

A Reminder

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), August 11, 1934

The Egyptians have not forgotten, nor should they ever forget, that dark and somber day whose dawn broke over Egypt under an evil star — the day on which Egyptian dignity was insulted, Egyptian sanctities violated; the day on which, alongside Egypt's own dignity, the dignity of right itself was insulted, and alongside Egypt's own sanctity, the sanctity of justice itself was violated; the day on which the strong and tyrannical trespassed against the weak and unsuspecting, and that sinful, criminal fire was unleashed upon this peaceable, trusting land.

The Egyptians have not forgotten, nor should they ever forget, that ill-omened day on which the English declared to all of humanity that they honor no covenant, respect no right, value no justice — that they honor only their own interest, respect only their own dominion, value only their own might, and extend their power across the earth wherever the chance arises; that they care for nothing but force, consider nothing but force, and fear nothing but force.

The Egyptians have not forgotten, nor should they ever forget, that day on which English shells reached the city of Alexandria, tearing down its forts and razing them, spilling blood, burning homes, and turning a peaceful, tranquil city into a blaze of raging flame, in which the peaceful and the tranquil burned for no crime but their own weakness — for no crime but that the English wished to occupy Egypt and extend their dominion over her, whatever the circumstances might be.

The Egyptians cannot forget this day, for among all the living nations, the Egyptians are the most ancient in their claim to independence, the greatest in their share of dignity, the richest in a history filled with glory, greatness, and mighty deeds — and it is not fitting that a people who led all other peoples toward independence, glory, and greatness should forget one of their own darkest days, a day on which their independence, their glory, and their greatness were themselves assaulted. Indeed, the Egyptians cannot forget this ill-omened day, for its ill-omened consequences remain with us still, growing more ill-omened by the day, working their way deeper into Egyptian affairs from year to year, touching the life of the whole people, touching the life of every community, touching the life of every individual. Whatever an Egyptian turns his thoughts to, his thinking arrives, in the end, at the

occupation, at the army of occupation, at the representative of the occupation; his thinking arrives at that day on which the occupation began, and at that day, still to come, on which the occupation will end.

And whatever an Egyptian turns his thoughts to, whatever an Egyptian attempts, his thinking and his attempt will always arrive, in the end, at this dark and standing fact, which rises up in the very path of his thinking and his attempt: that unjust English power keeps him from thinking freely, as he ought to think, and from acting freely, as he ought to act — and forces him to say to himself: had the English never assaulted Alexandria, I would think freely, and I would act freely; and the English occupation of Egypt must come to an end, so that I might think freely, and act freely, and live with dignity.

The Egyptians have not forgotten, and there is no way for them ever to forget, this ill-omened day among their days, nor this shameful event in their history; and the Egyptians had no need for us to remind them of it, for they remember it themselves, and had no need for us to alert them to it, for they are not unaware of it. But even had they forgotten, even had they let it slip from mind, there is, in these Egyptian barracks occupied by foreign troops, in these Egyptian ministries dominated by foreign officials, in this Egyptian policy interfered with by a foreign representative, in these Egyptian bodies worked over by the foreign lash — there is enough, in all of this, to remind the forgetful and rouse the unaware. Far be it from the Egyptians that forgetfulness should ever overtake their political life, or heedlessness ever touch it.

The Egyptians complain, because they are governed against their own will, and they know full well that it is the occupation alone that subjects them to a form of rule they detest. The Egyptians complain that their freedom is confiscated and their dignity squandered, that flagrant injustice tampers with their rights, touching their strong and their weak alike, visiting itself upon their rich and their poor alike — and they know full well that the English occupation is the source of all this, the support of all this, and the very thing that allows all this to persist. When the Egyptians complain, they are remembering that day. When the Egyptians cry out, they are remembering that day. When the Egyptians endure in patience, they are remembering that day. And when the Egyptians hope, they too are remembering that day.

And among the Egyptians, for all this, there are those who do not forget this day, but who feign forgetting it, because they wish simply to

live: their hearts remember it, and their spirits grow heavy with it, but their tongues neglect to speak of it, and their pens neglect to write of it — because the sway of immediate self-interest holds more power over these hungry bellies than the sway of the heart and its feelings, and because the pleasure of a soft and easy life holds more power over these weak and listless creatures than the pleasure of loving one's homeland, of grieving for one's homeland, and of striving earnestly to save one's homeland. Such people, we hope, God will set right, restoring to them some measure of manhood, some share of honor — so that they might come to feel that when they choose their own advantage, and lose themselves in pleasures, they sin not only against themselves, but against their own sons and grandsons, and against the homeland entire. And what sin could be uglier or more shameful, in the soul of any man deserving of the name, than this sin — a sin that strikes neither one person nor one group alone, but strikes the whole homeland, and every generation to come?

How fitting it would be for the Egyptians to read this valuable chapter that His Excellency Ahmad Shafiq Pasha set down in his own private memoirs, which we have reprinted for them elsewhere in these pages. There they will see scenes that make the heart bleed and the soul scatter in anguish; they will see how Egypt's dignity defended itself, armed with nothing but justice, forsaken by all but right. They will see how those whose duty it was to die for Egypt's sake instead sought life by the basest of means. They will see how the bombs tore down the forts, burned the houses, and spilled the blood, and how a certain number of Egyptians looked on, seeking sustenance for themselves — subsisting on it not in order to stand firm in defense, but rather to make their peace with defeat, and to surrender to foreign rule. They will see how some sought safety for themselves while fear filled the land all around them; they will see how some sought peace of mind for themselves while terror filled the hearts all around them; they will see how some hastened to seek shelter beside the English, even as looters and plunderers assaulted men and women, tore earrings from their ears, and spilled Egyptian blood by Egyptian hands, even as the English, in turn, spilled yet more Egyptian blood by other foreign hands. And those whose duty it was to die so that Egyptians might live sought instead to save their own lives. This chapter, set down by Shafiq Pasha, deserves to be read by every Egyptian, taken to heart by every Egyptian, and recounted by every Egyptian to his own growing son — for Shafiq Pasha wrote this harsh chapter in the very blood of Egyptians: that blood which was once spilled unjustly, and which came, for some, to matter far less than it ever should have.

And so, in the end, let the Egyptians remember that day, and let the Egyptians read this chapter, and let the Egyptians draw from the memory of that day and the reading of that chapter a strength that grants them patience and steadfastness, and drives them to earnest resolve and boldness — until Egyptian freedom, Egyptian blood, and Egyptian dignity become too precious ever again to be treated lightly by any Egyptian, too noble ever again to be coveted by any foreigner, whatever the might of the English may be...