straight path — for the straight path is long and arduous, and does not lead to power save after heavy effort and severe toil.

Let the responsibility for all this, hereafter, fall upon whoever it falls upon. Let it fall upon the Egyptians; let it fall upon the English; let it fall upon one group of Egyptians rather than another. For what matters in all of this is that the nation should know the point of weakness within itself, and exert itself in its own behalf, and be firm in preserving its unity, and open its heart to those who wish to return to that unity, and turn away — with mercy and compassion — from those who insist on falling behind the ranks.