

Appeal

I do not love pessimism, nor do I enjoy listening to pessimists. Indeed, I deeply dislike these conversations that cast over Egyptian life today a dark and sorrowful color, or that seek to predict for Egyptian life in the near or distant future only darkness and grief. Often I go so far in resisting such pessimism that I accuse myself of excessive optimism and force myself toward a middle ground between satisfaction and anger, between confidence and suspicion. I do not doubt that Egyptian life has never before descended to such depths of misery as it has reached in these days. Nor do I doubt that the abnormal political life we are now living is the principal cause of the suffering we endure. Yet I still believe that this evil political condition is temporary, however long and heavy it may seem, and that it must inevitably disappear tomorrow or the day after. I also believe that the Egyptian nation possesses enough strength, patience, endurance, and steadfastness to protect itself from plunging completely into the corruption and decay described by the pessimists. Thus I resist both extremes: exaggerated optimism and excessive despair. I hope that this suffering afflicting Egypt may be lifted and that this suffocating darkness weighing upon her may disappear. Yet certain signs are now appearing within Egyptian social life which, whatever we may do, we cannot and should not ignore. We must reflect upon them and warn against them, for they may prove to be omens of a great and spreading evil. They say that the police arrested a man near a mosque while he was attempting to sell a little girl. When investigators questioned him, they discovered that he had agreed with the girl's own mother to sell her. Thus, in the twentieth century, in the city of Cairo, beside one of God's mosques, we witnessed a man and a mother agreeing together to sell her daughter for a miserable sum—a few coins, a few dinars. Yet however large the amount may seem, it remains contemptibly small when weighed against the sacred emotions of motherhood that ought to have prevented a mother from selling her child for money. They also say that public security has deteriorated so greatly, and that authority itself has become so weak and helpless, that people now take justice into their own hands and seek revenge by themselves. Two men scarcely quarrel before pistols, rifles, or knives appear between them. People no longer feel safe even within their own homes behind locked doors. A knock may come at the door, and when it is opened death may enter—or perhaps a thief using violence and intimidation to extort money. The public roads themselves have become as frightening as desert roads in ancient times of tribal violence and lawlessness. A man walks calmly or fearfully along the road, and suddenly a bullet strikes him from nowhere or a club falls upon his head from an unseen hand. Yesterday some foreigners even told me that they had gone for a walk along one of the suburban roads near Cairo. Hardly had they left their automobiles and walked a short distance before they were met with showers of stones and insults. They feared that some terrible harm might come to them if they continued, so they hurried back into their cars and returned quickly to Cairo, where security appears somewhat more stable and reassuring. They

say as well that in Egypt there are two hundred thousand people suffering from tuberculosis and exposed to its fatal consequences, while the country possesses only a single hospital devoted to treating this terrible disease. Before this, and surely after this, people have spoken and will continue speaking of deadly epidemics sweeping through cities and devastating the poor and miserable. And however deeply you search for the causes behind all this—what drives a mother to sell her daughter, what places public security in such danger, what allows tuberculosis and epidemics to destroy thousands of Egyptians—you will inevitably discover at least one cause which, if not the only cause, is certainly the greatest among them all: hunger and deprivation. Most likely this mother did not sell her daughter because she hated her, but because she wished to survive. Most likely hunger is what tempts criminals toward crime, and deprivation is what strengthens tuberculosis and unleashes epidemics upon Egyptians. There may indeed be other contributing causes, but poverty is undoubtedly the most powerful and most terrible among them. And if you add to this misery another reality—a luxury bordering on shamelessness and indifference to human suffering, untouched by the burning fire endured by the poor and deprived—you will understand even more clearly the danger before us. This luxury is not enjoyed by the wealthy classes of the nation, for even Egypt's wealthy suffer beneath the burdens of the crisis. Rather, it is enjoyed by a group of high officials whom political circumstances have allowed to prosper through ministerial favor and governmental privilege. Then you will agree that it is only natural for bitterness to awaken in people's hearts, and for Egyptians to discover feelings previously unknown to them: the resentment of the miserable toward the fortunate, and the hatred of the deprived toward the luxurious and contented. People in Egypt read newspapers—or have newspapers read aloud to them—and nothing concerning ministers and high officials remains hidden from them. One may ask how certain newspaper reports are received in the hearts of the poor and deprived in cities, villages, and the remotest countryside. We need not ask how ordinary officials or political opponents reacted to the news that the Director of Public Security was to receive an annual bonus of three hundred pounds. Their reaction is obvious enough. But ask instead what effect such news has upon laborers and peasants struggling to obtain bread for themselves and their families, or medicine for illness and epidemics, and failing to find either. And do not ask lightly what effect the luxurious summer holidays enjoyed by ministers in Europe or Alexandria—whether at the state's expense or their own—have upon the soul of that mother who wished to sell her daughter, or upon countless other mothers who do not wish to sell their children yet desperately seek the means of keeping them alive. Egyptians would do well to reflect deeply upon these conditions now emerging within Egyptian social life. Without exaggeration or alarmism, we fear that these signs may herald a great disaster. Perhaps it is still possible to avert part of this danger if we confront it honestly from this moment onward. But one thing is certain: if we neglect it, it may grow beyond control, and one day we may find ourselves face to face with a terrible disease for which no remedy remains.

