

# Truths . . .

*Al-Wadi, 7 August 1934*

The English residing in Egypt need to know it, and some Egyptians who seek them out as a means and solicit their help and support need to know it with them, and the Egyptian Gazette in particular needs to know it, because it speaks on behalf of the former and the latter, and because it is the one that has invited us to set down these truths for it, after it wrote that elegant, graceful article it published yesterday morning, which its friendly ministerial newspapers then translated from it.

These are truths we do not think the Egyptian Gazette is unaware of, nor do we think its English readers or its poor Egyptian allies are unaware of them, for we live in an age in which the self-evident is not unknown, and in which basic principles are not hidden from ordinary people, let alone from the educated men who edit newspapers, engage in politics, and handle the affairs of nations.

The clearest and most self-evident of these truths is that if freedom of opinion, in everything, and in politics especially, is something the English hold sacred in their own country, guarding its sanctities with the fullest care, never permitting themselves to abolish it, restrict it, or forbid it to any Englishman — especially when he happens to be among the opposition — then Egyptians hold freedom of opinion just as sacred as the English do, regard it as their own right just as the English regard it, and want it to be, in their own country, a genuine matter and not a game, an established fact and not mere words written or spoken. And Egyptians know full well, with the deepest regret, that they remain far from enjoying this sacred right — but they insist, with the fullest insistence, on winning it, on arriving at it, and on having their own share of it be exactly equal to the English share of it. The Egyptian Gazette may think Egyptians are conceited for wanting to win what the English enjoy in Great Britain, since Egyptians have not reached the level of civilization the English have, and must be humble, and must wait. But the Egyptian Gazette ought to know that political experience in this modern age has convinced people that they are all equal, and has taught them that none of them has any advantage over another in enjoying political rights, and that the rights of peoples cannot be confined to one class rather than another, nor to one group rather than another — just as it has taught them that colonialism, and the domination of strong peoples over weak

ones, is a hateful disease that nations must resist by whatever means they find to resist it. Egyptians are jealous guardians of freedom of opinion, and of properly enjoying it, and they struggle for it with all the struggle they can muster, and sacrifice for it with all the sacrifice they can bear, and endure for its sake what can be endured and what cannot — even the Egyptian Gazette's reproach and mockery, and its boldness in telling Egyptians frankly, in the land of the Egyptians themselves, that they are a people who must be taken by suppression and humiliation, or else not aspire to what the English enjoy of freedom and independence.

Egyptians will not change their opinion on this, whether the English are pleased or angered by it, whether the English accept it or refuse it. And no educated Egyptian will hesitate to broadcast all of this, and spread it among these classes that the Egyptian Gazette holds in contempt, and wishes the head of the delegation would raise himself above mixing with, and permits ministries to sin against the very cause of freedom in order to keep these classes ignorant, heedless, and submissive to the humiliation and servility intended for them.

The Egyptian Gazette, and its English readers, and its poor Egyptian allies, need to know that what could once be said in past centuries cannot be said now. And that the call to divide the people into classes — some honored and dear, some despised and lowly — has produced, in Europe, and in England's own country, grave and terrible consequences that history has not yet forgotten, and we do not think the English would wish these to happen in Egypt, or wish Egyptians to be driven to them. Nor do we think the English are unaware that persisting in writing articles like the one the Egyptian Gazette wrote yesterday is likely to lead to these very consequences, and to drive toward this widespread evil.

The Egyptian Gazette, and its English readers, and its wretched Egyptian allies, need to know that it is among the most astonishing of astonishments, and among the most flagrant of matters, and among the shames with which modern European civilization brands itself, that foreigners should live in a country like Egypt without preserving any right for it, without honoring any dignity for it, and without any hesitation in proclaiming, within it, a call to divide its people into classes, to favor one group of its own people with special care, and to treat its majority with violence — for no reason but that this majority is not wealthy, nor well-off, nor capable of what these globe-trotting foreigners are capable of, of this soft, happy life that they attain only in these lands, and that they would never have dreamed of had they lived in their own countries,

those countries in which liberty is held sacred, and the rights of peoples are respected.

The Egyptian Gazette needs to know that Egyptians will never consent to having the life of foreigners in their country serve as a means to their own exclusion, or a pretext for their own humiliation. What Egyptians do consent to, and insist upon, and what the educated among them teach the uneducated, is that Egypt must belong to Egyptians first and before all else, and after all else, and that the foreigner is a newcomer to Egypt — if he can live in it, reconciling his own interest with the interest of the nationals, so be it; and if not, then God's earth is vast, and his own country has more right to him, and shows him more tenderness. And Egyptians know full well that foreigners impose themselves upon them by force, that the English sacrifice their own interests for the sake of foreign interests, and that the English are strong, possessing means of oppression and violence that Egyptians do not possess — but none of this frightens Egyptians, nor changes their opinion that Egypt must belong to them first, and that a day must inevitably come when the Egyptian Gazette can no longer write what it has written, and when no ministry, whatever it may be, can be permitted what the current Ministry is permitted, of insulting Egyptians in the land of the Egyptians.

This day may be distant, or it may be near, but it is coming without any doubt, just as a day once came upon England when it permitted the workers to take hold of governance, and even at times to monopolize it, in place of the upper aristocratic classes that had once monopolized it entirely.

Then the Egyptian Gazette needs to know that the head of the delegation has apparently not been convinced by what the advocates of the general English interest call for — that there are differences among Egyptians which make some of them more deserving of his visits than others; rather, he is convinced of what the English themselves are convinced of in their own country, that all the people's sons are equal, that their poor deserve more care than their rich, that their unlettered deserve more care than their educated, and that their common folk deserve more care than their elite. And so, on this basis, the head of the delegation will visit whatever provinces, cities, and villages he wishes, and will take whatever roads, streets, and lanes he wishes, and will descend wherever he wishes, among the wealthy quarters and the poor quarters alike — and it is not for the police, nor for the Ministry, nor for the High Commissioner's residence, nor for the Egyptian Gazette, to

draw up his route for him, or impose one road upon him, or forbid him another. This is, rather, his own sacred right, which he enjoys whenever he wishes, however he wishes — and if force stands clear of him and this right, so be it; and if force stands between him and this right, it will have recorded against itself fear, embarrassment, and failure, and recorded against the policy of colonialism a disgrace that brings no honor, and a hypocrisy that lifts no heads.

As for what follows: the English are free to love injustice, to support it, to call for it, and to profit from it — but it is only right that they should remember that other peoples preceded them in taking hold of Egypt through injustice, and ruling her with cruelty and violence, yet achieved nothing by it; rather, they departed, and Egypt remained standing. And the English themselves have taken hold of Egypt through violence and cruelty for years upon years, and they can now ask themselves: what have they gained by it? And have they achieved, of Egypt's humiliation and subjugation, what they wanted? . . .

Taha Hussein

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