

Visit . . .

Al-Wadi, 22 July 1934

We must return to this visit, which took the High Commissioner off to Sabriya on Wednesday, so that he might share a meal and tea with the Finance Minister, as he had done before, and so that he might see Egyptians in the countryside, and Egyptians might see him too, just as had been said before.

We must return to this visit because talk of it has not yet subsided, and perhaps it will not subside — and if the newspapers disagree in their differences over it, it is not that they wish to belittle its importance, nor to give it its full due, out of interpretation or denial, though it remains among the most significant events that genuinely touch Egyptian dignity and wound the national sentiment.

We must return to this visit, for it seems that certain quarters, as the *Ahram* says, have this morning finally realized that the matter deserves reflection, and requires interpretation, and calls for a great many questions. It would have been reasonable, had things run their course in this country the way reasonable things run their course, for this shrewdness about the visit to occur before it took place, and for the questioning of its motives, its purpose, and its likely results, to occur before it happened, rather than after. But the French proverb says: 'Better late than never.'

People are saying that this visit was the first, not the last, and the introduction, not the conclusion, and that a group of ministers had wanted, or someone wanted for them, to follow the Finance Minister's own path, and to show what he had shown of his own patience, since it is said that Egyptians of true honor know how to entertain great men, and know how to prepare for them the finest reception.

So if what the *Ahram* has reported is true, then this visit has stirred certain observations from certain quarters, and these belated observations may amount to what the ministers spend, or those who seek to draw near to the ministers spend, when they follow the path of their brilliant, singular, and truly extraordinary colleague — and so the state need not prepare the ground, at its own expense, for the High Commissioner's plane to land in certain provinces; and the countryside folk need not be mustered to receive the High Commissioner and see him

off with cheering and applause; and the High Commissioner himself need not enlist the ministers' help in reaching out to the countryside folk in their own places, inspecting their affairs, learning their hopes and their pains, and distributing among them these English smiles whose surface is mercy and whose depths, before that, are torment. And the Egyptian conscience should not be ashamed, before itself and before foreign consciences, that Egyptians should have gathered and cheered the representative of the British state, which still usurps their independence by force, and can mass its army on their soil, fill their skies with its planes, and impose upon them a life its own consent does not permit a noble people to accept.

The ministers, their aides, the ministers' assistants, and the ministers' supporters all know full well how sinful it is for the tongues of Egyptians to be unleashed in cheering for a foreigner whose country is in dispute with ours, so long as this dispute remains standing; and how sinful it is for Egyptian hands to be driven to applaud a foreigner whose country disagrees with ours, so long as this disagreement remains unresolved. And it is a dereliction, within the very homeland itself, for Egypt to say to the English: give us back our independence, keep your hands off our affairs, refrain from involving yourselves in our business — while some Egyptians shout for, and applaud, an Egyptian minister in the very village of the English representative, when they have not yet given us back our independence, have not yet kept their hands off our affairs, and have not yet refrained from involving themselves in our business.

All of this may well be true, if what the *Ahram* published was accurate, and this visit has indeed stirred certain observations. We ourselves, then, may rightly ask, and press the question at length, about how this visit came about, and how the Finance Minister undertook it, or was invited to it. For if the Finance Minister had consulted his own conscience, this great, undoubtedly wakeful conscience would have shown him that this visit does not suit Egypt's own interest, nor Egypt's own dignity, especially given the circumstances and forms surrounding it.

The Egyptian people are in dispute with the English, and the Egyptian minister, whoever he may be, whether he wishes it or not, is bound to know of this dispute and to safeguard its interests — for he holds his office to defend Egypt, and to draw her closer to the English through defending her rights, preserving her dignity, and displaying her strength and might, not the appearance of the weak and the humbled.

So the Egyptian minister, whoever he may be, whether he wishes it or not, ought not to fall short in the very matter entrusted to him, nor to overstep his own right in some circumstance or another. Nor is it any elevation above dereliction in the very matter entrusted to him, or negligence in his own right in some circumstance, for an Egyptian minister to invite the representative of England to encounter Egyptians wherever he happens to meet them, willingly or unwillingly, with cheering and applause, while the dispute between us and the English remains standing.

It may well be that the Finance Minister's own intelligence advised him — and he is undoubtedly a great intelligence, no one would dispute it — before this visit, or before he was invited to it. His colleagues who are like him — men of similarly refined feeling — reflect, and think, and ask what has happened, and what might happen, and think that they have already tasted this visit as it ought to be tasted, and have already savored and swallowed it as it ought to be savored and swallowed. For had the Finance Minister only begun by considering his people's advances or their retreat as a whole, or by seeing to it that his advances, or theirs, should not be aimed at satisfying him, it would not have been his place to fill their hearts with confidence, security, and reassurance.

Then, had the Finance Minister only consulted his intelligence as well, this great intelligence would have counseled him that the circumstances imposed upon ministers, and those like ministers, require them to observe the utmost precision and caution possible in whatever ties exist between them and the English. For English talk of the Cromer era is very frequent in these days, and they repeat it in Egypt and repeat it in England, and their deeds testify that they seek seriousness, not levity. And the Cromer era is well known, known in its general outline and its details, its foundation being the imposition of force upon Egypt, and taking hold of her firmly, without distinguishing between popular Egypt and official Egypt, on the pretext of saving the people from the rulers' injustice, and protecting the people from the sultan's tyranny. And we think that Egypt's ministers, whether supporters of the people or not, ought not, as ministers, to assist, near or far, in the return of this Cromer era, or its approach, or in any deed likely to suggest to people that this era has already returned, or is on the verge of returning. In that lies a dereliction of Egypt's own right, and in that lies a flagrant insult to both official Egypt and popular Egypt — for both detest the return of the Cromer era, and both regard it as abject humiliation for any Egyptian to

assist in bringing that era back. And the Finance Minister is an intelligent man, and he understands us perfectly well, understands exactly what we mean to say, and agrees with us, without doubt, that had he consulted his own conscience, it would have dissuaded him from this visit, and had he consulted his own intelligence, it would have dissuaded him from this visit, and had he consulted his own true, lasting interest, it too would have dissuaded him from this visit.

There may well be, in this visit, something of apparent prestige and passing elevation of standing — but the wise think of tomorrow and of yesterday more than they think of today.

And so, in closing, we hope that what the Ahram reported — that this visit has stirred certain observations — is accurate, and we hope, in particular, that these observations land where they ought to land, in the souls of all the ministers, so that they may know that the connection between them and the High Commissioner's residence must rest on precision and shrewdness, and on caution and care.

Taha Hussein

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