

Has Fear Gone?

al-Balagh, 13 May 1945

That the world received the days of victory with contentment and rejoicing is beyond doubt, and no cause for surprise. Germany's surrender has spared a great deal of blood that would otherwise have gone on being shed — not merely day by day, nor merely hour by hour, but moment by moment, through every instant of night and day — and has secured fathers and mothers against some of war's own perils threatening whatever children they still had left, even if it has not secured them against every peril of war, since war still rages fiercely in the Far East. It is only natural, then, that people should rejoice at the collapse of that wicked edifice from which death had issued and to which it had returned, that source and wellspring of horror at the very heart of Europe.

But there are certain settled facts, pointless either to deny or to dispute: people's rejoicing at victory in Europe was never entirely free of every taint, never wholly unbound, never quite cleansed of whatever might trouble or spoil it. Fear has not gone entirely — a considerable measure of it remains, drawn from this continuing war in the Far East, which has forced Mr. Churchill himself to tell his own countrymen, in some of his own remarks, that they will enjoy only a brief period of rest and rejoicing, before resuming their own earnestness, effort, and labour, until Japan too is forced into the same surrender Germany was forced into.

We heard broadcasters speaking on the radio yesterday, from Great Britain and America, that the world will now witness a movement of troops on a scale with no equal in history, as soldiers and matériel are transferred from Europe to the Far East; the Americans alone intend to move three million soldiers from the Western theatre to the Eastern one, together with their equipment and their various instruments of war.

If we add to this whatever matériel and men the British will themselves transfer to this same theatre, and whatever America continues to send directly from American soil to the Far East, we come to understand that humanity has not yet been granted the chance to feel secure and settled, and that people have not yet been granted the chance to return to their own homelands, come back to their own homes, feel secure among their own families, and resume the kind of work that bears

fruit and yields real results under the shelter of security and peace.

This, then, is one source of fear among others — but fear has other sources too, perhaps no less terrible than this one. Germany has laid down her arms, but the war's own aftereffects have not laid down theirs, and will not, for a long time yet.

The clearest of these aftereffects is this widespread misery engulfing victors and vanquished alike — exposing some to painful deprivation, and others to deadly deprivation.

The radio told us, yesterday, from Great Britain, that the English will face considerable hardship in provisioning, and that their own rations of certain foodstuffs will be reduced; the same has been said of America. As for the liberated countries, their misery is too plain to need any description; and as for the defeated people, they live among their own ruins the way rats do. The Americans have begun to feel a certain pity and compassion for them, and to offer them charitable food. No sooner had news of this been broadcast, though, than the liberated nations grew indignant, their own spokesmen declaring that the Americans were rushing to the defeated enemy's aid faster than they had ever rushed to their victorious friend's.

Fear, then, has not entirely gone from this quarter either, and every person in Europe remains anxious, for himself and for his own family, about the war's aftermath — even once he is finally granted the chance to settle back in his own homeland, and feel secure in his own home, among his own people.

We do not imagine there is a single family left in Europe the war has not bereaved of one child or another; nor do we imagine there is a single family left in Europe free of some real anxiety over one child or another who escaped death, yet did not escape the wounds or the illnesses the war exacted.

These people's rejoicing at victory can never, then, be pure, or free of every taint — it is, at most, a relative rejoicing, closer to the sigh of relief breathed by someone afflicted, who had expected horrors poured upon him without limit, only to have those horrors finally lifted, after he had already taken his own heavy, hateful share of them.

Nor is this all: this victory that calls upon people to feel contentment and rejoicing does not come to them wearing a bright, radiant face — it

comes to them, rather, with a face not entirely free of a certain gloom. The world received victory, after the last war, with a measure of security it does not know in the aftermath of this one.

There was nothing, among the victors of the last war, resembling these violent, frightening displays of discord we now witness; the world spent a month or two simply savouring its own security and triumph, and political disagreements among the victors did not appear until negotiations at the peace conference had already advanced somewhat — and even then, these disagreements were never particularly disturbing or frightening.

In this war, however, disagreements appeared even before the enemy had surrendered, and a real estrangement emerged among the victors — taking on forms violent enough, at times, to distract people from the affairs of the war itself. Once the enemy's surrender was finally complete, the field lay wide open to dispute and discord — and what could prove this more clearly than the fact that victory was not even announced on the same day across all the Allies, but announced in the West on Tuesday, and in Eastern Europe only on Wednesday?

Nor did the world see, in the aftermath of the last war, a victim of disagreement as serious as the one we see now. The Polish state, for whose sake the war was declared, which lost a third of its own population, which lost the greater part of its own economic wealth, and whose armies took part in real victory on both fronts, East and West — this state now finds itself lost between the Russians and the Anglo-Saxons, each side insisting it wishes her only good, and prefers her own well-being — and the result of it all is that she remains absent from the San Francisco Conference, since the Russians will not accept the London government, and the Anglo-Saxons will not accept the Lublin government.

As for the Poles themselves, they can say nothing at all, being subject, whether they like it or not, to the authority of one side or the other.

Nor does the matter end with the Polish problem: problems are sprouting up everywhere, appearing every single day. The Austrian problem, the Trieste problem, the trusteeship problem, the Security Council problem, the Turkish-Russian problem, and whatever other problems you like — problems whose end no one can foresee, nor how that end might even come about.

What we hope the reader has no doubt about is that all these problems, however severe and acute, will not reach the furthest extreme of violence, and will inevitably find, or be found by the victors, either permanent or temporary solutions — but they stand there regardless. Their very existence, their intensity, and people's own disagreement over how to understand and resolve them, all of this prevents rejoicing at victory from ever being pure, free of every taint; it is, if the expression may be permitted, a grieving rejoicing, and an anxious rejoicing, without any doubt.

There are, however, other peoples who take no part whatsoever in these problems, near or far, but merely witness them the way a neutral bystander witnesses events, sometimes displeased, sometimes pleased. These peoples took part in the war, whether strongly or weakly, aided the victors, whether actively or passively, tasted the war's own bitterness, and felt its fire regardless — and it was their own right to receive victory rejoicing in it, delighted by it, their rejoicing untouched by grief, their delight untouched by anxiety or fear.

Yet these peoples, too, never won this pure rejoicing, nor enjoyed this unmixed delight; they received the news of victory, smiled at it with a fleeting smile that crossed their own lips as swiftly as a passing cloud, and then went on with their lives, earnest, grieving, and anxious — the very least one could say of them being that they are satisfied neither with their own present, nor at ease about their own future, and that they retain, of their own past, nothing but painful memories, stirring in their hearts no small measure of sorrow, doubt, and disappointment.

These are the very peoples who heard the promises made to them, believed them, trusted them, and lived alongside them, as though they were already facts on the ground, merely hidden by the fierce, terrible war, and bound to appear the moment the war's own tumult finally cleared.

These peoples looked up one day, only to find that the promises once so vocal, morning and evening, night and day, had grown steadily silent, gradually withdrawn from view, vanished from every heart, and hidden from every eye — replaced, in their place, by the same old political ways people had grown used to before this war, had grown weary of, and had imagined they would never return to, or that would never return to them. And then they found themselves, all at once, drowning in these old ways not merely up to the chin, but over the very ears. How, then, could you

possibly expect these peoples to find themselves free for pure joy and rejoicing, to fend off anxiety and fear, while everything around them proceeds exactly as though the war had never broken out at all, as though the war had never even ended in this tremendous victory?

Did Egypt herself rejoice at this tremendous victory with a complete, all-encompassing rejoicing, untouched by anxiety, undimmed by fear? Or did Egypt rejoice at this tremendous victory only with an official rejoicing, one the people themselves regarded with a mere smile, before going on with their own work exactly as they go on every day — their hearts filled with earnestness, filled with anxiety, filled with a hope whose fulfillment they cannot date, though they remain confident it will be fulfilled one day?

As for Germany's surrender, Egyptians had expected from it a great deal of good, and expected it soon. But they looked, and found only that Germany had collapsed, that Hitler had killed himself, and that democracy had triumphed. And through all of this, they themselves remained exactly as they had been before — exactly as they had been before the war was even declared — wishing for things they regard as rightfully theirs, neither granted them, nor refused them, but simply left suspended between the words yes and no.

The time has not yet come. It may come after a wait short or long — and they observe that victory had scarcely been announced before freedom was restored to the people in England herself, restrictions lifted, press censorship abolished, and people able to live as freely as they had lived before the war — even though the war, for them, has not yet ended at all, still demanding of them tremendous effort, still exposing them to tremendous danger, still pouring terrifying horrors down upon them.

Egyptians saw all of this, reflected on it, and were glad of it for England's own sake — then looked at themselves, and found that, after victory had been announced, they remained exactly as they had been before it was announced: no freedom restored to them, no restriction lifted from them, not even freed from press censorship — and this despite the fact that their own war has been, at most, a merely theoretical one.

They had hoped to be told, on the day of victory: rejoice with us — your own freedom shall now be made whole; the Allied armies shall evacuate your own homeland; the Nile Valley shall enjoy her own independence, entire, complete, and unimpaired. Rejoice with us — for you are, from this very day, free; the restrictions imposed by wartime

emergency, all or most of them, have been lifted from you; you shall resume your own lives exactly as you lived them before the war, your freedom of speech and action bounded by nothing but the common law.

They had waited to be told exactly this — and were told none of it. They merely heard the cannons fired, heard the radio broadcast the news of victory, smiled, and went on about their own business, glancing at the flags raised aloft, toyed with playfully by the breeze — but scarcely paying any of it any real attention at all.

Can they really be blamed?