

Preparation...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), August 28, 1934

The observatories have not yet recorded any earthquake in the ground, nor any disturbance in the movements of the planets and stars; the meteorological department has not yet announced any disturbance in the atmosphere, nor any change in the movement of the winds. And so the emergencies everyone awaits remain distant still, however much their first signs may have appeared, however much people's talk of them has grown — and there remain, before the Egyptians, days in which they may still breathe to their heart's content, sleep to their heart's content, eat and drink to their heart's content, and speak their fill, if speaking is what pleases them.

There is, however, one unsettling preliminary, which very nearly suggests that these emergencies, if they have not yet reached Egypt, may perhaps have drawn somewhat nearer to her. One of the morning papers reported that an official living, we believe, in Shubra went to the police to inform them that stones and gravel were falling in his house, as though it were a downpour of heavy rain, whenever night came; that this was an entirely new and unprecedented occurrence; that he had searched for its source and could neither identify it nor trace it; and that he believed — indeed, was certain — that these were demons emerging from beneath the earth by night, and causing all this disturbance in his house. The chief of police smiled at this account, but sent along with the official a policeman to look into the matter — and no sooner had this policeman arrived at the house and settled himself within it than the stones began to fall, the gravel scattered, the atmosphere grew grim, and the man felt certain the earth itself had quaked beneath him, and flew back to his superior, frightened and terrified. The chief, being an educated man, bold, sound of heart, and strong of mind, knew that demons had indeed once existed, but that their age had long since passed, that they had been forced to abandon civilized lands and had withdrawn instead to the deserts of al-Ahqaf, where they now dwell among the ruins of the tribe of 'Ad, that people who perished thousands upon thousands of years ago.

And so this educated chief did not believe the homeowner, nor the policeman, and did not credit the notion that the hands of demons were scattering the gravel and hurling the stones. He was certain, instead, that some cunning human devils had contrived this scheme, and lain in wait

for this poor man, presenting him with these hateful, harmful gifts. He resolved, then, that he must uncover these devils and bring them before the prosecution, and then before the courts. So he went to the house himself, fortified by whatever knowledge he possessed — perhaps reciting to himself certain incantations, and perhaps also fortified with a few talismans besides.

No sooner had he reached the house and settled within it than the dust rose, the stones fell, and the gravel scattered on every side, and our friend set about searching, and searching again, investigating, and investigating again, hoping to find some human devil or some demon, whether Egyptian or foreign resident of Egypt — but he found no one at all. So he returned to the police station and recorded what he had witnessed in his report, and God alone knows what measures the police will now take to ward off from this Egyptian the evil of these demons, and to protect him from their aggression — for the police are, after all, charged with protecting Egyptians from harm, whether that harm issues from men or from jinn.

What matters, though, is that this strange phenomenon, which appeared in the Shubra district, appeared only now, in these very days, after so much talk had already spread among the people about the emergencies the English are preparing for, and the Egyptians are discussing. I have no doubt, nor anything resembling doubt, that these demons have come from the deserts of al-Ahqaf as a warning of the approach of these emergencies, and as an advance guard of the momentous events that may occur in the days ahead. It seems most likely that these demons were merely the first contingent of a vast army of jinn soon to spread, before long, throughout the provinces of Egypt — and I fear their settlement may fall particularly upon the houses of government officials. For who knows — perhaps news of the crisis reached these demons before it reached us, and they learned that whatever ease exists in Egypt these days, if it exists for anyone at all, exists for officials rather than for farmers whose crops have failed, merchants whose trade has stagnated, and craftsmen whose trades have gone idle. Officials, then, must surely prepare themselves for these strange emergencies that struck one of their own yesterday, or the day before, and threaten soon to strike them all in the days to come. And how are officials to prepare themselves for these emergencies of demons? Plans must be devised, programs drawn up, curricula charted, and the opinions sought of specialists skilled in incantations and talismans, masters of sorcery,

capable of driving out demons, or confining them in jars, and casting them into the depths of the sea...

Perhaps officials would do well to convene a general congress to study the matter of these demons, and to seek out the surest means of warding off their evil, guarding against their cunning, and ridding themselves of whatever scheming they harbor... Be that as it may, the appearance of demons in Egypt is proof that the earth still turns, and that events are eager to change at last, having wearied of stagnation and stillness.

And so this talk of emergencies is genuine, preparation for these emergencies is inevitable, and the appearance of demons is, indeed, a truer sign of the nearness of these emergencies than even the delegation of Mr. Patterson to represent the High Commissioner. How, then, should preparations be made to protect the country from the grave calamities that these emergencies might bring, and the events and misfortunes that might accompany them?

Here the politicians differ — God forgive me, I mean the newspaper writers differ — with much give and take among them, much ebb and flow, much push and pull, to no benefit and no avail whatsoever. What kind of preparation for these emergencies is wanted of the Egyptians, and from which Egyptians is this preparation wanted? From the cabinet? The cabinet possesses nothing, and is capable of nothing. You have surely heard the words of the poet Bashar:

If the misfortunes of fate awaken you,

then rouse Amr for them — then go back to sleep.

And indeed, Amr was roused, and then went back to sleep — and Amr, if you like, is the High Commissioner, or, if you prefer, certain of the English residing in Egypt. The very best preparation the cabinet could possibly make for these emergencies is simply for us all to carry on sleeping, until God brings to pass whatever has already been ordained.

From the people, then? What is wanted of the people? The people seek no revolution, give it no thought, do not see it, at present, as any means toward freedom and independence; the people want genuine independence in their external affairs, genuine democratic liberty in their internal affairs, and they reject, most vehemently and most openly, anything that touches their independence or their liberty, and resist,

most vehemently and most openly, anything intended to alter their conception of independence, or the system of government, or the methods of politics. They have shown their view plainly and clearly ever since the Revolution, never wavering from it, never hesitating over it; they upheld this view with violence and with the sacrifice of life and blood, when violence and sacrifice were the means available to them; they then upheld this view with patience and steadfastness, with devotion to principle and integrity in demanding their right, never turned from it by any ordeal however severe, never diverted from it by any turmoil however great; they wore out, in its cause, cabinet after cabinet and minister after minister, wore out, in its cause, one representative of the English after another, wore out, in its cause, the attempts of tyrants and the schemes of schemers. What, then, is wanted of the people, what is demanded of them — or rather, what is wanted of the people's own leaders and guides? They portray, with perfect fidelity, the people's own loyalty to its principle, the people's own devotion to its right, the people's own refusal of injustice, the people's own resistance to the oppression of the unjust. What, then, is wanted of them? That they compromise? That they concede some part of their right? That they soften? That they fall short in some part of their duty? For the people's rights are not won through compromise, are not preserved through pliancy, and are not attained through negligence and dereliction.

How, then, should the people and their leaders prepare for these emergencies, just as they have always prepared for them, just as they are preparing for them now, and just as they will go on preparing for them tomorrow? Through patience in adversity, steadfastness to principle, insistence upon the right, and unwavering persistence in preserving national dignity, whatever these emergencies may be, whatever calamities they may bring.

This is the people's strategy; they have, and ought to have, no other. This is the leaders' path; they have, and ought to have, no other. They refuse no discussion, should discussion be proposed to them; they refuse no inquiry, should inquiry be proposed to them — but they do not compromise, do not falter, and do not fear.

Let whoever, after all this, still wishes to compromise, compromise on his own account, not on the people's account. Let whoever, after all this, still wishes to soften, soften with respect to his own rights, not the people's rights. Let whoever, after all this, still wishes to hasten ahead and arrive before the people at large arrive — for opportunities may

present themselves, circumstances may arise, and advantages may draw near to those eager for advantage; and among these doors that the emergencies will throw open lies a wide entrance indeed for those who have long waited to walk through it...