

Contentment ...

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We were gluttonous, all but ruined by our gluttony, and we were voracious, all but destroyed by our voracity, and our political, intellectual, and economic life lay exposed to nearly countless dangers, whose source was our headlong love of the ideal, and our pursuit of it without limit. So we would not settle in politics for anything less than full independence and complete democratic life. Nor would we settle in intellectual advancement for anything less than reaching what Europeans had reached in the superiority of literature and art, of science and philosophy. Nor would we settle in economic advancement for anything less than an independence that would secure for us a distinct standing in economic affairs of every kind, a standing that does not dissolve into the foreigner's, but stands firm against him and resists him, should the interest call for resistance.

We were gluttonous, all but ruined by our gluttony, and we were voracious, all but destroyed by our voracity, and contentment was the least of the virtues adorning those souls of ours, so covetous, so ambitious, that knew neither calm nor settledness, nor satisfaction with little.

We were held up as a proverb among Easterners for covetousness and ambition; more than that, we were the source of contagion for Easterners in covetousness and ambition, and many peoples of the East had scarcely to come into contact with us, near or far, before they caught what had struck us of gluttony, and were overtaken by what had overtaken us of voracity, and became, like us, a thorn in the throats of colonizers, an ache in the bellies of Europeans.

And from our excess in gluttony and voracity, and from the East's excess in following our influence and taking us as a model, it came about that we, and the peoples of the East along with us, became a source of vexation to these European statesmen, who would have loved nothing better than to be rid of us and our Eastern brothers, so that they might go on exploiting us and exploiting them without encountering resistance or refusal, and might turn freely to whatever concerned them in their purely European affairs. But they would look, and there was Egypt demanding

independence and pressing its demand, and there was the East striving toward freedom and pressing its striving, and there they were, compelled to resist here and resist there, and to pursue in this resistance the paths of harshness at times and the paths of courtesy at other times.

And we would watch, and the peoples of the East would watch, this resistance of theirs, at once harsh and gentle, and watching it only made us more excessive in covetousness, more immoderate in ambition, bolder in demanding our right, and more insistent on attaining it whole and undiminished.

Such we were. But God provided us with someone to teach us contentment and its merits, and to turn us back from gluttony and its faults; so we grew humble, little by little, until we arrived, in contentment, at a portion not to be scorned, and reached, in moderation, a reasonable standing, one that pleases and reassures our colonial masters.

We used to enjoy a great share of constitutional liberty: direct general elections, and a broad parliamentary power to oversee the ministries and direct the affairs of the crown; and we were turned back from this to a narrow, restricted franchise, and to a limited oversight of the ministries, and we used to live a life filled with hope of resolving our dispute with the English, and of achieving the independence we aspired to, and we used to pursue this steadily, meeting with continual success in it; so God provided us with someone to teach us how to be patient, how to go slowly, and how to wait.

And here we are, patient for three years now, and waiting for three years now. And it has appeared that the resigned ministry succeeded in the patience, the slowness, and the waiting it took upon itself, and that another ministry was needed to take Egypt one further step; for patience is good, but despair is better than patience, and slowness is good, but abandonment is better than slowness, and waiting is good, but forgetting is better than waiting.

And so the prime minister was able to speak to the correspondent of the Deba, saying calmly and reassuringly that he places politics in second rank, and this is a kind of economy in expression; for it appears that the prime minister does not wish to place politics in any rank at all, but wishes to neglect it entirely, and turn away from it entirely, and spend his days arranging for us a life as placid as his placidity, as humble as his humility, as calm as his calm, content with little, just as he is content with

little.

And so it would be well for people to follow the example of their ministers: they used to wait when Sidqi Pasha waited, and so they must abandon hope, because Abdel Fattah Yehia Pasha prefers abandonment. Talk of negotiation, then, is idle chatter on which time should not be wasted, and talk of independence is a vanity on which effort should not be spent, and talk of freedom is a luxury that a people unable to fend off hunger should not concern itself with. And who knows? Perhaps the entire Egyptian nation was grievously mistaken when it sought independence, and gave itself over to hope, and sacrificed lives and wealth, and bore what it bore of upheaval and trial, and met what it met of catastrophe and misfortune. Perhaps the entire Egyptian nation was mistaken, and remains mistaken, in having thought of independence and in still thinking of it; for nations err and are right in turn!

And since Sidqi Pasha, being infallible, has judged contentment and moderation right for it, and since Abdel Fattah Yehia Pasha, being infallible, has judged asceticism, acceptance, and forgetting right for it, then the whole Egyptian nation must be mistaken, and all rightness must lie with these two great chiefs.

Let the English, then, take their ease over the Egyptians' contentment and their turn toward asceticism, just as the People's Party took its ease over the return of the dismissed members to the fold after they had been cast out of it. And let the English trust that Egyptians will be content, and will guard their contentment most jealously, whether they wish it or not, for so long as the ministry remains content to place politics in second rank, or in no rank at all, Egyptians must be content too, and must follow the example of their ministers. If this pleases them, well and good; and if it does not please them, Egypt has police and soldiers who know how to bind hands and feet, how to tie tongues and stop mouths, and how to bring people back to the obedience and submission that befits them.

We used not to be content with ease and prosperity, but craved more of them and immersion in them, so Sidqi Pasha taught us to toy with the crisis and let it toy with us, to feel its sting and deny its existence. And now here is Abdel Fattah Yehia Pasha teaching us courage and contentment together, taking us to feel the crisis's sting and acknowledge it, and to accept it and give up hope of its passing, because his ministry cannot produce miracles! And so we must labor and strive, and wear

ourselves out in labor and striving, to pay the taxes and settle the debt as the creditors wish, whether or not anything is left to us to live on afterward; for how sweet is the pain of hunger! How lovely to accept it and bear it with patience!

We used to want education to spread among us broad, deep, sound, uplifting to minds, strengthening to morals, guaranteeing the dignity of scholars and students alike; so Sidqi Pasha taught us that learning is a means, not an end, and that scholars and students are means, not ends, and that they are therefore instruments, no more and no less, instruments in the hand of the state, which shapes them as it pleases and directs them as it wishes.

And Abdel Fattah Yehia Pasha came forward and set about teaching us that instruments ought not to think, nor to want, nor to resist, but ought only to submit and obey; so that when university men were told: accept what the law refuses, they were bound to accept it, and when the men of compulsory education were told: give up some of your freedom, your dignity, and your rights guaranteed by the constitution, they were bound to do so! This is because we all need to live, and the sensible man is the one who attends to necessity before refinement, and the sensible man is the one who submits to circumstance, and the sensible man is the one who prefers mere living above anything else.

Demanding independence distracts us from living and busies us with the ideal; demanding justice in the management of economic affairs distracts us from living and busies us with the ideal; demanding dignity for scholars and students distracts them from living and busies them with the ideal.

And I know of no greater folly than these people who busy themselves with lofty ideals and expose themselves to hunger.

The prime minister is gentle with us, tender toward us; he wishes to cure us of the fault of gluttony and voracity, and to teach us contentment and moderation; he wishes us to leave lofty ideals to poets and the pampered, and to devote ourselves to what people like us ought to devote ourselves to — the pursuit of livelihood.

Do you suppose we will profit from these exalted, precious lessons the prime minister delivers to us? No; for we did not profit from exalted, precious lessons delivered to us by others before the prime minister, and because — whether regrettably or happily — we prefer lofty ideals to

mere living, and rush upon lofty ideals as moths rush upon flame, not minding that we burn in them, even if others prefer safety and peace of mind.

How fitting it would be for the prime minister to be satisfied with what others before him, who likewise placed politics in second rank or in no rank at all, were satisfied with — and to place politics in first rank instead; and if he cannot do that, let him resign; for the nation neither wants, nor can accept, anything other than politics as the mainstay of its life, until God settles the matter between us and the English!