Cheering . . .

Al-Wadi, 21 July 1934

We had wanted to take 'Sabri-isms' as the title for this chapter, since it connects to Sabri Bey, the Finance Minister, and to the patience he showed when the High Commissioner called on him last Wednesday. But the matter will not bear levity, and does not permit joking. And is 'Sabri-isms' anything but a byword for levity and joking? The matter is graver, and reaches further, than anything the Finance Minister has done since he took office to this day — for it touches no interest over which opinions might reasonably differ, where people might be exposed, in judging and managing it, to error as much as to being right. It touches instead the entire Egyptian conscience; it touches the whole of Egyptian dignity; it touches that feeling which ought to be instilled in every Egyptian heart — that this country holds itself in honor, and so must hold itself in honor before others, and that this country stands in dispute with the English until an agreement is reached between them, over whatever disorders their affairs.

Yes, the matter is graver, and reaches further, than the story of the public debt, than the story of the mortgage debt, than the story of the land exchanges, than the stories of transfers and dismissals, of favoritism and partiality — for all these stories touch public interests over which opinion may differ, as we have already noted, and whatever loss they cause, however great it grows, remains a loss bounded and defined, one that can be borne, even if reluctantly, and can be remedied, even with difficulty, effort, and hardship. But this matter touches the whole of Egyptian independence, the whole of Egyptian dignity, and this national struggle whose burdens Egyptians have borne, whose pains they have suffered, and for which they have sacrificed both life and money for more than half a century.

Some appetite stirred in the soul of one minister among the ministers, or stirred in the soul of some foreign representative of some foreign state, and so the minister wished to invite the High Commissioner to visit his village, or the High Commissioner wished the minister to invite him to visit this village. It ought never to be that such a private appetite becomes a means of burdening Egypt with what she ought not to bear, of charging the people with what they ought not to be charged, of tempting the people with what they ought not to be tempted by, and of

driving the people toward what they ought not to be driven toward.

What are these crowds that were mustered for the High Commissioner, receiving him from the moment his plane touched ground until he reached the minister's house, chanting, applauding, showing admiration and reverence, and thronging around him again from the moment he left the minister's house until he reached his plane once more, chanting, applauding, showing admiration and reverence? What is all this for? Why is all this done? And for whose sake is all this done?

Is it enough for a minister to desire that the High Commissioner visit him, or for the High Commissioner to desire to visit a minister, for Egyptians to be mustered to cheer and applaud, showing the representative of the British state that governs them unjustly that they are content with her injustice; that they are delighted by her aggression against their independence; that they are content with how she treats them — among the worst treatment any nation has ever imposed on another people's life? Is it enough for a minister to desire the honor of a visit from the High Commissioner, for Egyptians to be mustered to display something that brings honor neither to themselves, nor to the minister, nor to any Egyptian, whatever his standing, whatever his position among Egyptians? It must be one of two things: either the reports of this chanting and applause, and the news of these greetings and this admiration, are true — in which case they are a disgrace to those who committed them, a sin against those who incited them, urged them on, and desired them, and an insult to the people's dignity, a betrayal of the people's rights, and a training of the people to be servile and humiliated. Or else these reports are false, without any basis, fabricated, and do not depict the truth — in which case silence about them is a sin, and keeping quiet about their broadcast is a crime against Egypt's dignity, and an affront to the honor of Egyptians. And it is the right of those who committed no sin either in honoring the High Commissioner or in staying silent about that honor, to know how this sin came to occur, and to discover the truth of the matter. It is the right of all Egyptians, upon the Finance Minister, and upon the governor of Gharbiya, that they should let it be known whether Egyptians gathered, as Al-Muqattam reported the day before yesterday, and greeted and bid farewell to the High Commissioner with chanting and applause, and displays of admiration and reverence — or whether this news was simply invented, fabricated out of nothing. If the first is true, then it is the Finance Minister's duty to feel pain within himself, and to regret this opportunity

he arranged, for it is not among the opportunities that bring honor to those who arrange them, or fill their souls and hearts with pride and vanity. And if the second is true, then it is the Ministry's duty to deny these reports, and to ask those who broadcast them where they got them, and how they allowed themselves to broadcast them, without first making certain of the undoubted truth.

Egyptians once cried out in protest at Lord Lloyd's visits to the provinces, and Parliament rose in outrage over it. So what do we see now? We see ministers arranging visits by the High Commissioner to the provinces, and creating opportunities that bring him together with Egyptians, opportunities that make him feel that Egyptians hold him in high esteem, admire him, and look to him for good things. This is too much for a country that demands independence, and whose own ministers believe themselves independent.

It behooves Egyptians to think, and to question their own consciences — for it may well turn out that these consciences are in need of insistent questioning. If the head of the delegation, or a member of the delegation, wishes to visit a city or a village, or to tour a province, he is blocked from doing so by police and troops, by armed force, by the raising of bridges, the digging of trenches, and the erection of barriers. Yet if the High Commissioner wishes to visit some village in some province, the ground is smoothed for his airplane's landing, at the state's expense, at the cost of the public treasury, and by the very hands of the sons of the people — and then Egyptians are gathered to receive him and see him off with chanting and applause.

It is as though the head of the delegation and the members of the delegation were the enemies of Egypt, the usurpers of her independence, whom the people ought not even to be allowed to see, whose causes ought never to be connected with the people's own causes — and as though the High Commissioner were Egypt's savior from every evil, her protector from every aggression, the one who preserved her independence, restored her dignity, and said to her sons, 'Be dear,' and they became dear!

What mockery of justice, what folly of the times! And it is Egyptian ministers themselves who arrange this, and who create the opportunities for it! Mere flattery would be a lighter thing than all this; mere subservience to power would be a lighter thing than all this; the very lives and interests of individuals would be a lighter thing than all this.

How can the ministers not think about this, and not question their own consciences over it?

What mockery of justice, what folly of the times! People are saying that other ministers may well be arranging something similar to what the Finance Minister has arranged, so that the High Commissioner might visit them in their own provinces — and on that day, too, the ground will be smoothed for his plane's landing, at the state's expense, at the cost of the public treasury, and by the very hands of the sons of the people whose blood was spilled demanding independence — until, when the High Commissioner descends, the representative of the state that has usurped that very independence, Egyptians receive him with chanting and applause, and Egyptians see him off with chanting and applause.

And people go on to say that the minister is a fortunate man, that the future smiles upon him, and hope laughs for him — has not the British High Commissioner himself paid him a visit? What mockery of justice, what folly of the times! Has Egypt's dignity and her rights been held so cheap, to this degree, in the eyes of Egyptians? . . .

Taha Hussein

Al-Wadi, 21 July 1934.