

Life

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A beautiful, honorable life is this one the happy Egyptian people have been living for years now, all goodness and plenty, all happiness and good fortune, all honor and dignity; the people in it have grown so full and so sated that they have gone to excess with themselves, and have become prone to indigestion and the ailments that resemble it; not one of them is hungry or thirsty, not one of them is destitute or deprived, every one of them is pampered, or as good as pampered, every one of them is rich, or as good as rich.

And in it the people have found security for themselves, their wealth, and their interests; they fear nothing, and they hope for nothing — they do not fear, because they have risen above fear, and they do not hope, because all their hopes have already been fulfilled, and all their wishes already granted; it is enough for one of them to wish for a thing, and behold, he has won it; it is enough for one of them to hope, and he need only stretch out his hand, and behold, his hope seizes hold of him and clasps him close. Every one of them holds himself in honor and will not accept indignity, nor expose himself to accepting it; every one of them is free in his homeland, and held dear by his fellow men.

They have gone to such excess in honor that it has reached arrogance, and to such excess in liberty and dignity that foreign countries have grown wary of its first signs, reckoning with it most carefully, and fearing lest its surplus of strength and might drive it to sally forth from its own house and raid the countries around it, exposing peace to grave danger.

This is the life the happy Egyptian people are living these days; and the strange thing is that this blessing has so overwhelmed them, and pressed upon them so insistently, that it has made them forget they are blessed, and that this happiness has so engulfed them that it has made them forget they are happy, until the matter has ended in insolence and ingratitude, so that they are found discontented rather than pleased, downcast rather than delighted, preoccupied rather than at ease, and their newspapers are found pressing their complaints, dwelling on their sorrows, chafing at their days — dissatisfied with everything, reassured

by nothing; chafing at the ministry, though God has not yet created a ministry like it; chafing at parliament, though God has not yet created a parliament like it; and imagining that foreigners wrong them and look down on them, and tyrannize over them in their own country, and show no regard for the sanctity of hospitality or the rights owed a guest.

All of this because they are sick with insolence and ingratitude, made arrogant by overwhelming blessings, corrupted by a happiness too dear for them; so the matter has grown confused for them, and they no longer know what to do or what to say.

And what do you make of a people granted a ministry that, scarcely had it taken up the seats of government, devoted itself entirely to their affairs, managing them in the best possible way, attending to them most faithfully, never letting the great matters distract it from the small, nor the small distract it from the great, caring for the people by night and caring for them by day, caring for them waking and caring for them asleep — while in other countries the ministries occupy themselves with their own affairs to the neglect of the people, and amuse themselves with foolishness to the neglect of the people's interests?

And they told us that a certain ministry, in a certain foreign country — I will not name it now — spent more than two months caring for nothing, concerned with nothing, thinking of nothing, except a man called Sidqi Pasha, who had been the head of the ministry and was then removed from it, and who then set about warring against those who succeeded him in power; so his successors turned their attention to him, waging war against him, blocking every road before him, cutting off every path, fighting him within his own party until they drove him out of it, fighting him in parliament until they wearied him of parliament — and all of this occupied them to the neglect of their own wretched, deprived people, so that they warded off none of its wretchedness, and turned back none of its deprivation.

And the people complain, and no one listens; and their interests are lost, and no one attends to them. They told us of this foreign country whose entire ministry devoted itself to warring against a single man, while its entire ministry neglected the affairs of a whole people, and we had scarcely compared this country to Egypt before we found ourselves condemning Egyptians for the ingratitude and undutifulness in which they live, and this denial of blessing, this failure to acknowledge kindness. And they told us of another country where the ministry stands

in the place of the strong and mighty, though it is in fact the weakest of ministries and the least endowed with force — because, as some newspapers said, it draws the sword of dissolution over the heads of the deputies in its own country, brandishing it at them whenever they so much as think of showing it a different face, or displaying some disagreement with it.

And it does not give them this warning in parliament, or in any government office; for were it to do so, it would violate the constitution, which guarantees the deputies their full liberty and places them above threat and menace. It gives them this warning, rather, in gatherings held in party clubs and ministers' houses, and in talk passed to certain men, which certain go-betweens then carry abroad, so that it is broadcast and spread and fills every ear. And yet it is not even true; for it was issued and not issued, said and not said, a threat and not a threat — and yet the deputies in that country listen to this talk, and take fright at these warnings, so that the majority of them hear it, and submit to it, and believe it.

And they claimed that a small number of them rejected this and found it intolerable, and set about interpellating the ministry over it, and met with — and what an evil thing they met with! — they met with uproar and clamor, they met with rebuke and censure, they met with a resolution of the Chamber of Deputies declaring that they had violated the constitution by this very interpellation, and they returned to their seats rebuffed and routed. They had wished to protect the constitution, and it turned out they had assaulted it; they had wished to put the ministers in a difficult position, and the ministers forced upon them a disgraceful and ugly difficulty of their own.

They told us of this foreign country, and we had scarcely compared it to this Egypt of ours, where no assault ever reaches the constitution or the law, where the ministers dare not speak of the deputies except with good, nor think of them except with reverence and esteem, where the deputies scarcely resolve on a thing before they do it, and scarcely do a thing before the ministers assent to it and submit — we had scarcely made this comparison between that country and Egypt before we found ourselves condemning Egyptians for the ingratitude and undutifulness in which they live, this denial of blessing, this failure to acknowledge kindness, and before we found ourselves pitying the deputies and ministers for the injustice visited upon them every day, and feeling for them in their labor on behalf of a people that does not value those who

labor for it.

And they told us of yet another foreign country, full of foreigners who went to excess against its own people in every way — excess in exploitation, excess in degradation, excess in arrogance, excess in contempt — carrying them from one excess to another until they came to dictate even what their own orators might say and what their own writers might write.

A great orator among their great men once delivered a speech that did not please the foreigners, so their accredited ministers went about objecting and taking note, and asked their own prime minister to take care, since that speech had been met with loud applause, and this applause threatened to tempt the newspapers into following the orator's lead — whereas the whole good lay in orators never saying what that orator had said, nothing the foreigners disliked to hear; and should an orator's tongue get the better of him and say what the foreigners dislike, then the whole good lay in his listeners not applauding him; and should the listeners' hands get the better of them and burst into applause regardless, then the whole good lay in the newspapers not becoming an echo of the pleased and an amplifier of the admiring.

We had scarcely heard this account and compared that country to Egypt before we found ourselves condemning Egyptians for their suspicion of foreigners, their impatience with foreigners' kindness, their unfair treatment of foreigners, and their pressing upon the prime minister to accept from foreigners nothing less than a submission unmatched by any other submission, a surrender unapproached by any other surrender — and before we found ourselves pitying the foreigners living in Egypt, since Egyptians subject them to every kind of degradation and make them taste every kind of torment, receiving from them nothing but contentment and smiles, hearing from them nothing but praise and gratitude, finding in them nothing but reverence and esteem.

Not one of them would think of approaching the prime minister, let alone conveying to him a remark, or raising with him a protest, or claiming that his government had done something unbecoming; and had any foreign minister in Egypt thought of doing this, or anything resembling it, he would never again have found his stay on the banks of the Nile pleasant, and would have been forced to depart, along with his countrymen, from the land of the Pharaohs, or else to offer an apology for meddling in what was none of his business.

And people tell us every day of the degradations peoples endure elsewhere, the kinds of injustice ministries commit elsewhere, the sorts of domination foreigners exercise elsewhere, and we hear these accounts and measure what happens in those countries against what happens in this one; and this leaves us with nothing but regret and sorrow, for Egyptians are truly in need of learning to give thanks for blessing and to acknowledge kindness. And we think that the one most deserving of blame, the one bearing the greatest share of neglect, is none other than the minister of tradition; for he does not attend to education as he ought, and had he grasped what is required of him, and properly weighed his responsibilities, he would have established, in every institute and every school, lessons teaching Egyptians how to give thanks for blessing, how to acknowledge kindness, and how to value the goodness of their benefactors, and he would have charged the university's professors to devote their public lectures to correcting this crookedness in Egyptians' character.

And perhaps the interior minister, too, is to blame; for it would be well for him to oversee the newspapers, and bring them back to their senses whenever this insolent, ungrateful people wrongs them by directing some criticism, mild or sharp, at the ministers or the deputies, since the interior minister knows full well that our ministers and our deputies ought never to be touched by criticism; for they do not, and cannot possibly, do anything that would expose them to criticism, gentle or severe.

How fitting it would be for Egyptians to reflect on their own lives! And how fitting it would be for Egypt's ministers to teach them how such reflection ought to proceed! For had Egyptians known how to compare themselves with other peoples, they would have become certain that they are living, at this moment, a life unmatched in history, one that nations envy them for, and peoples begrudge them.