

A Commemoration

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The Prime Minister and the Finance Minister are convalescing in Europe. The Under-Secretary of Finance is taking the air in Europe and attending the Economic Conference. The Minister of Education is preparing to leave for Europe, as he did last year — a journey combining rest after his labors in building up the school system with the chance to gather the fruits of those labors in the form of decorations and titles. The Under-Secretary of Education has already preceded him to England for a rest, and the Secretary of Education will be going to Lebanon in a few days for a rest. One of the two Under-Secretaries of the Interior will travel to Europe for a rest, while the other will be working in Alexandria — though the Cabinet decree requires the under-secretaries to remain at their ministerial posts from time to time, the Under-Secretary of the Interior has been kind enough to continue working in his colleague's absence, so there is no escaping his combining work with summering at the state's expense, since he too, naturally, needs a rest. The Director-General of Public Security has gone to Rhodes for a rest. The Under-Secretary of Public Security has applied for leave, which the Minister of the Interior has graciously granted him, for a rest. The Director of Publications has traveled to Constantinople for a rest. The Under-Secretary of Publications has likewise been granted leave — also for a rest. All these ministers, meanwhile, are summering in Alexandria at the state's expense, resting while nominally at work. And the state of affairs in the remaining ministries is no different from these three we have mentioned, if their men are not in even greater need of rest and more handsomely entitled to leave. The state of affairs in the various departments and services is the same as in the ministries — their chiefs, deputies, and officers all need rest and have every right to apply for leave, and the government is bound to grant their requests and let them enjoy as much leave as they wish. And the government, if it is so inclined and in a playful, light-hearted mood, disposed to being obliging and treating people well, may also seize upon these leaves as an opportunity to assign certain capable civil servants to various missions in the countries of Europe, and to pay toward this assignment the costs of travel and accommodation, or travel without accommodation, or whatever generous or modest sum it pleases as a contribution to the costs of travel and accommodation.

The sum of all this — and of what resembles it from what we know and keep silent about, and what we do not know and do not mention — is that in Egypt there are two phenomena worthy of reflection and consideration, worthy of much discussion, worthy of becoming the subject of a proclamation about Egypt unlike any other, an announcement about Egypt without equal. The first phenomenon is that the affairs of Egypt are running as smoothly as affairs can ever run in any government, being managed without a manager and moving along without anyone at the wheel. Egypt is accordingly the very image of that ideal country which takes its government as an ornament, a luxury, and a leisure above the diversions of life — lest it be said to fall behind other countries.

The proof of this is that this enormous number of ministers, under-secretaries, chiefs, and directors — the very pillars and columns of the state — has traveled or is about to travel, has rested or is about to rest, has summered or is about to summer, and yet the departments and services continue on their course, moving straight ahead without deviation or confusion. Had Egypt been a troubled country, or anywhere near troubled, and had Egypt been in urgent and pressing need of these pillars and columns, they could never have rested or applied for rest or even thought about it. I venture to guarantee you that you will not find in any country on the face of the earth a number of officials like this enormous number, all resting or preparing to rest, all traveling or preparing to travel. And I am aware that some of those tiresome contrarians whom nothing pleases, not even the fast in the month of Rajab, will say: how do you know? Perhaps the affairs of state are thrown into the most violent disorder and corruption precisely because these gentlemen have abandoned their posts for longer or shorter periods, and no one pays any heed to it or gives it a second thought, though people know it perfectly well and feel nothing. Some will say this, or something like it, but they are going too far, and one should not listen to them or dwell on what they say — for our ministers, our under-secretaries, and our chiefs are too devoted to the interests of the state, and too careful of the good of the people, to allow themselves to fall into such trifling, or to neglect our public life so grossly. They have living consciences and quick minds, and a fierce attachment to their trust. For it is only because they know with complete certainty that the ship of state can sail on calmly and serenely without them that they have left it behind and allowed themselves this rest which they undoubtedly need.

This is the first of the two phenomena. As for the second, it is that Egypt is wealthy and prosperous, so close to bursting with riches that she risks indigestion from the sheer abundance of her wealth and means. The proof of this is that she can bear all these leaves, paying the salaries of all these officials whom she can do without throughout the summer months, while also spending on one group of them summering in Alexandria and on another group vacationing in Europe. Had she been poor or of middling means — like England, France, Germany, or Italy — she would have economized somewhat, dispensing with some of these officials whom she does not need in summer, since she most certainly does not need them in winter either, and would have refused to let some others summer at her expense, since she herself does not summer. And she would have refused to let yet another group enjoy life in Europe at her expense, since she herself enjoys nothing but misery and suffering. And in this scorching heat that melts souls and smelts bodies — but no: Egypt is wealthy and prosperous, and she is free to spend without restraint and scatter without reckoning, treating her wealthy to the account of her poor and her masters to the account of her subjects. And Egypt is free to do with her money whatever she pleases — she may throw it out the windows and send it off on the wind, and no one may question her about it or call her to account for it. So she has chosen, and she spends right and left, and lavishes upon ministers and their like every manner of comfort. Whoever finds this to his taste, so be it; and whoever does not, let him drink from the Nile, if circumstances do not permit him to drink from the sea.

You will agree with me, then, that it is in Egypt's interest that much be said about these two phenomena, so that all people may know that we are happy, that all people may know that we are a people who have no acquaintance with misery, poverty, or suffering, that all people may know that we are a people in whose souls fear finds no opening, and in whose hearts there is no cause for anxiety about tomorrow or for preparation against tomorrow. And why should we trouble ourselves with tomorrow when our affairs are in such good order, praise God, and our masters know our interests better than we do and are better placed than we are to protect us from misfortunes and calamities? They are content, so we must be content; they are reassured, so we must be reassured; they are smiling, so the smile must never leave our lips.

And you will ask me about these two phenomena: where do they come from? How has Egypt distinguished herself from all of God's

countries, so that she prospers when the world suffers, and grows wealthy when the world is poor, and finds her peace when the world is troubled, and rejoices when the world is grief-stricken?

The answer to this question is simple. It does not require recourse to history, nor consultation with economics; it requires only one thing — that we recall the day we are now in. For this is the day on which the English bombarded Alexandria, and after which the English entered Egypt.

This day, now half a century or a little more behind us, is the source of the happiness that now distinguishes us from all the countries of the earth. We were wretched; then we tasted prosperity from that day forward. All our affairs were in the hands of others; then all our affairs came into our own hands — from that day forward. We had no ministers, no under-secretaries, no civil servants able to rest and go to excess in their resting, or to summer at our expense, or to vacation in Europe at our expense, because in those days we had no treasury to speak of. But since the occupation, we have grown wealthy and prosperous, and our banks have overflowed with our money — so it is our right to spend from it without measure, as we please, and on whom we please.

Would you not agree that the government is perfectly right to forbid people from protesting the bombardment of Alexandria or grieving at the memory of the occupation? For governments exist among men to teach them fidelity and gratitude, and to restrain them from ingratitude and thanklessness. And the Egyptians today are ungrateful and unacknowledging: they deny the benefits the English have conferred upon them, and grieve at the presence of the English among them. The government must therefore discipline them and discipline them well — taking them to task for at least affecting a degree of decency, so that they may conceal their ingratitude when ingratitude is unavoidable, and hide their thanklessness when thanklessness cannot be helped, and grieve in private between themselves and their own souls when grief cannot be avoided. For it does not become Egypt that people should say of her that she is sad and downcast on this day, when what was called for was to show joy and merriment and delight.

As for myself, I had wanted to be like the other writers who wrote in commemoration of this day — they preached and preached well, and painted its picture and painted it admirably. But I could find no sermon more eloquent, no lesson more deeply lodged in the soul, and no picture

more faithful to the true effects of the occupation upon the souls and hearts of Egyptians, in their public and private life, in their interests and their institutions, in their dignity and their honor, in their hopes and their high ideals, than the picture in which we find ourselves right now, in the shade of this happy era. For this happy era is itself one of the effects of the occupation and one of its truest pictures — a mirror that reflects it exactly as it is, with all that it contains of what we love and what we do not love, of what we accept and what we do not accept. Let those who approve of this era approve of the occupation and wish it to endure. And those whom this era afflicts in their own person, their dignity, their pride, and their interests — let the occupation afflict them likewise; and let them pray to God to lift its darkness and remove its oppression; and let them do all they can to free themselves from its unrelenting harm and its abiding evil.