

Resistance

Kawkab al-Sharq, 25 March 1933

There is no violence in it and no harshness; no force in it and no severity. It is calm and serene. Many people imagine it to be submission and surrender — but when they come up against it they find it bitter; when they test it they find it hard; when they unleash upon it all the power they possess they obtain nothing from it. The smiles of this quiet resistance are not a manifestation of weakness, not a variety of contentment, not a mode of submission — they are a biting, searing irony that entices and allures, until when the covetous man draws near he is undone, and the one who holds it in contempt finds at its side the lethal venom, and recoils from it blunted and despairing.

How beautiful is this calm serenity which the colonisers take for abasement — only to find it is honour in its fullest sense; which the covetous take for surrender — only to find it is defiance in its fullest sense; and which is the clear and conclusive proof that revolution is not in violence alone, nor in severity alone, nor in that upheaval in which order is broken, sins are committed, and the innocent good are offered as sacrifice to the sinful wicked. Revolution may rather be composed of tranquillity, safety, and equanimity, around which the enemy circles but cannot reach it, cannot come close to it — until when seriousness sets in it becomes clear that he has expended his effort to no avail and wasted his time to no benefit.

How much poets and men of art have concerned themselves with those bewitching smiles that form on the lips of certain individuals — mocking events, holding misfortunes in contempt! And how abundantly the poets and men of art have concerned themselves with these smiles of individuals, excelling and achieving mastery, showing people timeless works of art. How much worthier they would be to look at other, more mocking smiles — more magnificent than those smiles and more beautiful, more powerful in their impact on hearts, more far-reaching in their effect on souls — because they are smiles that translate the people's mockery of the power of the powerful, and the nation's contempt for the authority of the arrogant.

In these popular smiles there is the beauty of patience and fortitude, the beauty of honour and nobility of bearing, the beauty of confidence and hope — and in them, above all and after all of this, there is the beauty of genuine solidarity and cooperation that finds no way in through weakness or failure.

How worthy the poets and men of art are of portraying this mockery of peoples, and how worthy the despots and those who want to force the nation into what it does not love, and take it by what it does not accept, are of also looking at these smiles — that perhaps they may stir lessons in their souls, that perhaps they may fill their hearts with instructive warnings, that perhaps they may convince them that humiliating individuals may be feasible, but humiliating a nation is something beyond all hope.

It is folly to spend effort on it, to waste time on it, to sacrifice for it the politicians' intelligence and competence and whatever they covet of good renown and wide-reaching fame.

How beautiful are these smiles that have formed on Egypt's lips ever since the Prime Minister took up the burdens of government — they have never left these lips, never departed from them, never been tinged with frowning, and no knitting of brows or pallor has altered their clarity and beauty.

Egypt looked at Şidqī Pasha when he formed his cabinet, understood what he wanted, and smiled at him with compassion — admonishing and warning him. But he misread this smile: he saw in it no admonition, no counsel, no warning — only satisfaction, encouragement, and acquiescence. So he pressed forward on his path, hardening and going to excess in hardness, changing and going to excess in change, replacing and immersing himself in replacement.

And whenever he advanced a stretch along his path, he looked at Egypt and saw the smile of compassion and warning — and understood from it nothing but submission and surrender, and gathered his forces and pressed ahead with redoubled insistence. And when his strength grew he imposed himself on Parliament and dissolved it; on the

Constitution and changed it; then on individuals and groups — some seized by inducement, others by intimidation; then on all the public interests, through which corruption spread as a disease spreads through the body of a healthy man; then on foreign policy between us and the English, and between us and other nations — producing a strange compound: outwardly a dignity that deceives no one, inwardly surrender and ignominious collapse.

And whenever he advanced a stretch or several stretches, he looked at Egypt and saw this compassionate, mocking smile — and understood from it neither compassion nor mockery, until his effort reaches its utmost limit and his exhaustion arrives at its end. There — and only there, but after time has been lost and effort has been squandered — it becomes apparent to him that he let his vanity deceive him about his nation: he diminished its importance when it is great, belittled its standing when it is mighty, thought it content when it is indignant, and took it for submissive when it is fiercely proud.

There, and only there, he looks ahead and sees nothing but effort expended in vain and strength gone for nothing. He looks to his right and to his left and sees for himself no way out of the politically tight spot into which he has mired himself. He stands where God willed him to stand — unable to advance because the road ahead is closed, unable to retreat because the way behind is cut off. He is bewildered, not knowing what to do, not knowing what to say.

And his friends who backed and supported him, and his allies who pinned their hopes on him, who tied their aspirations to him — they look at him, press around him, hover about him, and ask him: What have you done? Where have you ended up? Where are those broad hopes and wide aspirations? Where are you and where are we in realising the hope, justifying the expectation, and bringing this nation to where you wanted it?

Yes — they question him and he finds no answer for them; they press him with their questions and he presses with his silence; they bow their heads as he has bowed his, fall silent as he has fallen silent, and bewilderment takes hold of them as it has taken hold of him. And the

Egyptian nation is calm and tranquil, serene and still — and on its lips this clear, sweet smile that no longer leaves any doubt about what it means to express.

What? After three years in which the sun does not rise except upon a force imposing itself, and does not set except upon a machination plotted and a scheme prepared — the nation remains as it was on the day the Prime Minister rose to replace one life with another, one system with another?

What? At first the leaders would set about speaking — and would be silenced; they would set about moving — and would be compelled to stillness; they would set about travelling — and would be turned back to their homes. And it was said: a remnant of chaos that firm governance must erase, an excess of turbulence that order must remove. A year passes and the remnant of chaos is still there; another year passes and the excess of turbulence is still there; and the third year draws to its close and the matter is as it was in the very first hour.

The leaders should not speak, nor move, nor travel — because the nation still loves them, trusts them, gathers around them, and responds to their call. And so what was all the force expended for? What were all the efforts spent for? What were the funds squandered for? What was a system abolished and another erected in its place for? What was a parliament dissolved and another erected in its place for? What were inducement and intimidation unleashed upon individuals and groups for? What was the cabinet patched and darned for? What were the hands of administrators extended over people in what is permitted and what is not? What did the Prime Minister sacrifice his health for and submit to the authority of doctors for? What was all of this for — given that the noble leader has only to move for the whole nation to rally around him as on the first day the cabinet was formed; has only to speak for all hearts to flutter for him as on the first day the cabinet was formed; has only to call for the whole nation to respond as on the first day the cabinet was formed? And so what was all this effort for, and what was all this time sacrificed for?

A question that finds no answer with the Prime Minister — but you find its answer, clear and manifest, biting and dashing all hopes, in this sweet-bitter smile: content and indignant at once; obedient and despairing at once.

The leader of the Wafd and his companion had barely extended their journey when the government proved incapable of bearing the nation's love for them and its gathering around them — and so they are turned back against their will in a train guarded by the police, or by the army, or by both together, exactly as when they were attempting to travel in the first year of this cabinet's years.

The nation did not love the leader of the Wafd and his companion out of fascination with their persons or infatuation with them — they are like you and me. But the nation sees in them its principle to which it has sworn to attain, and its highest ideal to which it has sworn to arrive.

Come then, Your Excellency — gather whatever soldiers of the police and soldiers of the army you wish; turn the leader of the Wafd and his companion back to Cairo; place each of them in his home; lock the doors on each of them; erect barriers before each of them; do the same to the other leaders — you will never achieve more than you have already achieved. And what have you achieved? And where will you find the strength to resume the struggle? Is this a movement of despair or a movement of hope?

How much do hopes torment souls, and how incapable people are of grasping lessons and warnings! And if it is a movement of despair — the ancient poet was right when he said:

*Perhaps the soul detests from fate / what holds a relief like the loosening
of a tether.*

As for you, honoured and proud homeland — keep your sweet-bitter smile; for there is nothing more exasperating to the events of fate, nor more mockingly dismissive of afflictions and adversities.