

Unjust Blame

Taha Hussein

Whenever the government erred, the opposition pointed out its error, and asked it to set the matter right; whenever the ministry fell short, the opposition exposed its shortcoming, and asked it to turn away from it; and whenever the ministry overstepped, the opposition pointed out its excess, and asked it to return to some measure of moderation and restraint. Whereupon the ministry took offence, and its offence grew fierce; the ministry complained, and its complaining grew fierce; the ministry contemplated force and violence, and resolved upon them, and threw itself into them by whatever way it found open to it; and the ministry's partisans and helpers said of these opponents that they cavil unjustly and manufacture reproach, that they will have nothing but fault-finding, that they wish by it no good and seek by it no benefit, but mean by it only to embarrass the ministry, to bar its way, and to force it to defend itself with severity, so that it should go to excess in its own defence. And whenever the Prime Minister took in hand a constitution that stood in force, one the people trusted and loved, and held obedience to it a binding duty, since they had pledged themselves to God upon it, and sworn to it by the most solemn of oaths — whenever the Prime Minister took in hand this constitution and set up in its place another, and did not follow, in doing so, the constitutional path prescribed within it, the path that was lawful and obligatory — the people denounced what the Prime Minister had done, and the people desired that this constitution be restored to them, and pursued toward that end nothing but the lawful, permissible way, in which there is neither sin nor suspicion. The Prime Minister said: they are rebels. And his helpers and partisans said along with him: yes, they are rebels. And whenever the standing constitution permitted the people to say whatever the law allowed them to say, and to travel wherever the law allowed them to travel, and to enjoy their freedom just as the Prime Minister and his associates enjoyed theirs, the Prime Minister said: they are rebels — and the Prime Minister came between them and speech, and the Prime Minister came between them and travel, and the Prime Minister came between them and assembly, and turned them back from their journeys and from their clubs by the hands of the police, with their truncheons and their whips. And the Prime Minister refused to let them meet one another, or visit one another, or even speak to one another, and the Prime Minister set the police to watch over them, circling their houses,

standing at their doors, following them when they went out in the morning, tracking them when they went out in the evening, and bursting in upon them in the mosques of God when they went there to perform the prayer. And the foreigners were silent through all this, and the foreigners were content with all this, and the English were pleased with all this, and said: Egypt is an independent country, and it is not fitting that we should come between its government and its people — and they praised the Prime Minister and his helpers and his partisans, for that by this conduct they were establishing order, and by this policy securing security. And whenever the foreigners tyrannised over the Egyptians, taking control of their interests and their concerns, holding cheap their freedom and their dignity, and exposing a portion of them to hunger and privation — and the Egyptians showed some sign of denouncing this, or of indignation at it — the foreigners took offence, and went to excess in their offence, and the foreigners complained, and persisted in their complaint, and the foreigners said that there was in Egypt hatred for them, conspiracy against them, and incitement toward them. And the foreigners sought the aid of the English against the Egyptians, and the foreigners complained of the Egyptians to the Egyptian ministry. And whenever the missionaries among the foreigners transgressed against the young of the Egyptians, their sons and their daughters, leading them into sedition in matters of their faith, drawing no distinction in this between the Muslim, the Christian, and the Jew, and pursuing toward that end at one time the path of coercion and torment, at another the path of seduction and enticement, and at a third the paths of tampering, deception, and the corruption of the will through hypnosis — whenever the missionaries did all this, and clear proof of it stood established, and the plain facts themselves declared it, and the missionaries themselves confessed to it, and the ministry itself confessed to it, and Parliament itself confessed to it, and then the Egyptians denounced it, and protested against it, and asked that this evil be turned away from them and this harm lifted from them — the foreigners took offence, and the English were indignant, and The Times said that the opposition were making the question of proselytising a means of embarrassing the government and plotting against it; and the ministry's own partisans were not ashamed to say as The Times said, and to accuse the opposition of the very thing The Times accused them of, and to claim that the opposition say and do nothing except to embarrass the ministry and plot against it and bring down upon it every kind of embarrassment and obstruction. And the meaning of all this is that the Egyptians must deny themselves, and relinquish their right to a free life, and content themselves with whatever portion of

abasement and submission God has allotted them; that they ought not to reproach the ministry should it err, or fall short, or overstep, since that would be an embarrassment to the ministry and an unjust blame upon it; that they ought not to complain or show impatience should the foreigners tyrannise over their affairs, and appropriate for themselves, to the exclusion of the Egyptians, the good things of their own country, since that would be hatred of the foreigners and a plot against them; that they ought not to feel indignation, nor to call upon the ministry against the missionaries, should these missionaries transgress against the children in matters of faith, morals, and honour, since that would be an incitement to sedition, and a provocation of it, and an embarrassment to the ministry, and a breach of order.

It follows, then, that the Egyptians must cease to be people like other people — that they must feel nothing, and denounce nothing, and complain of nothing, for if they feel, they complain and denounce, and if they complain or denounce, they are rebels, or plotters, or lovers of sedition desiring it. And do not say that this condition which the ministry and its partisans desire, and to which the foreigners and the English wish to reduce the Egyptians, is ill-suited to the nature of things, or ill-suited to right, justice, and equity, or ill-suited to the least measure of human dignity — for in these days the matter is referred neither to the nature of things, nor to right, justice, and equity, nor to human dignity, but only to interests, and to the interests of the powerful in particular. The ship of the ministry, then, must sail upon a calm, tranquil, settled sea, one the wind does not lash nor the wave disturb, but only the breeze caresses its surface. And the affairs of the foreigners must proceed exactly as they wish, finding from the Egyptians no resistance, nor anything resembling resistance. And the affairs of the missionaries must proceed as well as they proceed in any country on earth, so that fathers and mothers should feel no anger when their sons and daughters submit to every kind of aggression.

The Egyptians must be like a lump of dough which the powerful shape as they please, finding in it no resistance and no refusal, but only pliancy, obedience, and softness. And do not say that the foreigners themselves, in their own countries, oppose their ministries and wage war upon them; and do not say that the foreigners, in their own countries, would never under any circumstances tolerate an assault upon faith, morals, and honour, still less one committed by strangers. Say nothing of this, for all of it is true beyond doubt — but it is true in Europe and

America, and ought not to be true in Egypt, since in the soil of Egypt and its sky, in the air of Egypt and its water, there are peculiar elements that no sooner take hold of a right than they turn it into an injustice. In the land of Egypt there are peculiar elements that require the Egyptians alone to endure what no one else endures, to be exposed to what no one else is exposed to, and to be held to what no one else is held to.

These foreigners, missionaries and others, fear sedition and shrink from it, yet they stir it up and persist in stirring it. For it is established fact that the Egyptians did not invite them to Egypt, but that it was they themselves who came to Egypt of their own will; and it is established fact that the Egyptians have complained to their government and have sought the aid of this government, and have not ceased to complain to it and to seek its aid in warding off sedition before it occurs, and in taking precaution against harm before it strikes the guilty and the innocent alike. And it is established fact that the Egyptians — for all the harm they meet with, and the injury they bear — counsel one another to patience, counsel one another to gentleness, counsel one another to the preservation of security and order; but these missionaries stop at nothing of this, and heed nothing of this, but wish only that everything be permitted to them, that they be given leave in everything, and that no one resist them in anything — and if the Egyptians accept this, so be it, and if not, then they are the authors of sedition and its advocates, the enemies of security, and rebels against order.

This is much, and more than this, for a ministry to accept and to endure patiently — for the ministry is, in any case, Egyptian. And whatever its doctrine of government, and whatever its view of the people's policy, it owes it to itself, as a matter of right, not to consent that it be said of the Egyptians that they are the authors of sedition, when in truth they are the people furthest removed from it, and the most anxious of all people that it should never come to be.

It is not true (and the ministry itself knows it is not true) that the opposition makes the story of the missionaries a means of embarrassing it. The truth, beyond all doubt, is that the opposition has wanted, and continues to want, and will always want, that the government rise to the purpose for which it was created — for it was created, before all else, to protect the citizens from external aggression, and from the corruption of order and the disturbance of security within the country. And it is no protection of the citizens from external aggression to leave the missionaries free to descend upon them from every quarter, tampering

with their children and wronging them in matters of faith, dignity, and morals; nor is it the securing of order and the establishment of security to leave these missionaries free to do as they please with minors and the weak, meddling with them as they have done until now.

The Egyptians, then, rebel against no one, wish ill to no one, harbour deceit toward no one; they wish only to be secure and at peace in what all people wish to be secure in — their faith, their dignity, their morals, and their interests — and they ask of their ministry that it rise to this duty as it ought, or else resign.