

A Surprise

Kawkab al-Sharq, 14 August 1933

It did not happen today, and it did not happen yesterday; it happened, rather, on Saturday evening, so people say. For it is claimed that certain Egyptian circles read, at one and the same moment, the summary of the piece published by the Daily Telegraph, which categorically denied the transfer of the High Commissioner, and also received special news of their own, which established for them, with equal certainty, that the High Commissioner had indeed already been transferred to Ankara. And so God did not will that these circles should reap the fruits of that violent effort expended in London to win the Daily Telegraph's favour, after its own former unfairness; for the Daily Telegraph has returned to contentment after anger, the Daily Telegraph has returned to fairness after injustice, and the Daily Telegraph has grown fond of the ministers, and the ministers' supporters, and the two allied parties, and whoever revolves around the two allied parties. The Daily Telegraph has affirmed that the High Commissioner is returning to Egypt and resuming his work there, and that the Ministry may be deprived of its ailing chairman, but will otherwise remain, on the whole, as it is, with two or three men added to it, so that it may continue conducting affairs along this splendid, fruitful, productive course, which has secured security, established order, delivered Egypt from poverty and misery, and won for her the greatest possible share of glory and majesty, of wealth, happiness, and bliss. And the Daily Telegraph's opinion had been the very opposite of all this only two weeks ago, when the Prime Minister and his colleagues regarded it as unjust and unfair, some of them appealing to it for fairness and sympathy, and others declaring it unworthy of any attention or notice.

So when the Daily Telegraph yielded to what had been asked of it, in the way of sympathy and fairness, the Ministry's newspapers rejoiced, and one of them appeared on Sunday morning happy and delighted, having adorned its front page with two precious ornaments: a photograph of the High Commissioner, remaining in his post, since God had decreed for him a complete recovery; and a photograph of the Prime Minister, who would be retiring from his post, since his health required rest and peace of mind.

And while the Ministry's newspapers were rejoicing at the Daily Telegraph's return to connection after estrangement, to closeness after abandonment, and to warmth after coldness, those well-versed in the ways of the Ministry were tasting the sweetness of this fancy mingled with the bitterness of a despair that shares nothing of that sweetness. For alongside this sweet chapter, they were also reading reports that the High Commissioner would indeed travel, but not to Egypt; would indeed cross the sea, but not to the Nile Valley; would indeed settle in the East, but not in Cairo—in Ankara instead. For Egypt's climate might be lovely and mild, might be clear and gentle, might be well suited to convalescence in autumn and winter after a long illness in spring and summer—were it not that in Egypt's climate there hangs a great and abiding cloud, one that does not pass away as all other clouds pass away, that stands between Egypt and the clarity she seeks, the mildness she wants and desires, and that does not shift as all other events and things shift.

This great, abiding cloud is what people call the Wafd; and the English, and others besides the English, try to drive it back from this clear sky, and to bar it from this mild region, so that they might have this clarity and that mildness for themselves alone—but they find no way to drive it back, and no way to bar it; for it is forever great, forever abiding, sheltering the Egyptians with patience and steadfastness, protecting the Egyptians from despair and hopelessness. And this cloud is one whose scorching shade the High Commissioner can bear for a year, or years—but only to a certain measure, and only holds firm beneath it to a certain measure. And the English concluded that their High Commissioner had borne the shade of this great, abiding cloud until he was all but burned by it, and so they rescued him, and transferred him to Ankara, where there is no Wafd, and nothing resembling the Wafd, and where all he need do is conduct himself as other ministers and ambassadors do, in perfect calm and complete stability, managing the ordinary political relations customary between states that enjoy true independence.

And the English love justice for the English, and detest injustice done to them, and any insistence upon wronging them; and so they took pity on Sir Percy Loraine, and transferred him, just as they took pity on Lord Lloyd, and dismissed him. And they wish to send to Egypt a new High Commissioner, to receive from the state of Anglo-Egyptian relations whatever his predecessors received, and to try upon it whatever

intelligence and perceptiveness, whatever cunning and skill, whatever flexibility and tact God has granted him—that he might perhaps be tried, and acquit himself well, against this great, abiding cloud that shelters the Egyptians with patience, and protects the Egyptians from despair, and refuses to yield its place in Egypt's sky, save on condition that true freedom, genuine independence, and a sovereignty admitting neither doubt nor dispute be fully secured for it, exposed to neither trifling nor play. And the new High Commissioner may be as fortunate as George Lloyd was fortunate, and be dismissed; or he may be as fortunate as Percy Loraine was fortunate, and be transferred. Or God may have decreed for him a fortune of a wholly new kind, having decreed for him a policy unlike that of either of his two predecessors—for one of them wished to take Egypt by force, and ended in dismissal; and the other wished to take Egypt by gentleness and cunning, and ended in transfer. Perhaps, then, God will inspire the new envoy to take Egypt by candour and honesty, and by facing actual realities, sincere toward her and toward her nation, offering sound counsel to her and to her nation—not domineering, for the age of domineering has passed, and not devious, for the age of deviousness has passed, since nations are no longer governed as children are governed, and are no longer taken in as the naive and the weak are taken in. Time alone will reveal what fortune or failure God has decreed for the new envoy.

Egypt knows with certain knowledge that God has written victory for her, for God has always written victory for the right, and always decreed triumph for justice. And what right resembles Egypt's right to live free and secure, aggressing upon no one, and aggressed upon by no one?! And what justice resembles Egypt's insistence that her own affairs should belong to her alone, not to any other individuals, nor to any other peoples? The Egyptians will look, then, upon the departure of the old High Commissioner with a smile, and will look upon the arrival of his successor with a smile, just as they have grown accustomed to looking upon every event with a smile—knowing nothing of that joy which makes people forget their dreams, and nothing of that sorrow which turns people away from struggle, but knowing only confidence in the right, steadfastness in demanding it, and the pursuit of it in resolve and determination, in dignity and pride.

But the matter of this sudden incident is not without something curious in it. For we, writing what we wrote yesterday, could not have supposed that our prophecy would be fulfilled so swiftly, nor that those

whom the Daily Telegraph's news had displeased would so soon be delighted by what would displease those who had commissioned the Daily Telegraph's report. We had supposed that the plans of conflict and contention, the methods of struggle and combat, required some measure of patience, and that vengeance would not be won by those seeking it before a week had passed, or a little more than a week. But it appears the other side had, in fact, made ready, and made ready well; and no sooner had those who had inspired the Daily Telegraph triumphed and won its favour, than their adversaries triumphed in turn, and circumstance granted them exactly what they wanted.

There is, in this affair, a lesson worthy of reflection: namely, that anything is possible—even that the Daily Telegraph should say a thing and affirm it, feigning firmness and certainty in what it says and affirms, and that people should spread word that it said and affirmed nothing except by inspiration from well-informed sources—only for it to appear, on that very same day, that though it had indeed said and affirmed, and been firm and certain, circumstance and actual fact had said something else entirely.

How fitting it would be, then, for Egyptians to take this as a lesson; and how fitting it would be for Egyptians not to go to excess in believing the newspapers and placing their faith in them, even when they are the Daily Telegraph, or papers like the Daily Telegraph.