

Summering

Kawkab al-Sharq, 28 May 1933

As for the people, they will spend the summer season as they are accustomed to spending it every year — laborious in work, struggling to bear their burdens, enduring exhausting toil and grinding hardship, because they need to live and because living in these days is not easily within reach. It is not enough to stretch out your hand to obtain what you want from it — you must strive in its pursuit through the white of the day, you must spend the black of the night devising how to secure it, you must scorn pain in order to ward off hunger, you must expose your entire body to the scorching heat of the sun, and you must load yourself with twice the burden you used to bear in order to reach some portion of the sustenance you owe yourself and your family.

There is no way, therefore, for the people to think of escaping the summer or fleeing it to the seashore — where the refreshing breeze blows, where rest and the savoring of life's pleasures await, where the burdens of a year's work may be set down and strength gathered to bear them again when autumn comes. The people will think of none of this, because they have never been accustomed to thinking of it, and because life has never accustomed them to grant them the respite, the leisure, and the financial ease that would allow them to think of it. And because life in these days demands from them twice the effort it used to demand, costs them twice the toil, and does not after all of that spare them the pain of hunger and deprivation.

And so bare feet will walk on scorched ground until they bleed; sallow faces will endure the blaze of the sun until they burn; rays of solar fire will pierce torn and tattered clothes until they reach the bodies beneath, working upon them in a manner resembling nothing so much as the lash of whips — which may also touch them with harm when they fall short in paying their taxes. Men and women, young and old, will return to their homes at day's end where hungry children await them — some having obtained a little, some having obtained nothing at all. Those who obtained something will make do with a little bread and some onions and the like. Those who obtained nothing will make do with patient endurance of hunger, in the hope that tomorrow's day may reward them for this patience with something better.

As for the Prime Minister, he will summer as a convalescent in Paris and Versailles, and will travel from Paris and Versailles to wherever the doctors direct him — mountain resorts or seaside resorts or ocean resorts — where life is gentle and existence smiles, where nature is exuberant and serenity abides. Around the head of government is a company of people who are not ill, and who have nothing resembling illness, but who are attached to the Prime Minister — lightening his easy life for him, smoothing his smooth existence, relieving him of

his light burden, resting him even from rest itself, and entertaining him even from idleness!!

As for the ministers, they will abandon their grand and luxurious offices and their fine and comfortable homes — for the summer heat there is intense, and summer there is exhausting to the mind and wearing to the body — and they will move to Alexandria, where the sea and its beautiful shore await, its open air and the varieties of pleasure and delight that stir near its waves, and the kinds of joy and merriment that come with the brightening of day and the darkening of night. A company of officials will move with them to relieve them of their rest, facilitate their easy work, and allow them to enjoy this beautiful life — the summer life in Alexandria. And with the ministers and officials a company of servants and attendants will move to provide for both parties whatever they need to taste this comfortable existence and enjoy tranquil minds for months of the year, after chafing under the serious and laborious life of Cairo.

The state will spend on all of these — both parties. It will spend on those summering in Alexandria. The state is obliged to spend on both parties, for they are its ministers and its officials. And when has the state ever been known to fall short in indulging its ministers and officials and the servants of its ministers and officials?!

But there is one thing that no one will think of, no one will notice, no one will pause over — and these ministers and officials and their retinues will be displeased with us for thinking of it now and wishing to remind them of it and draw it to their attention, in the hope that it may stir between them and their consciences something of a conversation not devoid of lesson and moral, and which may sometimes arouse the emotion of shame!!

This thing is that the funds the state will spend on them so that they may enjoy the pleasure of the sea and its open air and refreshing breeze are levied from those whom the sun will burn without mercy, whose feet will bleed on ground scorched by the summer heat, whose faces will be darkened by the glare that assails them from every direction, and whom these blazing rays will caress, piercing through to their frozen bodies — through their torn and threadbare clothing. It is therefore incumbent upon the ministers and officials, when they plunge into the water in the morning or evening; when they sit at their desks in their offices and this gentle breeze comes and caresses their faces, penetrates to their bodies and stirs in them a light pleasure that invites energy; or when they sit at their tables in clubs and cafes enjoying what is brought to them of food and drink, and look out at the sea as the sun floods it with its rays at the start of the day, or draws those rays back from it at dusk, and the moon plays with it as the night advances; and when they watch the dancing of male and female dancers, hear the music of male and female musicians, fill their eyes with those beautiful, bewitching scenes that come alive on the seashore in the evening, filling the air with enchantment and souls with turmoil, and stirring in hearts a fire — some of it innocent and

some of it sinful!

It is incumbent upon them, when they take pleasure in all of this and find the delight of all of this, to remember those wretched people whose feet bleed and whose faces burn, who breathe air whose very composition is flame, returning after long toil and intense hardship — and many of them perhaps finding nothing to eat!

Yes, it is incumbent upon them to remember these people — for this memory may do some good, and may stir in their souls something of sorrow for the wretched, compassion for the miserable, and sympathy for the afflicted. It may impel them to acknowledge some of these people's rights, to recognize some of their merit, and to hold themselves — not to returning their money to them, nor to sharing in their pain, nor to lifting some of their burdens from them — but rather to attending to their interests and looking after them with care and concern. Perhaps this may make them feel that they have not been left as prey to harm and hardship, but that they have ministers and officials who feel for them some pity, show them some sympathy, and look upon them with a gaze not entirely devoid of compassion!!

Where are we, and in what age do we live? We are in Egypt, which is a part of Europe — so in what country of Europe do ministers abandon their capitals to summer at state expense?! We are in the twentieth century, in which the personality of peoples has been affirmed, in which class distinctions have been made to disappear, and in which the actions of governments have been subjected to the most rigorous surveillance and the most exacting accountability. So where is the recognition of the personhood of the people who will endure torment in the summer so that their ministers and officials may enjoy at their expense every variety of comfort?

And why do the ministers and officials move to Alexandria at state expense? They have two options: either they are capable of working — in which case let them remain in Cairo; or they are incapable of working — in which case let them resign or rest on leave at their own expense, not at the expense of the wretched and deprived people.

They will say that the ministers move in order to be near His Majesty the King, and that the officials move in order to be near their superiors the ministers and officials. But kings and presidents of republics spend their summers in Europe, and the ministers remain in their capitals — and when heads of state need them, they travel to wherever they are at their summer residences and then return to where they work.

Cairo is not far from Alexandria where His Majesty the King summers. It is the simplest and easiest of things for the ministers to travel to wherever they have the honour of presenting themselves before His Majesty to receive his high commands and to submit to his exalted

presence whatever matters they wish to submit.

It is not, therefore, the interest of the state that requires the government to move to Alexandria — it is the indulgence of the government's heads, the ministers and officials. This was tolerable, for all its weight and its deviation from what is right, before this terrible crisis intensified. As for now, it is a matter whose least possible description is that there is no way to defend it.

It has been claimed that the acting Prime Minister considered cancelling this summer journey, and then claimed that he abandoned this thought. Let the Prime Minister think again, and let the ministers think with him, and let the officials think with them, and let the parliament think with them all — that these are not days of luxury and extravagance, but days of endurance and deprivation; that the life they live in Cairo is neither bad nor wretched, but is in fact a life that many ministers of the great powers envy them.

Let them therefore remain in Cairo — for that is the least they owe by way of demonstrating their solidarity with the people and sharing, if only from a distance, in the hardships they endure.