

Advice . . .

Al-Wadi, 23 July 1934

The High Commissioner may perhaps have no need of it, for he possesses it already, and other people besides us possess it too — he is sharper and more knowledgeable in the realities of things than anyone who might need such basic guidance. But we offer it to him nonetheless, sincerely, so that he might make use of it, if it happens that his time in Egypt has not allowed him to grasp the realities of things here, just as he grasps the realities of things in China. And so that others besides him might make use of it too — those who seek him out and try to find some way to him, wishing to make the bond of affection between themselves and him a means of access to the corridors of power, and a method of currying favor, and a style of advocacy, for a purpose that these aims sometimes reveal, and sometimes conceal. That purpose is: mustering the crowds for the great and powerful, and for men of authority, and carrying them off on a wave of shouting and applause, pushing them to display admiration and exaltation, taking from them a declaration of trust, and extracting from them a triumphant, insistent proclamation of goodness, in this waiting. All of this is futile — it does no good, and this clamor is of no use, and the matter ends up, in the final analysis, being reduced to a comedy of buffoonery, and a masterpiece of mockery — after the matter had begun as a form of violence, coercion, and imposed servility.

And it is for this very reason — of all things furthest from suiting a noble man, and from what befits his sense of his own dignity and his satisfaction with people's genuine respect for him, and their genuine esteem for him befitting his own rank or station — that we do not know whether the High Commissioner holds any view on this matter drawn from China, nor whether the man who spoke to us about some of this in Egypt has experienced anything of it himself, but what is certain is that this man does not consider it anything but violence, coercion, and levity — and it is, in the last analysis, a matter of amusement and joking. And none of this changes people's opinion in the slightest; it only adds to their resentment a further resentment, to their grievance a further grievance, and to their fury a further fury.

People chafe most severely at deliberate coercion, at the hands of officials of the administration, and at the underlings who bustle about among them, inviting them to a gathering to receive some minister, or

some great figure among the official dignitaries, because people, deep within themselves, do not love this and are not inclined toward it, and they try to flee from it in escape — yet the administration, the officials, and the underlings take to blocking their paths of escape, going to excess in their pressing, and unleashing upon them a flood of enticement and intimidation, until they force them into what they do not love. So when they do gather, reluctantly, they mutter under their breath in hatred, applaud in sorrow, and display love while their souls are filled with loathing, and proclaim satisfaction while discontent devours their hearts entirely — until

this laughable tragedy ends, and they go back to their own people, mocking, at what they saw and what they heard, and what they were brought to and what they were made to do, speaking of how what is in their hearts will remain in their hearts, and how what runs on their tongues will be carried off by the wind. No trace of it remains — it is only words spoken, then quickly forgotten.

And so too do matters proceed in Egypt, since ministries first existed here that needed some outward show of endorsement, yet could never manage to win genuine, unadulterated endorsement. And so too do matters proceed in Egypt, since the English first showed that they take pride in the opinion of the masses, and value the masses' trust. From that time onward, weak ministries felt it was their right, and the right of those who remained in office through them, to deceive themselves first, imagining that people were content with them, that they had supporters, devoted followers gathered around them, greeting their members with shouting and applause; then to imagine, for the English, that they had won the people's approval and the public's trust, in a manner that would qualify them to have the people rule and settle the affairs of the public. And this sometimes does, in fact, amount to self-deception, though this is very rare, occurring only when the ministers are exceedingly naive. But they may prove incapable of deceiving even themselves, and settle instead for deceiving their own supporters among the Egyptians, and their friends among the English — until, when the hour draws near, and the moon splits, and God's decree, which none can turn back, arrives, and the ministry is removed from its posts, it becomes clear, and its supporters manifest themselves, and it becomes clear, and the English manifest themselves, and they were certain beforehand that the whole matter had been mere violence, and coercion, and a game, joking, and amusement.

And perhaps the truest example of this laughable tragedy was the affair of Sidqi Pasha, who, for three years and part of a fourth, ruled Egyptians with iron and fire, and treated them with violence and coercion, yet claimed for them and for himself that he ruled them with mercy and compassion, and conducted their affairs with gentleness and leniency. He claimed for them and for himself and for the English that people were content with him, and loved him, that they would ransom him with their very souls and their wealth, and would throw themselves into the flame of fire, and the swells of the sea, for his sake — until, when he retired to himself, and to his own allies and companions, none of this proved true in the slightest, and he did not trust any of it. Yet the English kept showing they believed it, concealing their disbelief! They proclaimed themselves confident in Egyptians' contentment with him, and delighted themselves with his confidence in Egyptians' resentment of him — until, when the circle came full round, and Sidqi Pasha's true nature became clear to men and jinn alike — that he had not won contentment or love, that he had not been confident anyone was pleased with him or loved him, and had declared in the English newspapers that the English themselves refused to negotiate with him, because they knew the people did not endorse him, and were not inclined toward him.

All of these are basic truths that everyone knows, and that everyone speaks of, and we are most especially eager that the High Commissioner should know them — not by comparison to Egyptian ministers alone, but by comparison to the High Commissioners themselves as well. For Lord Cromer used to believe, and the English used to believe with him, that the men in blue jalabiyas loved him, trusted him, and felt secure with him. But when his time was up, it became clear to him, and to the English, that the men in blue jalabiyas did not love him at all — they merely feared him.

And Kitchener used to believe what Lord Cromer had believed, and Lord Lloyd used to believe what his two predecessors had believed. Yet the life of the peasants, and of the cultivated and distinguished classes, all shows that they loved none of these men at all — some of them feared, some amused themselves, and some sought out whatever benefit lay closest at hand, no more and no less. So if anyone claims to the High Commissioner that he can gather Egyptians for him, and let him hear their cheering and their applause, and show him their admiration, their esteem, and their trust, then the best thing for the High Commissioner is to meet all of this with a shake of the head and a shrug of the shoulders.

For the Egyptian people will never trust an Englishman, and the Egyptian people will never be loyal to an Englishman, whatever the case may be, and whatever the circumstances, until the dispute between Egypt and England is resolved. Nor will the Egyptian people ever trust a minister, and the Egyptian people will never be loyal to a minister, whatever the case may be, and whatever the circumstances, until the Egyptian people are assured that this minister is a sincere democrat in his democracy, who does not take the people as a means to power, but rather takes power as a means to serving the people. And so the High Commissioner may well be able to properly value what happened at Sabriya, at its true worth, and to properly value what will happen in other villages and estates besides Sabriya. The greatest good, the greatest ease, the greatest diligence, and the truthfulness most befitting the High Commissioner's own dignity, and the dignity of Great Britain, would be for the High Commissioner not to think of visiting villages and estates at all, until matters are set right between Egyptians and the English, and until Egyptians truly become free in their own country — and then the representative of Great Britain will see how Egyptians receive their guest, sincere and truthful, neither fearful nor frivolous.

Taha Hussein

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