Feast (I)

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Kawkab al-Sharq, 13 November 1933

Yes, it is a feast, whether the ministry wishes it or not; for the ministry may extend its authority over streets and roads, over institutes and buildings, but the ministry will never be able to extend its authority over souls and hearts, because souls are not won by police, and hearts are not attained by the strength of soldiers; souls are won by love, and hearts are attained by contentment, by pure affection, and by a trust that no fear stirs and no hope excites. And the ministry knows full well, knows better than we do, its own share of the love souls hold for it, of the contentment hearts feel toward it, of the nation's trust in it, and the people's reassurance in it.

Yes, this day is a feast, this day whose lovely sun has risen over lovely souls lit by hope, despite the darkness of despair surrounding them, and quickened by faith, despite the doubts circling around it.

A feast which, even if the people cannot openly welcome as feasts are welcomed, rejoicing in it as free and noble people, grieving over it as free and noble people, has still been welcomed by the people's hearts as it ought to be welcomed; welcomed with gladness, because it reminds them of Egypt's awakening, after which there is no more sleep, of Egypt's dignity, after which there is no more humiliation, of Egypt's freedom, whose love can never be erased from souls; and welcomed with sorrow, because it reminds them of Egypt's sacrifices in the cause of that awakening which sleep can undo, in the cause of that dignity which humiliation will never touch, in the cause of that freedom which tyranny will never corrupt.

It reminds them of those noble souls who left the earth to raise the edifice of dignity among the people of the earth, and of that pure blood that watered the earth so that it might grow this fresh, unfading plant, this blossom that never withers — the plant of freedom and independence; it welcomed it rejoicing, because it warns them that misfortunes may descend upon them, and close in upon them, blocking their paths and cutting off their roads, yet they remain firm and strong through it all, overcoming misfortune and braving terror, and pressing through to what they seek; and it welcomed it with grief, because it

reminds them that some of Egypt's sons were too weak to bear the trust, and fell midway along the road, twisted by desires and self-interest before they reached the goal, before they realized the hope, and turned instead to war against their own nation, scheming against it, and making it a means to fulfill their own designs and ambitions.

Yes, this day is a feast, welcomed by the hearts of all Egyptians as precious, fruitful feasts are welcomed — with contentment and with anger, with joy and with grief, with this remembrance that revives hope, renews longing, strengthens expectation, admonishes whoever needs admonishing, and stirs the lesson in the hearts of those who need to take heed.

This happy day's feast has delivered its message to Egyptians, however the ministry may try to gag its mouth and bind its tongue; for even if the ministry can gag people's mouths and bind people's tongues, it will never be able to gag the mouths of events, or bind the tongues of the days.

Here are the police, coming and going, taking this one and sending that one, casting this one into the darkness of prison, and returning that one to his family unharmed. Here are the professors and teachers, who have submitted to the ministry's order, and so gathered themselves in full at the schools and institutes, whether they had no choice but to go to the institutes and schools, or were free to do as they wished on this day.

These professors and teachers submitted to the ministry's order days ago; they went to their schools and institutes early, before the hour of instruction, and these students and pupils submitted to the ministry's order, and so attended their schools, and listened to their lessons, and answered whatever questions were put to them, and these people feared the ministry's severity, and so went about their business, declaring no joy, because the ministry punishes the declaration of joy, and declaring no grief, because the ministry punishes the declaration of grief, and declaring no hope, because the ministry despises the declaration of hope, and showing no despair, because the ministry despises the display of despair.

But we assure the ministry, and speak the truth in doing so, and the ministry assures itself, and speaks the truth in doing so too, and everything assures the ministry, and assures everyone else, that these displays of severity and force, these varieties of coercion and violence, have not touched people's souls in the least; for these professors and

teachers submit to the ministry's order, but still hold the feast dear; and these students and pupils submit to the ministry's severity, but still hold the feast dear; and these people avoid the ministry's violence, but still hold the feast dear.

And had the ministry been able to reach into hearts, it would have been alarmed by what it found there; and had the ministry been able to reach the depths of consciences and souls, it would have been horrified by what it saw; but the ministry is content and humble, satisfied with little, satisfied that material force suffices it, content to loose its severity upon bodies, unconcerned afterward with whether hearts are pleased or angered, whether souls feel safe or afraid. And the ministry, content and humble, dislikes to question history, dislikes to look into the consequences of things, cannot measure Egypt against other countries, nor measure the Egyptian people against other peoples, nor consider that the banks of the Nile are no exception among the lands of the earth, that the sons of the Nile are no exception among people, that whatever triumph of freedom has occurred elsewhere must occur in Egypt too, that whatever triumph of peoples winning their dignity and independence has occurred elsewhere must occur in Egypt too, that the triumph of violence is bounded in time however long it may seem to stretch, and limited in scope however great it may appear, and that justice exists beyond doubt, because God willed it to exist, and when God wills a thing, nothing can turn it back.

The ministry, content and humble, cares nothing for any of this, thinks nothing of any of this, and is no exception among the ministries of its kind, which have imposed on peoples what those peoples did not want, and reaped no benefit from it, and gained nothing at all from it.

Those who wish to feel pity, because they love pity, and to feel mercy, because they favor mercy, are well placed to pity the ministry and show it mercy, for it has done no harm to people through this violence it has practiced and gone to excess in, except the harm it has done to itself; it has furnished, against itself, the strongest evidence, the clearest proofs, the most brilliant arguments, and it has demonstrated to the dull-witted, before demonstrating it to the sharp-witted, that it walks one path while the nation walks another, that it wants one thing while the nation wants another, and that whatever satisfaction it has won from the English by its conduct, it has won an equal measure of the Egyptians' anger by that same conduct.

Those who feel pity, because they love pity, and mercy, because they favor mercy, are well placed to pity the ministry and show it mercy, for it truly deserves pity and mercy. What do you make of a ministry that makes war on this very day, when, had it not been for this day, its members would never have become ministers, nor would its members have enjoyed the power and authority they now enjoy? What do you make of a minister descended from the revolution who joins in declaring war on the day of the revolution? What do you make of people brought to life by the national struggle, which Egyptians commemorate today, who now set themselves against that very national struggle, wishing it forgotten, wishing the strugglers to return to what they were before God stirred in them the love of struggle? What do you make of people who ought to have competed in commemorating this day, and been first to honor and glorify it, so as to prove to the nation that they are no less devoted to Egypt, no less proud of Egypt, no less jealous of Egypt's dignity, no less committed to Egypt's independence, than their rivals — and instead they call night and day, earth and sky, to witness that they feel no such devotion, and cannot bear to see Egypt commemorate the day of struggle, or recall its record of struggle, or call its sons to press on in struggle?

These gentlemen truly deserve pity, truly deserve mercy, for they pass sentence on themselves with their own hands, and declare to people, in words admitting no doubt, no ambiguity, no ground for confusion, that the road has grown too long for them, so they halt; that the burdens have grown too heavy for them, so they cast them off; that the struggle has grown too hard for them, so they choose comfort and seek rest, and force other people to be like them, content and humble.

Let these gentlemen enjoy their humility, for as they wish, for Egypt does not accept it; let these gentlemen enjoy their contentment, for as they wish, for Egypt does not love it; let these gentlemen rest, for Egypt does not wish to rest; let these gentlemen avoid the length of the road and the hardships and punishment along it, for Egypt does not hate the length of the road, and does not fear hardship or punishment.

Let the minister of endowments look at his old friends, and at his new friends. Let the minister of endowments look at those old friends of his, who remember the national struggle and make their way to Saad's tomb, to renew for him and for Egypt the pledge to continue the struggle, and let him look at these new friends of his, who watch the police and the army, spread their spies and informers, and spare no effort, possible or impossible, to muffle the voice of struggle, to hide the nation's love of

struggle, and to let this lamp go dark, this lamp lit on a day just like this one, fifteen years ago.

Let the minister of endowments look at those old friends of his around Saad's tomb, and at these new friends of his in the office of the prime minister; let him look at himself, standing between the one group and the other, to see and understand how he chose, and what he chose, and where he wished himself to be!

Let the minister of endowments recall, if he has read it, or read, if he has not yet read it, a poem by a cautious French poet, in which he asks himself this question:

"What have you done — tell me, what have you done — with the days of your youth?"