Tomorrow

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Tomorrow all the harm besetting Egyptians will be lifted, all the evil besetting Egyptians will be removed, and good will spread its ample shade over the Nile valley; every withered thing will turn green, and freshness will return to everything faded.

Tomorrow — not the day after, tomorrow, before noon — a smile Egypt and the Egyptians have long sought and never found will dawn across all of Egypt, before all Egyptians; hope will spread through every soul a light strong enough to erase all darkness, and expectation will breathe into every heart a life strong enough to erase all despair and overcome every hardship. The peasants will go out to their fields laughing and rejoicing, singing the sweetness of life and the beauty of hope and the delight of a gentle existence in a country whose people knew nothing but comfort before the fallen dictatorship swept over them and rained misfortune upon them without end.

Tomorrow — not the day after, tomorrow — Egyptians will renew their pact with prosperity and plenty, with ease and wealth, and Egyptians will wake from this long, heavy sleep to find themselves breathing calmly, filling their chests with clean, open air undisturbed by anxiety over paying taxes or settling debts, untroubled by fear of having their crops seized, their land sold, or whips falling on bare bodies like flame, tearing at them, drawing blood God permitted no one to draw except by right.

Tomorrow — not the day after — Egypt will taste happiness, after a long companionship with misery; for tomorrow is the eighth day of this month, the day before the anniversary of the royal accession, and it is the day on which the new finance minister announced, at peace with himself, clear of eye, easy of mind, smiling, confident in his ability to deliver — confident that he exists, that he is a minister, that he holds the power to command and forbid, to give and withhold — that he will lift from Egyptians no small part of this heavy burden weighing on them, the burden of taxes.

Yes, tomorrow — not the day after, tomorrow — the new finance minister will present to Egyptians, on the occasion of the happy accession

day, a gift no minister before him has given them, and none after him will ever give; for God created him, indeed decreed his creation from the farthest ages and the oldest times, even before ages existed and times were known, so that he might, at this bitterest hour of hardship and want, in these harshest days of misery and privation, present to his nation a gift that lifts sorrow, dispels grief, and relieves the afflicted of their affliction. The days kept passing it down jealously, the centuries kept handing it on carefully, and fate kept preparing this great man for this great day, in this great month, of this great year, until time smiled, and there was Sidqi Pasha tumbling from the seat of power and from the finance ministry, and there was Abdel Fattah Yehia Pasha climbing to the seat of power, and there were the fates going forward obedient and submissive, believing and yielding, to His Excellency, as one should say, and to the honorable Hassan Sabry Bey, as Sidqi Pasha said, placing in his generous and open hand the reins of income and expenditure, of revenue and outlay, so that he might look upon the peasant and find him as happy as any man could be, when he had been as wretched as any man could be.

And I testify that the Egyptians' conduct is strange indeed, for they did not throw festivities and beautiful nights, they did not indulge themselves, they showed neither delight nor pleasure, they announced neither elation nor rejoicing, at this great promise from this great man on this great day — a day on which hardship vanishes as though it never existed, and ease arrives as though it had never left the land, never departed its people since time began and day and night began to alternate over them.

These Egyptians behave strangely: the finance minister promises them relief from the crisis, removal of hardship, a lightening of taxes, and sets a specific day to keep his promise, a day that cannot come early and cannot come late, and yet after all that they neither rejoice nor make merry, as though they did not believe it. Do you see how this democracy has corrupted people's natures and temperaments? How it has planted doubt in their hearts about ministers' promises, and apprehension that ministers might fail to deliver on them? This democracy is an evil that ought to be done away with. And what evil is greater than one that overturns the value of things, that permits the subjects what was once forbidden them, and fills them with the boldness to hear ministers' promises and merely shrug their shoulders, shake their heads, and take no notice of these promises, as though they had come from no minister at all, or from a man answerable to no one?

Strange indeed is the conduct of these Egyptians: they deny the favor, disbelieve the blessing, and fail to recognize merit where it is due, or to give thanks for kindness to the one who does them kindness. The simplest rule of obedience, the plainest principle of loyalty, the most basic duty of honoring ministers, would have required this Egyptian people, when this happy promise fell to them, to receive it joyfully, merrily, delighted and elated, as a thirsty man receives the first rain after long drought, when thirst had all but destroyed him and dryness had all but consumed him.

Yes, and it was this Egyptian people's duty to rush to their savior from every quarter, to hasten to him from every side, to raise up to him pure thanks for this promise that revived their souls, delighted their eyes, and restored to life its charm and beauty. But this ungrateful people did not rush, did not hasten, showed no contentment, declared no elation, raised no thanks, but waited in doubt and suspicion, as though listening to ordinary words from an ordinary man, not one fate had set aside to save Egypt from poverty and to turn back the ravages of hunger and deprivation.

And if peoples take this stance toward their ministers, a stance built on ingratitude and doubt, on apprehension and suspicion, then ministers have every right to lose heart, to weaken their resolve, to think ill of these peoples, and to withhold from them kindness and compassion, for they deserve neither kindness nor compassion. And it seems that this, or something like it, has already happened, or tried to happen. For people are saying that tomorrow's sun will rise and then set, that tomorrow's night will stretch long and then pass, without any easing of taxes, without the slightest reduction of their weight, large or small.

And they claim that the source of this default they fear and expect — which I myself neither fear nor expect — is that the Egyptian people did not appreciate the minister's promise as it deserved, and did not show enough delight and elation to encourage its fulfillment and spur its continuation. They say: however great the finance minister may be, he is a man like other men, who likes to speak and be heard, to promise and see people rejoice at his promises; and if he does not find in the people the encouragement and support he deserves, he grows weary of them and turns away from them entirely.

And they say: this coolness of the people toward these promises, their doubt in the possibility of fulfilling them, their receiving them with

this heavy indifference — all this displeased not only the finance minister, but the prime minister as well, for ministers stand together, sharing in good and ill, and each bears responsibility for what any one of them does. So when the prime minister saw that his colleague had promised, had gone far in promising, had proclaimed good news and gone further still in proclaiming it, and had met from the people nothing but coolness and indifference, he judged — being a careful man — that this coolness touched him too, that this indifference struck at him too, that the people's doubt in his colleague was doubt in him; and this troubled him, and weighed on him, and he reproached or blamed the finance minister for the kindness and compassion he had shown people who deserved neither kindness nor compassion.

And had they deserved kindness and compassion, they would have shown some sign of it, and some of them would have slipped away from their parties to rally around the prime minister and the finance minister; but not one of them has slipped away yet, for these Wafdists gather as much as ever, and pronounce on the ministry judgments harsh to the point of excess.

And these Liberal Constitutionalists remain exactly where they were, not advancing one step toward the ministry, not offering the ministry so much as a smile; indeed, these People's Party men say, when alone with the ministers, "We are with you," and when they return to Sidqi Pasha, say, "We were only mocking," so that they remain torn between the leader and the deputy leader, whispering one thing and proclaiming another, waiting on the judgment of days and the turnings of fate. And if this is the state of the people, and not one of them has supported the ministry since it took office ten days ago, then what use is kindness toward them, compassion for them, or thinking of easing their taxes? No, they must be left as they are; the taxes must be paid this year exactly as they were paid last year and in the years before, not one penny less, and if the state needs more money, perhaps it should be increased. This is a people that deserves to be governed, its taxes managed, only as Sidqi Pasha governed it and managed its money.

And people say the matter did not stop with the finance minister, the prime minister, and their colleagues, but went further still, to a foreign man representing a foreign power on the Debt Commission; for you know the French are a people who love justice and hate oppression, who love gratitude and hate ingratitude, so that when the Egyptian people showed the coolness, indifference, and doubt they showed toward these promises

the finance minister made and swore he would keep, France's representative on the Debt Commission grew troubled by this ingratitude, and took the side of the Egyptian ministry against the Egyptian people, and went to the prime minister and the finance minister to speak with them about what had spread and circulated and filled every ear concerning the tax relief promised for the morning of Sunday the eighth of this month.

And the prime minister and the finance minister thought, as people say, that France's representative was concerned for the Debt on account of this tax relief, so he was assured, as people also say, that the Debt would suffer no harm from this promised relief, and the prime minister and the foreign minister thought that France's representative on the Debt Commission wished, very discreetly, to meddle in something that did not concern him, nor concern France, in matters of our own finances that, by right of independence, ought to be ours alone to decide; so the prime minister and the foreign minister hinted to France's representative, very discreetly, that foreigners would do well to mind their own interests, and their interests alone.

And people say — and how much people say! — that France's representative understood this discreet hint, and realized that his effort had been misunderstood, so he hinted, very discreetly, that he had not meant to defend the Debt, nor to concern himself with what did not concern him, but had only meant to express his sense of this ingratitude the Egyptians showed no hesitation in displaying toward the kindness the finance minister was offering them. And people say — and how much they say! — that the matter was settled between the two states, that no disagreement or hint of disagreement arose, and that all was perfect harmony.

Then people take these stories as an excuse for whatever delay might come in fulfilling the promise, and the mischievous among them quote this old line:

Tomorrow, they claim, or if not tomorrow, then the day after.

Among those talking was a man sitting with his head bowed, listening but saying nothing, and when the group had finished their talk to this point, he raised his head calmly and said, in a voice full of mockery at what had been said around him: But you are leaving out the one thing beyond doubt or question, which is that the finance secretaries will travel from Cairo to meet the minister on this appointed day, and will travel at

the state's expense, of course, and will stay at the state's expense, of course, for a day or two, and will return at the state's expense, of course, to Cairo, and all this will cost money — however little — that would equal some of the tax that ought to be lifted from some of the peasants. Would it not have been easier, more economical, and better suited to what the ministry itself wants, for the finance secretaries to stay in Cairo, and for the minister to come to them? They all said: yes — and then burst into loud laughter.