

Patience

Kawkab al-Sharq, 23 June 1933

It is a virtue beyond doubt — say rather one of the most refined and purest of virtues, perhaps the most refined and purest of all. It is by patience that a man is distinguished who has attained all the qualities of manhood, who is able to meet adversity without flinching before it, without being distressed by it, without feeling his breast constricted by it as though he were ascending into the heavens.

By patience a man is able to mock at events, to laugh at calamities, and to smile at misfortunes. By patience a man is able to bear tribulation and hold firm against ordeal, and to look at things with a calm and steady gaze unspoiled by fear or hope — one that is upright and balanced, founded on the judgement of reason and the soundness of opinion. And then, by patience, a man is able to take in his active life steps that are free from rashness and safe from stumbling, to the degree that human nature permits its possessors to be free from rashness and safe from stumbling.

But this patience has kinds, and it has varieties and forms, with different qualities and shapes. There is patience that is very heavy — not merely containing the bitterness of waiting, but also the weight of burdens and the severity of deprivation. And there is a pleasant patience surrounded by varieties of blessing and kinds of pleasure, which dilute its bitterness, lighten it somewhat, and make it bearable — indeed, beloved to the palate and desired in the soul.

God has afflicted the Egyptian nation with patience in these days, making no distinction between its wealthy and its poor, between its people and its ministers, between its ignorant and its learned. Every Egyptian is being tested in his capacity for patience, tried in his endurance.

The Prime Minister mentioned patience and its merits in one of his two conversations with the Parisian newspapers, making patience a principle of governance and a foundation of politics. And the Prime Minister was entirely well-guided in his having found his way to patience

and made it the basis for all political problems between us and the English, and indeed between us and the foreigners generally. Our Prime Minister is confident that negotiations are coming, beyond doubt, and that the disagreement between us and the English will dissolve one day — but the path to negotiations and to resolving the disagreement is patience, and patience alone. And I assure you that you would be going to excess and extravagance — indeed, going beyond excess and extravagance into something I do not know how to name — if you were to deny that our Prime Minister is steadfast and patient in political matters generally, and in our affairs with the English in particular.

The man took up the burdens of government and wished to negotiate — but he hoped to negotiate. Then when he entered the second year he was minded to negotiate, and having already held elections and convened Parliament, he approached the English on the question of negotiations — but they asked him to wait, and he waited; they asked him for more time, and he gave them more time. One summer passed, followed by another summer, followed by an autumn; one winter passed, followed by a spring. The parliamentary year and the parliamentary session were completed, and the Prime Minister was minded to negotiate — calling for it and pressing his call urgently — but the English rebuffed him and he was rebuffed; they turned him back and he turned back; they demanded patience of him and he hastened to it. He hastened to it — but on condition that the English give him a little morsel to tide him over, as the late Sheikh Ḥamza Faṭḥ Allāh used to say, or a consoling tidbit, as people like you and me say. And the English gave him this morsel or tidbit — their Foreign Minister met him in Geneva and touched with him on one corner of politics in one corner of a conversation. The Prime Minister returned having sustained himself on this meagre fare, making do with it and bearing his wait patiently. Another autumn passed, followed by a winter, followed by a spring; and in these seasons events occurred for which the cabinet was reshuffled twice, and the Prime Minister and some of his colleagues fell ill — but none of this shook the Prime Minister from his ample patience and broad endurance. He remained confident in the negotiations, desirous of them, insistent in his confidence and desire, taking recourse in patience and in visiting the Sheikh of Imbāba and other saints and holy men — until summer came and he set off to France

to rest and sustain himself with patience while awaiting the negotiations.

He is, then, patient and persevering — a master of patience and endurance. And his patience is not confined to negotiations; it extends to all political matters he encounters by virtue of his office. He is like the Egyptian nation — desirous of abolishing the Capitulations, beyond doubt, for the abolition of the Capitulations is a condition for the fulfilment of national sovereignty, and our Prime Minister is intensely zealous for national sovereignty — recall his celebrated reply to the British Prime Minister. He therefore wants to abolish the Capitulations, but he takes recourse in the same thing for abolishing the Capitulations as he takes recourse in for the negotiations: patience, long-suffering, and visiting the Sheikh of Imbāba and other of God's favoured saints. And he will arrive at the abolition of the Capitulations, beyond doubt, by the same road by which he will arrive at negotiating with the English.

Our Prime Minister is as eager as other Egyptians that the national debt should not be consumed and its interest paid only in paper — but this is a grave political matter requiring deliberation and measured calm, resourcefulness and long waiting. And our Prime Minister is the best at deliberating and the best at being measured, the best at being resourceful and the best at waiting. He takes recourse in all of this through patience and visiting the Sheikh of Imbāba and other of God's saints upon whom there is no fear, nor shall they grieve. And as long as our Prime Minister is patient and persevering, steadfastly stationed in Versailles, the French and the Italians and the English will submit to him — and they will accept paper from him in place of pure gold.

And thus the Prime Minister delivers to the Egyptians a lesson in patience and taking recourse in it against events and adversities. But the Prime Minister's patience, however long it may last, is light and easy to bear — because the postponement of negotiations to an indefinite date injures the Egyptian people in its interests, benefits, needs, and hopes a thousand times more than it injures the person of the Prime Minister. Because the continuation of the Capitulations injures all of Egypt in its dignity and independence a thousand times more than it injures the person of the Prime Minister. Because the delay in resolving the debt

question wastes Egypt's interests a thousand times more than it touches the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister's patience with these things is therefore not patience with a harm that befalls him or an injury that visits him — it is patience with a harm that befalls others, with pains that sting others, with an injury that touches others.

How easy it is to be patient with such things as these! How easy it is for a healthy man to be patient with a sick man's illness — especially when the sick man is neither of his family nor of his friends! We are all patient in this manner, as the Prime Minister is; for however bitter it may be, its bitterness is alloyed and lightened by the sweetness of office and what that entails of power and force, of prestige and authority, of luxury and ease — in Egypt at one time and in Europe at another. The Prime Minister's patience was one of the varieties of luxury that all people desire but that is not granted to all people.

There is another patience that is not like the Prime Minister's patience — because it is purely bitter, unalloyed by any sweetness, unmitigated by any yielding or any ease. In it there is submission to forms of coercion and injustice; in it there is endurance of vicissitudes of hardship and affliction; in it there is hunger and in it there is deprivation; in it there is exposure to disease and epidemics; and in it there is more than all of this and harder than all of this: in it there is people's awareness that they were created noble and free, and people's inability to enjoy that nobility and that freedom. This bitter, heavy, and long patience is the patience with which God has willed to test, in these days, a generation of people called the Egyptians.

God Almighty is capable of afflicting fighters and the patient with varieties of ordeal — in their persons, their wealth, and their fruits; and after afflicting them in all of this He is capable of rewarding them for what they have endured, and giving them their due for what they have borne, and requiting them well for what they have striven for, and restoring to them what He has tested them in — so that they are noble, and they are free.

Let the Prime Minister be patient in Versailles and in other regions of Europe, and let the Egyptians be patient in Egypt — for God is with the

patient; but with the truly patient.