

Yesterday

(“Ams” — Kawkab al-Sharq, 25 July 1933)

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It was, beyond all doubt, a memorable day — a day on which the emotions of the people appeared in their full force: strong to the utmost limits of strength, sorrowful to the utmost limits of sorrow, and clear to the furthest bounds of clarity.

It was, beyond all doubt, a memorable day, one which neither the contrived political circumstances nor the affected political arrangements could stamp with that lukewarm character that leads people to imagine the nation has grown heedless of itself and of its rights, preferring a life that flows on steadily and easily, free of effort and of toil, concerned with nothing but those fleeting needs that confront individuals every day.

Yes, it was beyond all doubt a memorable day, one on which the sorrowful, faithful emotions of the people surged forth fiercely, heedless of all else. The soul of the people revealed itself, as it has always been: utterly pure, utterly clear, believing in the truth with the deepest faith, confident of victory with the fullest confidence, appreciating to the highest degree the sincerity of the sincere, the devotion of the devoted, and the sacrifice of those who sacrifice themselves in the cause of truth, of duty, and of patriotism.

In speaking of yesterday, I do not speak as a mere reporter, nor as a narrator, nor as one who repeats reports and tidings. Rather I speak as a witness who lived these immortal hours alongside the people, who felt this magnificent feeling alongside the people, and who shared with the people in this great emotion. So when I speak, I am not describing what I myself felt and received from that great soul — the soul of the people — for there is no way to describe such a thing now. I wish, rather, to depict those impressions that remain in the soul after these magnificent popular gatherings, in which the life of the people appears strong and unconquerable, mighty and never humbled, bold and unafraid, surging and irresistible, innocent of all affectation, pretense, and hypocrisy, or any attempt at affectation, pretense, and hypocrisy.

Perhaps the first of these impressions — the strongest, the most enduring, the most insistent upon the soul and the most possessing of the

heart — is admiration for the free popular spirit in its strength, its frankness, and its innocence of affectation and crookedness; and the conviction that this strong, great spirit is one and the same. Circumstances change around it, yet it does not change; its causes, its motives, and its manifestations vary, yet it does not vary. It is the very same spirit when it appears because the people grieve over the loss of someone dear to them or the loss of one of their rights; and it is the very same when it appears because the people rejoice at the coming of someone dear to them or at the gaining of one of their rights. It is that power which embodies the people's esteem for themselves, the people's faith in their duty, the people's refusal of every injustice, and the people's rejection of every act of aggression.

Look at whatever manifestation you wish of the popular spirit — when it bids farewell to a great departed one, or welcomes a great new arrival, or protests because some evil is intended against it, or rejoices because some good has been brought to it — and you will find all these meanings represented in this spirit in the truest and most powerful way. Perhaps those who study society and probe its secrets, and who seek to discern the characteristics of the people's life, may find in all this avenues for inquiry and analysis, and aspects for study and explanation. But I aim at none of that now, nor do I deny any of it now. I wish only to observe — and I do not doubt that many of the thinkers who witnessed yesterday will observe — that it is exceedingly difficult for those who lead the people and oversee the organization of their struggle to despair, or lose hope, or let weakness find its way into their souls, while they behold this spirit, and feel it, and are kept alive by this burning fire which it kindles within them, strong and radiant — too strong and too radiant for events and calamities to affect. And there is another thought which I tried to drive from my mind but did not succeed in driving away, nor could I rid myself of it: the thought stirred by the simple comparison between what the Prime Minister cabled to the Daily Telegraph two days ago, and what the people proclaimed to the entire world yesterday. The contradiction between these two things is glaring indeed.

The Prime Minister declares to the Daily Telegraph, in calm and serenity, in boldness and confidence, that the nation is unanimous in repudiating the rule of the Wafd and in recoiling from its return to power, because that would be the road to chaos. And the people proclaimed

yesterday to the entire world, with strength and resolve, with courage and steadfastness, with certainty and faith, that they love none but the Wafd, want none but the Wafd, and will be content with nothing but the rule of the Wafd.

It is certain that I did not believe the people yesterday; rather I believed the Prime Minister, and I still believe him, and I shall always believe him — even after the Wafd returns to power — because I am confident that the Prime Minister is infallible, incapable of saying anything but the truth, of uttering anything but what is honest, or of portraying anything but the reality in which there is no doubt. The Prime Minister was therefore right when he informed the Daily Telegraph that the nation is unanimous in detesting the Wafd and its rule, and wants nothing but the Wafd and its rule. And it is most likely that the police yesterday took pity on those teeming thousands, and felt for them, and had compassion on them for their insistence on error and their persistence in falsehood, and so unleashed upon them the fire hoses to extinguish this false flame that was blazing in their hearts, and to bring these unruly, erring crowds back to moderation and rightness. And it is most likely that these teeming thousands profited from this lesson and benefited from the path of this cold counsel, and so came to believe — as I myself believe — that the Prime Minister was right and well-guided when he informed the Daily Telegraph that the nation is unanimous in detesting the Wafd, its rule, and its conduct of affairs.

And a third thought, which undoubtedly pressed upon the minds of all people yesterday, is this: that the succession of night and day, the passing of month upon month and year upon year, the variation of events and the procession of calamities, have changed nothing in the souls of the people, have laid no weakness upon their resolve, and have created among the people no cause for hesitation in demanding their right, nor any doubt that the future belongs to the people. Some people used to think that it was the recency of the event alone that had roused the people to their magnificent stand at the death of Wissa, may God have mercy on him.

A year passed after the death of Wissa, then another year followed it, and these two years were filled with all manner of trials and ordeals. Yet when Sinout died, the people took the same stand at his death as they had taken at the death of his companion, and showed in bidding him

farewell what they had shown in bidding farewell to his companion. The people set forth the most shining proofs and the clearest evidence that the Egyptian people's love of liberty, their devotion to it, and their reverence for its protection are no affectation, no pretense, and no kind of fashionable novelty — but rather a nature that there is no longer any way to change, however much strength be spent upon it, however much effort be marshaled against it, and however long the life of cabinets may last.

But I return to affirm that I believe the Prime Minister, convinced by what he said: that the nation is unanimous in detesting the Wafd and its rule because it is the road to chaos. And a fourth thought undoubtedly occurred to all people yesterday, one at which it behooves all people to pause and reflect long, and at which it behooves foreigners in general and the English in particular to pause and reflect long. For Sinout was a Coptic Christian; and there are those who suppose, and those who say, that the strife of the missionaries has divided Egypt, or has set out to divide it; and there are those who take this imagined division as a means of plotting against Egypt. But the death of Sinout showed that he had wholly succeeded in what he called for — the abolition of distinctions among Egyptians and the establishment of national unity in that noble place.

For yesterday the Egyptians were bidding farewell to their great departed one, not because he was a Coptic Christian, nor because he was a Muslim, but simply because he was an Egyptian. Yesterday the Egyptians thronged in and around the Coptic church and looked down upon it from the tops of the houses, mentioning nothing but that Egypt had lost one of her leaders, that she was grieved at his loss, that she accompanied him to wherever God willed his body to rest, that she passed with him by the Coptic church, entered that church with him, and stood with him at that church — because the rites of his religion required that he enter the church and that God's mercy be called down upon him there.

National unity, then, has triumphed in a manifest triumph, and the one who departed yesterday was the founder of this unity, its advocate, and its insistent champion. Will those who speak of division between Muslims and non-Muslims take heed of this? Will those who long for this division reflect upon it, so that they may learn that they long for what

cannot be, and hope for what hope cannot attain? Among people there are those whom God creates to be of benefit, living and dead; and Sinout was one of these. He benefited his nation in life, and he has benefited his nation and will continue to benefit it in death. God alone is able to grant him, for that, the finest of rewards.