

Division . . .

Al-Wadi, 17 August 1934

Let it be just or let it be unjust — that is not what matters, for these days are distinguished precisely by the fact that they take no account of justice or injustice, but take account only of established facts. And this division is, it would seem, an established fact: we wish to deny it, and it compels us instead to believe in it; we wish to doubt it, and find no way to doubt it. This division has been carried out by circumstance, and you may analyze circumstance however you please — some of it is a strength that cannot be turned back, some of it a weakness that cannot be resisted, some of it a turmoil that never settles. And all these circumstances have conspired together to divide the affairs of this unfortunate country, in these black days, between the British High Commissioner and the standing Egyptian Ministry — giving to the one a share, and to the other another share. And it is perfectly clear that the High Commissioner's circumstances are entirely strength, that the standing Ministry's circumstances are entirely weakness, and that certain other circumstances, between the High Commissioner and the Ministry, are nothing but hesitation and confusion. It is no surprise, then, that the High Commissioner should have the larger, more substantial share, and the Ministry the lighter, lesser one — and that Egyptians should stand between these two claimants, watching, their hearts filled with sorrow, brimming with a bitter, deep grief.

As for the High Commissioner, his circumstances — entirely strength, as you know — willed that the protection of Egypt in these days should fall to him, and the protection of Egypt in the broadest, most comprehensive, most precise sense of that word, the sense closest to actual verification. The High Commissioner inspects our borders, east and west, so as to have accurate, verified knowledge of whatever protection these borders require. The High Commissioner inspects our army, so as to have accurate, verified knowledge of this army's needs, should circumstances call for its use in protecting these borders, or in protecting Egypt within her own territory. The High Commissioner inspects our police, so as to have accurate, verified knowledge of this police force's capacity to protect security and uphold order, should security require protection, or order require upholding. The High Commissioner, then, concerns himself with protecting Egypt materially, from foreign incursion or internal disorder. And do not forget that the

High Commissioner penetrates deep into Egypt's interior, visiting certain ministers, or selecting certain locations suitable as airfields at the very heart of Egypt.

Then the High Commissioner concerns himself with protecting Egypt morally and politically. He negotiates with the French over the debt question before the Egyptians themselves negotiate it, this very year; then he notices that the negotiations have not reached their conclusion, and so holds onto the matter, to resume discussion of it; then he oversees these problems that have been stirred up in the Mixed Courts, and watches closely the give and take between our Ministry and the foreign judges in these courts. Then he takes the matter up with his own government, and receives his government's opinion on it; then he, or circumstance itself, manages to delay the memorandum our Ministry had wanted to send to the powers, until the British Foreign Office's own opinion settles on something. Then the newspapers here and there say that the fate of this memorandum has become uncertain — perhaps the Egyptian Ministry will send it to the powers directly, or perhaps the British Foreign Office will speak to the powers on Egypt's behalf instead. And do not forget that the High Commissioner, for all his concern with Egypt's military and political protection, does not fall short in showing concern for the protection of Egyptians themselves, individually and collectively, wherever he judges their protection to be his duty — for the man is said to concern himself with the story of the land exchanges, and with the story of the Corniche; he is said to concern himself with irrigation matters; he is said to receive whatever complaints weak Egyptians bring before him, studying them, inquiring about them, involving himself in them, speaking to the ministers himself, or sending someone to speak to them and to other officials on his behalf. And the man, beyond all this, and above all this, studies the affairs of the parties, reflects on what has happened, and gauges what is to come. If you add to all this that he holds sway over the affairs of the Four Reservations, you will realize that his share of Egypt's affairs is the lion's share — that he has taken from the two portions the fuller, the more substantial, the more complete, and the one best suited to the strength of the strong.

As for our Ministry, its share is modest, just as it is itself modest, and its share is amusing, just as it is itself amusing. It has the regulation of bathing on the beaches; it has the monitoring of what people wear and remove; it has the harassment of the newspapers; it has the tightening of restrictions on the delegation whenever its leader comes or goes; it has a

say in certain matters touching dismissal and transfer, appointment and discharge, provided it consults, in doing so, those who are able to offer it advice whether it asks for it or not. It may perhaps send delegations to conferences, and assign certain officials trips to Europe to search for books, or to study educational matters while the schools are closed for summer; and it has, before all else and after all else, the right to reside in Alexandria, enjoying the beauty of the sea, the clarity of the air, and the sweetness of the breeze,

moving between houses for lunch at one hour and dinner at another, and for a third round of tea-drinking, with no harm in a sea excursion, or a trip to Marsa Matrouh, from time to time.

Do you see how circumstance divides Egypt's affairs between the High Commissioner and the standing Ministry, managing the division so neatly, giving to each precisely the share suited to his measure of strength or weakness? As for the Egyptian people, circumstance was gentle and compassionate toward them, granting them a portion perfectly suited to them — patience under heavy cares, and the endurance of trials they were created to endure.

And just as the High Commissioner makes good use of what circumstance has granted him, inspecting east and west, flying at one hour and traveling by land at another; and just as the Ministry makes good use of what circumstance has granted it, appointing and discharging, dismissing and transferring, and ordering people to wear their cloaks and not remove them until they reach the water — so too does the Egyptian people make good use of patience, excel at endurance, smile at hardship, and wait to see what the days will reveal.

So let us be patient alongside them, and let us smile, and let us wait — for perhaps this waiting will not last long.

Taha Hussein

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