

So Then . . .

Al-Wadi, 10 July 1934

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So then — what happened to security yesterday? And what happened to order? And what danger threatened the peace of Egyptians and foreigners alike, when the Ministry restrained its police and its troops, and let the people show their own opinion freely, discharging their duty with dignity, and enjoying their right, without aggression, without transgression, without any attempt at wrongdoing or assault? Yesterday, in the Qalyubiya province, the people themselves were sole masters of the field — no authority weighed on them unjustly or by force, no power confronted them or hindered them, no confiscation touched them. The very soul of the people revealed what it held within, and that same soul showed its true nature, and the people's conscience proved itself, from beginning to end, pure, clean, blameless, unmarked by any inclination toward wrongdoing, any hostility, any leaning toward aggression, any rebellion, any ambition for insurrection. What moved it was nothing but sincere faith in what is right, sure conviction in duty, genuine concern for dignity, and true loyalty to the faithful. These are all qualities of honor and nobility, all qualities of safety and peace, all qualities of good and blessing. So why, then, does this Ministry make war on these very qualities? Why does it resist these very virtues? What does the Ministry want, trying to keep this light from shining, to smother this splendor before it can appear, and to block the people's own sovereignty from extending its authority over the people's own souls — while keeping its own merciful, faithful wing spread instead over the homeland's soil?

So then — what benefit is there, what use, in warring against these noble virtues, this pure feeling, this safe and radiant freedom — and in wishing this people humiliated by it? For humiliation was never what they were made for; they were made only to be free, honorable, independent, noble sons.

Yes — and so we say it again and again, and repeat it today, tomorrow, and the day after, exactly as we said it yesterday and the day before, in answer to a question we put to ourselves, put to the people, put to Nature itself, if Nature could ever answer: what is this resistance the people show for? What is this confiscation the people suffer for, when the people seek nothing but the good? What is this war waged on the people

for, when the people wish no one any harm, and are content that no harm come to anyone?

Yes — and so we say a word today to Qaisi Pasha that we said to him yesterday, and said to him and to others the day before, and never once got an answer — for it is precisely that silence which embarrasses his own companions, and stands as the strongest case against him, proving, to their own cost, the excess in everything they say and everything they do, and proving against them their helplessness and their failure to answer, whenever they neither speak nor act.

These tens of thousands who gathered yesterday in the city of Benha to bury a noble man, dead in the discharge of his duty — they gathered with sincere resolve, pure intent, capable of doing what duty asked of them, believing in what is right, holding their leaders sacred, and trusting their nation's leadership. So what harm came to Egypt from their gathering? What harm came to security from their funeral procession? And what harm touched order from the crowds around their faithful leaders?

We meet these same questions today just as we met them yesterday, at every opportunity, and we will keep putting them to the ministers' ears exactly as before, though they never once reach their hearts. The ministers do not want to hear them — cannot even bring themselves to hear them — absorbed as they are in holding power and clinging to authority; and in keeping that grip on power and authority, they neither want nor are able to hear the word of truth. Nor do they want, or manage, to look toward the light of truth, even if they had once wanted or managed to see it, before their footing settled where it now stands, and before their bodies took root in the seats of power they now occupy — content, whether pleased or resentful, simply to come home from that power each day and enjoy the rest, calm, and comfort that suit men like themselves, turning away from public life and its cares only because they were never really prepared to conduct affairs in the first place. It is the people who run the people's own affairs, when the people love doing so; the people who manage the people's own interests, when the people trust it to; the people to whom the people's own rights are entrusted, and who do not waste them, do not confiscate its freedom, and never try to force humiliation on it, or submission through brutality. It is the people who govern the people — when the people listen to it without fear, act on its word without being compelled, rally to it without being summoned, and follow it in obedience without fear of the stick.

Yes, so then — what case do the ministers have for the suffering they inflict on people who only wanted to welcome, or bid farewell to, the head of the delegation? What case does the Ministry have for squandering people's rights, freedoms, and dignity, when all they wanted was to show that they keep faith with the head of the delegation, that they betray neither their trust nor their conviction, hold nothing back from what is right, fall short in no duty, and never sell their country cheap? Here they are — tens of thousands who welcomed the head of the delegation yesterday, said only what they meant to say, did only what they meant to do, and went home again in peace, spilling no blood, committing no sin, exposing our security to no danger, and touching order with no corruption. Can the ministers and their agents really deny they are guilty of the ugliest kind of mischief in this spectacle they put on, conscripting the police and the army to serve it, embarrassing people's hearts with it, violating the law and the Constitution with it, every single time the head of the delegation comes or goes? Can the ministers and their agents deny that mischief has nothing to do with wisdom, that it becomes neither wise men nor clear thinkers — and that persisting in it proves nothing about soundness of judgment, or rightness of opinion, or genuine concern for the public good, but proves instead exactly the sort of thing we would rather the ministers were free of? Can the ministers and their agents deny that what happened yesterday offers plain proof, clear to the sharp-witted and the dull alike, that they do wrong by themselves and by the people whenever they strike out with no cause to strike, and take precautions with no need for precaution — and that they do wrong by themselves and by the people simply by staying in power, when the people wants no such thing, and wishes not one of them to remain? And what was it that stopped the Ministry, yesterday, from harming this enormous crowd, from blocking their gathering, from turning back their assembly? Was it fear, or was it wisdom? If it was fear, why was it afraid yesterday, and why is it never afraid any other time the people mean to gather or assemble? And if it was wisdom, why did it show wisdom yesterday, and why does it show none any other time? Or was it simply confusion of judgment, disorder in its own affairs, an inability to plan, and a failure to find any course of conduct that suits reason, benefit, and clear thinking?

The lesson the Ministry taught the people the day before yesterday stirred sorrow and grief in them, and left their hearts and minds troubled. The lesson the nation taught the day after stirred contentment instead, comforting those same hearts and minds for the trouble they had felt, and

proving to anyone willing to understand that Egypt is nowhere near the despair some imagine of her, nowhere near the humiliation some wish upon her, and nowhere near the weakness and surrender some expect of her.

Can the English possibly understand these two lessons, weigh their results against each other, and draw from that comparison, and from that understanding, whatever fruit they ought to draw from it?

Taha Hussein

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