

Wakefulness

Kawkab al-Sharq, 26 July 1933

As for the Ministry being wakeful and knowing no sleep, watchful and knowing no slumber, cautious and knowing no negligence, alert and never to be caught off guard — this is a matter as plain as plain can be, as clear as clear can be, admitting no doubt and tolerating no dispute. And if proof of this must be furnished for the stubborn and the contentious, even though it needs no proof at all, it is enough for people to reflect that no political opponent of the Ministry utters a word but it is counted against him, nor makes a move but the Ministry learns of it, nor moves from one place to another but the eyes and watchers of the government have outrun him with their scouts and followers, nor is visited by a visitor but his affair is reported to the Sultan, nor is approached by anyone who speaks with him but his business becomes known in the register. If, after all this, you still want wakefulness, and if beyond that you want alertness and caution, then you are a hard man to please — one who is not impressed by wonders, nor by fasting in the month of Rajab. And yet, above every wakefulness there is another wakefulness, and above every caution there is another caution, sharper and more exact, more thorough in its watchfulness and more decisive against evil, more conclusive in cutting off the malady. For the Ministry is wakeful in its surveillance, but it is also wakeful in what lies beyond surveillance: it spares no effort to stand between people and its political opponents, separating these people from its opponents sometimes with the hot treatment, sometimes with the cold, and very often with the lukewarm.

As for the hot treatment, these are the canes and whips that work upon the skin. As for the cold treatment, this is the water that gushes from the fire hoses. As for the lukewarm, it covers things in between: reprimand and rebuke, threat and intimidation, enticement and terror, and whatever you wish or do not wish that gives hope or strikes fear. And there is what you might love and what you might not love, of armoured trains, armour-plated cars, dug trenches, and walls raised up to the sky.

There is, then, no way for any denier to deny that our Ministry is wakeful to the utmost degree, cautious to the utmost degree, alert to the utmost degree. Nor is there any way to doubt that the President of our Council of Ministers was entirely right when he cabled the Daily Telegraph some days ago to say that his absence from Egypt and his presence in it were one and the same, since the policy laid out for Egypt

in these days runs, and will continue to run, in the best manner in which policy can run.

The Prime Minister fell ill, as though he had not fallen ill; he travelled, as though he had not travelled; and the Prime Minister's government, during his illness and during his journey, carried on exactly as it had carried on during his health and his presence — with the same wakefulness and caution, and the same tightening of the screws upon opponents and adversaries, pursuing every path toward them and charting a fresh course against them every single day.

Nor is there any way to doubt that the Prime Minister can now embody the saying of the ancient poet:

*If the calamities of time have roused you,
rouse for them an 'Amr, then go to sleep.*

He is indeed able to embody this verse, to sleep with his eyes fully shut, to breathe with his lungs fully filled, and to enjoy rest and quiet throughout the summer — for he has roused his 'Amr, and that 'Amr is the Minister of the Interior, who never sleeps and who need never fear falling asleep.

But human wakefulness is limited, as is everything added to man; and so the Minister of the Interior may well lie sleepless through night and day, and expend more effort than anyone else in any other country has expended, and still, after all that, not attain what he loves and what we, too, love: the maintenance of security, the establishment of order, and the protection of lives and property. Nor should the Minister of the Interior be reproached for these many violent incidents that occur continuously, one after another, across the land of Egypt, in which lives are lost, blood is shed, wounds multiply, and property is plundered. For whatever kind of man the Minister of the Interior may be, he has the strength of the exceptional and yet, in every case, the weakness of ordinary men. God alone is able to preserve souls from being lost, blood from being shed, property from being stolen, and what is sacred from being violated — for God alone is He whom no sinner can escape, and from whose dominion no fugitive can flee, however strong or however cunning he may be.

In this manner, every Ministry can offer its excuses when matters slip from its grasp, when affairs scatter beyond its control, and when it fails to achieve what it wished in maintaining security and protecting

order. Outside Egypt, this excuse is accepted from a government only because it is never offered alone, but always together with something else: an admission of weakness and incapacity, and resignation from undertaking what cannot be undertaken and carrying out what cannot be carried out. The excuse is accepted, and the resignation is accepted. Others are then charged with protecting security and order, in the hope that they may prove more capable of protecting security and order; and if they succeed, well and good — and if not, they too offer their excuse and their resignation, and that excuse and that resignation are accepted in turn.

But in Egypt, the Ministry offers neither excuse nor resignation. Rather, it is the people who seek out an excuse on its behalf, which the Ministry may then accept or not accept, approve or not approve. Rest assured that our present Ministry will not accept this excuse sought out for it on its behalf, for it neither concedes, nor can it concede, that security is disturbed, that order is weak, and that the lives and property of the people lack the safeguarding that ought to exist in a civilised country living in the twentieth century. The Ministry will not concede this, and it will not accept the apology. As for resignation, it is something that cannot even be entertained.

And yet the Ministry itself admits to this very incapacity, and admits to it in a manner that seems to us unbecoming of a powerful and dignified Ministry possessed of high standing and unassailable authority. And what admission could be clearer or plainer, or more dangerous to the reputation of the Ministry and the reputation of Egypt, than this decision taken by the Minister of the Interior a week ago, by which he cancelled the leave of district officials and police chiefs throughout Egypt for the whole of the summer season? When has any Ministry ever taken such a decision except in days of looming danger, when the safety and security of the State itself are exposed to disturbance?

But the matter did not stop there. It then emerged that depriving district officials and police chiefs of their right to rest during the summer was not enough to make the Minister of the Interior's wakefulness fruitful and productive. The newspapers reported that the provincial directors had submitted demands to the Minister of the Interior from their provinces, pressing for an increase in police strength in the province, on the grounds that what forces they had in hand were not sufficient and did not enable them to protect security, now that crime had increased particularly in these days.

It appears that the Minister of the Interior has attended to these demands, but has attended to them with deliberation, patience, and calm, refraining from hastily reinforcing the directors with the additional forces they requested. Instead, he wished to study the matter so as to master the study, to investigate it so as to conduct the investigation well, and to send reinforcements only once it was established that sending them was unavoidable and that there was no room for delay. Likewise, the Minister of the Interior formed a committee headed by one of the two Under-Secretaries — headed, that is, by the resident Under-Secretary who did not travel away to rest — and charged this committee with studying the directors' proposal, surveying the state of the police in every province, and measuring the number of policemen in each province against the size of its population. This committee met once in Cairo, studied the matter and surveyed it, then postponed its next meeting to a date to be fixed later; and this next meeting may take place in Alexandria, where the Under-Secretary spends the summer, and where the Minister spends the summer as well. The study will doubtless conclude, today or tomorrow or the day after, as to whether the number of policemen is adequate or inadequate for the population, and then proceed either to accept the directors' proposal or to set it aside. But meanwhile, the newspapers inform us that the disturbance of security increases from day to day, and intensifies from time to time — and here is news we read this very morning, telling us that two families fell out in a village in Upper Egypt, and that, as they say, the mill of battle turned between them: shots were fired, edged weapons were drawn, sticks and clubs were wielded, and when the affray cleared after an hour, it left behind four dead and twenty-five wounded, ten of whom had sustained severe and dangerous injuries. The source of this clash, as the newspapers tell it, was old grudges between the two families; and what enabled these people to kill one another and destroy each other was, in all likelihood, that the number of policemen in that province, in that district, and in that very village, was not adequate for its population. We should very much like to know what this adequacy means, how it is determined, and by what it is established. Is one policeman enough for every ten inhabitants? Or must there be one for every hundred? Or must there be one for every thousand?

This is a difficult question that undoubtedly calls for lengthy study — but this lengthy study will be of no help to the directors and the officials whose leave has been cancelled, and who remain unable to secure order and preserve it.

Does the Minister of the Interior not see that the real remedy lies in seeking a swifter and more effective cure than comparing the number of inhabitants with the number of policemen? This remedy we know, and the people all know it, and the Ministry knows it perfectly well — yet it does not wish to summon up the courage, with both hands, to step forward and apply it. This remedy is resignation. For the resignation of the Ministry, by itself, is what would restore security to stability and order to steadiness, since the corruption we now suffer does not stem from the fact that the Ministry's continuance in office has corrupted public affairs, shaken people's confidence in everything, and made them doubt the value of life, of property, and of all that is sacred. Otherwise, the number of policemen under previous Ministries would not have been less adequate for the population than it is now; nor would the state of security and order have been as corrupt as it is now; nor would the Ministry's incapacity to maintain security and lay hands swiftly upon criminals have become as evident as it is now.

This is the true remedy. But, as I have told you, the Ministry will not consent to it — so there is another remedy, one that does not cure the malady but does lessen its harm somewhat. It is for the Minister of the Interior to govern the people after the manner of Ziyad among the people of Iraq: bearing down upon criminals as far as he is able, while at the same time guaranteeing to those upon whom crimes fall compensation for what befalls them in life and in property. This means that the government should pay to every family one of whose sons is killed the blood-money for the slain; to every family one of whose sons is wounded, compensation for the injuries sustained; and to every family from which anything is stolen, the value of whatever was stolen, be it little or much. For the government — by the very fact of its existence — guarantees to the people security over their lives and property. If it proves incapable of achieving this security, and yet refuses, all the same, to resign, then it must compensate the people for what they lose through its incapacity and its shortcomings. You will say: where is the government to find the blood-money for those who fall among the dead and the wounded, and the value of what is stolen in money and goods? The answer to that is simple, and none would deny it save one who has no heart to feel or mind to think — for I affirm that the life of a single Egyptian, of those who fall every day, is dearer to Egypt, more precious to her, and more useful to her than the Aviation Congress, the Postal Congress, the Tourism Congress, the Railways Congress, or the Congress of Oriental Music. The life of a single Egyptian is more useful to Egypt than all these congresses put together.

The Ministry must therefore turn away from the policy of congresses, from the policy of propaganda abroad, and from the whole policy of extravagance, and must instead set aside the funds it spends in this direction to compensate the families upon whom murder falls, or upon whom theft falls, owing to the Ministry's failure to protect security.

And perhaps you will agree with me that Egypt would a thousand times over prefer that the government spend on these wretched families, protecting them from hunger and deprivation, rather than invite, in winter, troupes of actors and actresses, dancers and dancing-girls, to entertain foreigners and the privileged few in Cairo. Let the wakeful Minister of the Interior reflect upon this proposal, and let him, if he wishes, put it before this very committee that is comparing the number of policemen with the number of inhabitants.