

Farewell (I)

Kawkab al-Sharq (Hadith al-Massa), 1 April 1933.

They say that when Ziyad had mastered Iraq for Mu'awiya, and established there the new order by compulsion and violence, he wrote to the Caliph asking that the province of the Hijaz be joined to his governance; the Caliph was inclined to do so, and the people of the Hijaz were alarmed when this news reached them, and so they turned to Abdullah ibn Umar ibn al-Khattab, may God be pleased with them both, asking him to pray against Ziyad; but Abdullah prayed against no one — he turned, it is said, toward the qibla, and asked God for well-being, safety, and forgiveness for the Muslims; and God spared the people of the Hijaz from Ziyad, and relieved the people of Iraq of Ziyad, for He transferred Ziyad to another abode, where there is no governance but God's, no authority but God's, and no fear of a governor, nor dread of an emir...

And the people of the Hijaz were excused for dreading Ziyad's governance, for he had burdened the people of Iraq with horrors, and made them taste manifold torments; and the people of Iraq were excused for breathing a sigh of relief at Ziyad's removal, for he had made them taste kinds of humiliation, and subjected them to forms of degradation they had not known before; and though Ziyad's removal did not truly satisfy them, for he was succeeded by one who was no better than Ziyad — indeed, one who was worse than Ziyad.

I am as far as can be from imagining that there is any resemblance between our provincial governors, these men we call "mudirs," and Ziyad! For Ziyad had virtues they lack, alas, and he had vices they have not — happily — attained!

But one thing calls another to mind, and the shuffling of mudirs among the provinces in these gloomy days recalls Ziyad's story with the people of the Hijaz and of Iraq — it recalls it because the provinces' contentment with their departing mudirs, and their hope for their incoming ones, are not free of taints that do not truly picture contentment, and may rather picture indignation; nor truly picture hope, but may rather picture fear and despair. Whatever people may say, they cannot deny that the people of Asyut are indignant at their former mudir, an indignation the courts have recorded more than once, and which people in Egypt and beyond have spoken of at length; nor do I think the

people of Gharbiyya receive their new mudir with bright hope and smiling expectation, as he comes to them preceded by the men of al-Badari, al-Muti'a, and Bani Husayn...! And the strongest supposition — indeed the undoubted truth — is that these abominable events contrived in Asyut have preceded their mudir to the people of Gharbiyya, filling their hearts — I do not say with terror and panic, for Egyptians, praise God, know neither terror nor panic now! — but filling their hearts with sorrow and grief; for they expect their new mudir to conduct himself among them as he did among the people of Asyut.

Whatever people may say, they cannot claim that the people of Daqahliyya preserve for their departing mudir memories filled with pure love and fine praise, nor that the people of Minufiyya receive him with such broad hope and such wide, smiling expectation, nor with the readiness for sincere cooperation with which the best of mudirs are received; and the blood that was shed on the soil of Daqahliyya has not yet dried, nor have the souls that were extinguished in the air of Daqahliyya yet found rest, nor have people yet forgotten that poor administration was the proximate or distant cause for which this blood was shed and these souls extinguished — and what the laws of men could not punish, for one reason or another, the laws of God do not neglect, nor erase its sin, nor let it pass unreckoned!

Say something like this, or near to it, of all the other provinces from which a mudir has departed and to which a mudir has come: each of them bids farewell in indignation and receives in sorrow, recalling Ziyad's story!

And yet — did you read al-Muqattam yesterday, and did you see that all the provinces whose mudirs have moved on found among their people those who were pleased with their mudirs, grieved at parting from them, and eager to bid them farewell with a farewell full of love and affection, full of admiration and esteem! And did you notice that the news of this farewell all reached al-Muqattam at a single moment, and that al-Muqattam published it all on a single day, in a single place, as though it had an appointment with al-Muqattam! As though they had all met at this appointed hour, greeting one another, shaking hands with one another, and moved together to al-Muqattam, to settle into this place prepared for them in advance, and made ready for them in advance!

Did you not find something strange in this odd correspondence between the post offices of Qena, Girga, Asyut, Zagazig, and Damanhur,

and the postal couriers in Cairo, for all the difference in distance, near or far, that separates them from Cairo? Did you not sense that this too is a matter contrived by night, and meant to signify something other than this appearance that you and I both see? As for me, I do not know why I cannot content myself with the appearances of things; why I must always search for their inner workings and secrets. And truly I did not prolong my search, nor put myself to any trouble in it, for the newspapers themselves denounced these farewell celebrations, and some deputies put questions about them to the Minister of the Interior, and there was debate in the newspapers around these questions. And behold — a revelation issues and is heeded, a command is conveyed and is obeyed, and behold a strange correspondence among the mudirs, for all their differing temperaments and natures: every one of them averse to celebrations, disliking them; every one of them declining them, apologizing for them; every one of them eager that the newspapers publish his asceticism and his apology. Do you not find in this correspondence of the mudirs over their sudden asceticism the very thing you found strange in the correspondence of the letters appearing in al-Muqattam on a single day, in a single place, as though they had come by appointment?!

May God forgive our standing ministry — what has it done to the will of individuals and groups, and to the very nature of things? Must everything in Egypt be arranged, contrived? Must everything in Egypt submit to this strange tampering that reconciles differences and harmonizes divergences?

Then what did these tamperers intend by this kind of tampering? You may believe me — they did not intend the public good by it; they did not intend to ease the burden on these hard-pressed people who are made to pay out money they do not possess; they intended by it nothing but to toy with people's minds, and this absurd war that advances nothing and holds nothing back. Here are the people of Buhayra, from whom money was collected, and they paid it reluctantly; then it was intimated to the mudir that he should attend no celebration and accept no honor — do you suppose, then, that the money was returned to its owners? By no means was it returned; or rather, its owners were told not to accept it should it be returned to them, for they would then buy with it bonds whose yield would be spent on certain school prizes, to perpetuate the mudir's name. And what perpetuation is this? It issued from nothing but pure love, which drives one to generosity — not only with money in time

of hardship, but with one's very self as well.

And here are the people of Qena — yes, the people of Qena! The people of Qena, after all that happened there, after the leader of the Wafd and his companion were abducted from it, after the love of its people for the mudir, the administration, the minister, and the ministry had been made manifest, after a thousand and one proofs had arisen that its people support the new order, and offer up for it both soul and money — after all this, money was collected from the people of Qena to honor the mudir, and then it was intimated to him that he should attend no celebration and accept no honor; and so he apologizes, and insists on apologizing, while the people of Qena refuse, and persist in their refusal — until the matter ends with the people of Qena hiring, yes, hiring a special train, in which they escort — and I nearly said: in which they lead in bridal procession — the mudir to his new province. What now — is this earnest, or is it farce? At whose expense do these jesters play? Our government is harsh indeed, excessively harsh, that it should stand in the place of the separator between lovers, parting the mudirs from their lovers among the provincial folk! Why does it not leave these mudirs where they were, content with their provinces, and their provinces content with them? Why, then, does it embitter life for them and for it? The strange thing is that the people of the provinces will come to adore the mudirs who are transferred to them, and will be smitten with them beyond all bounds. The people of Qena will find in their new mudir a man they adore just as they adored their former mudir, and the former mudir of Qena will find among the people of Minya a folk he loves and is devoted to, just as he loved and was devoted to the people of Qena before. What, then, is the explanation of these phenomena that minds are powerless to grasp? The explanation is simple: the people of the provinces feel no adoration and no passion, and the mudirs find no love and no infatuation; all of it is merely something manufactured, contrived, which both sides must accept, so that clear proofs may stand that affairs in Egypt proceed in the best possible state.

But to my deep regret, there is no one, neither among the Egyptians nor among the English, who believes a word of this, or is deceived by any of these ruses — so then, to what end is this tampering, and to what end this insistence upon it? The answer to this too is simple: whoever cannot manage earnestness is compelled to farce; otherwise his very existence would be impossible.

Believe me — the affair of the departing mudirs and their provinces is no different from Ziyad's story: every province bids its mudir farewell, relieved by this farewell, and receives its new mudir, fearful of this reception.