

Clouds

Kawkab al-Sharq, 28 March 1933

It appears that there are clouds in the sky of Egyptian foreign policy — perhaps light and thin, with nothing behind them, or perhaps heavy and dense, with real substance behind them. Perhaps the coming days will reveal what good or evil these clouds conceal. But the one thing beyond doubt is that these clouds deserve careful attention, and ought to be tracked with precision and discernment. It is likewise the duty of Egyptians to insist on taking, toward them, a stance of candor admitting neither doubt nor equivocal interpretation. And what is there to prevent them from doing so? Their hopes and highest ideals, in their domestic life and in their foreign relations alike, are perfectly clear, perfectly plain; and the means by which they might realize these hopes, and attain these highest ideals, hold no obscurity, no vagueness whatsoever.

For they wish to be free in their own country, in the fullest sense that word conveys, and they pursue this freedom along clear paths that all can see are born of love — paths whose very substance is the demand for their right, without concession, without evasion or equivocation.

They wish their foreign relations to rest upon freedom — never forced upon them by coercion, never driven upon them by pressure, never lured into by stratagem, never decided in their absence.

It appears that the present Egyptian Cabinet is now taking, to some degree, suspicious postures on certain grave matters, and that these postures are stirring up doubts and delusions that serve no one's interest to arouse. We shall mention three of these suspicious postures the Cabinet is now taking — no more.

The first concerns the Government's position on the negotiation with the English. In years past, the Prime Minister used to exploit the question of negotiation, treating his pursuit of it and his hopes of achieving it as one of the means of remaining in power. He said much on this score, and his old colleague Tawfiq Doss Pasha said even more. Then these hopes lapsed, these aspirations scattered, and it became clear there was no negotiation, nor anything resembling negotiation. But talk of negotiation returned and revived at the start of this winter, and people began saying that conversations were taking place between the Prime Minister and the High Commissioner, spreading word that they advanced at times and

receded at others.

Then the Prime Minister fell ill, and was rendered incapable of negotiation, or conversation, or anything resembling either — yet people went on talking of negotiation, and some even went so far as to say: what Sidqi Pasha is now incapable of, other men besides Sidqi Pasha will carry through.

Then the High Commissioner suddenly departed, and perhaps no one was fooled by it; rumors multiplied, talk spread that something was afoot, that a draft treaty had been completed. The High Commissioner traveled to present it to his government: should it approve, the Prime Minister would sign it and then resign, his mission fulfilled; should it reject it, the Prime Minister would resign because he had failed to achieve independence, having sworn an oath to himself that he would either secure independence, or step down from power.

People differ over this draft treaty: some raise it as high as the draft the last official delegation reached; others bring it as low as the Sarwat-Chamberlain draft; others place it wavering somewhere between the two, rising and falling. It is most likely that the greater part of this talk is untrue — but one thing is beyond doubt: that this talk, which keeps circulating and spreading, insisting on its own spread and circulation, has already stirred a great deal of suspicion in the minds of Egyptians and foreigners alike.

As for the Egyptians, they have every right to be suspicious, since the matter touches their very life and independence, and they are unaccustomed to such insistent secrecy and evasiveness surrounding the question of independence as they now witness. They do not trust the present Cabinet, and find no reassurance in it. Perhaps the simplest way to describe their view of this Cabinet is to say that they view its every action with the deepest suspicion — for they have already tested it in excessive self-abasement, in flagrant neglect, and in extravagant overpayment for the most trivial and least consequential of things.

They know perfectly well that remaining in power is a thing of real value, whose price must be paid, and so they fear — and they have every right to fear — that the Government's excess in flattering the English, its overzealousness in securing English aims and interests in Egypt and the Sudan, may not, after all, amount to genuine neutrality, nor to a sufficient means of remaining in power; and that the Cabinet may find itself offered, or its friends and supporters among the English may ask it to

accept, some particular draft treaty as the price for holding power for yet another stretch of time, long or short.

As for the foreigners, they have never looked — and cannot look — upon the negotiations between Egyptians and English with the indifference of one who cares nothing and pays no heed; for they too have their own interests in Egypt, and these interests form part of the very subject of the negotiations. It is their right to know, or to try to know, to what extent these interests are being safeguarded, in what manner they are being safeguarded, what will remain to them, and what will be taken from them. If the negotiations are kept a sealed secret, a conversation conducted behind a curtain, it is no wonder that suspicion should arise in the minds of these foreigners, no wonder that talk should multiply among them, that rumors should spread among them — delighting some of them, alarming others, and unsettling the political atmosphere in any case.

And all this without even mentioning Parliament, which knows no more of these matters than the general public knows — yet Parliament seems content with this position of its own, so let us leave it be, content as it is.

We can affirm with confidence that this obscurity and vagueness, this concealment and secrecy, is in no way suited to creating, in Egypt, an atmosphere fit for a healthy life. And what do you make of a political climate whose very substance is turbulent, jumbled rumor, breeding suspicion and ill will, and planting in the minds of Egyptians and foreigners alike the notion that something is happening behind a curtain — something more akin to a conspiracy than to a negotiation?

As for the second of these suspicious postures the Government has adopted, it concerns the debt. The Government claimed that its head had succeeded in persuading the European Powers of the Egyptian point of view, or so they say, and the Prime Minister returned from Europe boasting of this victory with a certain air of self-satisfaction and pride, in a manner of hint and insinuation, carefully avoiding candor and clarity, as men of supposedly superior political skill are wont to do! Then it became clear he had succeeded in nothing at all. And so His Excellency Abd al-Hamid Badawi Pasha was dispatched to Italy, France, and England to reopen discussion of the matter, and it was said he had achieved a great deal — and then it was said he had achieved nothing at all.

Then the Mixed Court handed down its ruling, and the whole people was outraged, and the Prime Minister declared that he would pay in

nothing but paper — yet he has, to this day, taken not a single step to prove to the people that he intends to do as he said.

And here is where doubt and suspicion began to take root in the minds of Egyptians and foreigners alike: does the Prime Minister mean to bring his word and his deed into agreement, and pay in nothing but paper? Or does he mean to stall and procrastinate until the people's fury has calmed, only to give the creditors what they want afterward?

If it is the latter, then Egyptians may be forgiven for thinking ill and anticipating the worst, for distrusting a Government that deceives them, and foreigners who exploit them. And foreigners, too, may be forgiven for wavering between despair and hope, between fear and expectation, torn between the gleam of pure gold and whatever hatred and resentment the Egyptians might be driven to feel toward them.

If it is the former, then how slow the Government has been in reaching a decisive, comfortable decision! And what is holding it back from reaching this decision? Does it wish to take it alone, without any negotiation or discussion at all? Or does it wish to negotiate and discuss? And with whom does it negotiate? Does it negotiate with the English alone, letting them serve as its channel and its advocate before the other Powers? Or does it negotiate with the other Powers directly, without English mediation?

All these are questions Egyptians and foreigners alike find themselves caught up in, stirring in their minds doubts and suspicions, creating a foul atmosphere whose very substance is ill will, corrupted judgment, and the weakening of that cooperation which ought to exist between all who live along the banks of the Nile, Egyptians and foreigners together. Each suspects the other; each fears the other; and in each, the ancient poet's words ring true:

*If you would truly be my brother, then know my leanness from my plenty.
But if not, then cast me off, and take me for your enemy — I shall despise
you, and you shall despise me.*

The third of these suspicious postures is the Government's stance on the Capitulations. All Egyptians, without exception, detest the Capitulations, and wish to free themselves of them, just as other Eastern nations have freed themselves of theirs. The Egyptian Government had linked the question of the Capitulations to the question of negotiation with the English. But when the Mixed Court handed down its ruling on

the debt question, organized demands for the immediate abolition of the Capitulations arose — demands no Egyptian, and no foreign resident of Egypt, failed to notice; indeed, both parties knew perfectly well which way the wind was blowing. That wind reached Parliament, too, but soon died down — the deputies' and senators' sense of urgency died down with it, and it settled, and with it settled the resolve of those very groups that had been sending petitions to the newspapers every single day. Egyptians and foreigners alike, perhaps, understood — or very nearly understood — how the wind had risen and how it had subsided; but the subsiding of this wind never brought with it any settling of minds, in either Egyptian or foreign households. Egyptians seize every opportunity to press for the abolition of the Capitulations, while foreigners take, by turns, a posture of defense, a posture of flagrant attack, and, in every case, a posture of suspicion and fear.

It serves no one's interest that fear, suspicion, and hatred should form the very substance of relations between Egyptians and foreigners. Nor does the matter stop there: here is the Daily, pointing to these very three postures the Egyptian Government has taken on the debt, the treaty, and the Capitulations, and in its own allusions, doubt and suspicion appear as well. Suspicion, then, is not confined to those residing in Egypt; it extends beyond them, to Europe and her leading newspapers.

And yet there exists no position more candid, none more transparent, than the natural position of the Egyptian nation itself on these three questions. Between herself and the English, she wants an honorable independence, free of ambiguity, free of obscurity; between herself and her creditors, she wants to pay in her own currency, exactly as nations still resolved to honor their debts do; and between herself and the Powers holding the Capitulations, she wants this antiquated system abolished — abolished openly, without subterfuge, and without hostility.

What, then, prevents the Government from taking, on these matters, a stance as candid and clear as the nation's own — thereby dispelling doubt and erasing suspicion? What prevents it is something trivial, something it gives no thought to, and yet it is the very foundation of a healthy political life in any state that values its own dignity: namely, that the bond between itself and the nation has been severed; it thinks ill of the people and fears them in every matter, and the people think ill of it and fear it in every matter. And it is strange, given all this, that some foreigners — English and non-English alike — should still believe they

can come to any agreement with this Cabinet, whether on some small matter, or some great one.