

So Then . . .

Al-Wadi, 9 July 1934

So then — God has not decreed that the Minister of the Interior, Qaisi Pasha, should rest, or let anyone else rest. He is still driven to mass the police and mobilize the troops, still spending vast sums drawn from his own military skill to occupy the stations, watch the trains, and clear people off any road the head of the delegation might pass along. He still spends the bright hours of the day at his desk, taking in reports on the leader's journey — much as a general commanding an army in the field spends the bright hours of the day in his camp, taking in reports of the advance, news of attack and defense.

So then — God has not decreed that the head of the delegation may simply come and go, travel and settle, the way other leaders come and go, the way leaders elsewhere travel and settle in countries that actually know freedom and order. Instead he is watched wherever he goes, watched wherever he returns, preceded and followed and hemmed in by police, whatever town or city he happens to be moving between.

So then — God has not decreed that the Egyptian people may love whom they love and hate whom they hate, support whom they support and abandon whom they abandon — support and abandonment being nothing more than two of the countless things people have every right to feel. Instead, love itself is forced on them, and hatred beaten into them, the way property is seized by force. Nor has God decreed that this people may gather or disperse without sticks brandished in their faces, clubs raised over their chests, and whips coming down on their heads and on the bodies of their sons.

So then — what have the English accomplished in four years? What have the friends of the English accomplished in four years? What was all this effort for? All this oppression? All this corruption? Was it so that the Egyptian people should still, after everything, gain no dignity? So that the Egyptian delegation should still, after everything, remain undissolved? So that fear should not lift from the hearts of the people and the delegation, but keep poisoning the ministers' nights and gnawing at their days? So that the people and the delegation should still, after everything, be forcing the police and the troops to work without cause, to strike without reason, to be brutal for no purpose but brutality itself? So then — what do the English want? What do the friends of the English want? How can they

possibly hope to profit by humiliating a people that will not be humiliated, by wasting a nation that will not be wasted — what kind of love is this, for oppression as oppression, for cruelty as cruelty, for corruption as corruption?

What is wrong with people so overtaken by failure that they meet it at every turn, that the ghosts of defeat rise up before them at every step, that God has written failure across everything they do — and still they learn nothing from it, feel no shame, cannot restrain themselves, and cannot find rest from all this wasted effort? Has oppression really come to mean nothing more than injustice for its own sake, cruelty that serves no trade a man could live by, taken up simply as a way of passing one's life? What happened yesterday, when the head of the delegation moved to his summer house in Alexandria? What is it with ministers who cannot travel except under the hateful eyes of the people who see them off? What is it with leaders who cannot travel at all without thousands of people turning out to see them off? Who says ministers have more right to freedom, more right to safety, than any other Egyptian? Who says these hangers-on of ministers, and their servile followers, have more right to freedom than any other Egyptian? Who says the very souls and bodies of these hangers-on are worth more than the souls and bodies of the rest of us? Who gave the Minister of the Interior, Qaisi Pasha — himself just one man among the people — the right to sit in Alexandria enjoying the comfort, the beauty of the sea, the gentleness of the climate, the softness of the breeze, while issuing orders to that very police force that humiliate an entire people, that expose Egyptians to violence, brutality, injury, even death?

Who gave Qaisi Pasha, and Qaisi Pasha's own men, power over the souls and bodies of Egyptians, such that orders neither constitution nor law permits are carried out against them? What country are we living in? What age? Under what system of government? Have these men, whom circumstance has raised to power, never once felt that they are not ruling over a flock of sheep and cattle, but serving a people that holds authority over them — that they are not the people's masters but its representatives, charged only with carrying out the laws the people itself has made and approved?

When will these men, whom circumstance has raised to power, feel that the life of any ordinary person is worth no less than the life of someone in their own family, that the blood of the people's sons is not spilled any more easily than the blood of their own sons would be — that

whoever kills a single soul, without cause, without wrongdoing on the earth, has killed all mankind, and whoever assaults a single Egyptian has assaulted every Egyptian?

When will these men, whom circumstance has raised to power, feel that if Egyptian blood has grown cheap in English eyes — as it should never be cheap in Egyptian eyes — and if colonizers, whoever they may be, take a criminal pleasure in humiliating this people, then Egyptians must find their own sweetest pleasure in protecting this people from that very humiliation?

When will the ministers sober up from the intoxication of power — an intoxication that seems to make them forget what should never be forgotten, and to shoulder burdens they simply cannot carry?

This man, this martyr, whose spirit left him yesterday because he wanted to bid farewell to the head of the delegation, and to discharge a duty his own conscience laid on him, out of his own conviction in service to his country — no one had any right to expose this Egyptian to death.

Let the ministers weigh all of this. Let them put it to their own consciences — whether it is something to deny, or something everyone already knows. Whether it is forbidden, or permitted. And then let them ask themselves, and ask their consciences, which serves Egypt better, which does her more good: that her sons remain free, safe, and working — or that these sons be exposed to death in the street, so that some ministry, sooner or later doomed to fall, might go on enjoying power a little longer?

May God keep this martyr, who died yesterday and thereby proved that Egypt has not died; who fell yesterday and thereby proved that Egypt has not fallen — and who tells all those who wish to humiliate her and destroy her that she is too dear for humiliation ever to touch her, and too enduring for destruction ever to reach her.

Taha Hussein

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