

The Ostrich

Al-Gumhuriya, 6 December 1956

An old Arab proverb says: the ostrich went seeking two horns, and came back without even her own ears.

The ostrich's own foolishness is well known, in East and West alike — Westerners themselves depict her own foolishness in the way she buries her own head, whenever she senses danger drawing near, and the hunter closing in upon her. They cite her as an example for anyone who sees evil closing in upon him, yet fails to take proper precaution against it, or genuine care to avoid it — for anyone who recklessly plunges into ventures, giving no real thought to their own consequences, no real weight to their own repercussions.

I know of no one better compared to the ostrich, in her own genuinely foolish folly, than these British and French statesmen, when they dared commit exactly the sin they did commit — enticed into it by their own unbridled passions, their own overpowering desires, driven toward it by exactly this same foolishness, one that granted them neither real forethought, nor real judgment, but simply led their own minds astray, clouded their own insight, and entangled them in a genuinely great evil — an evil that would have been among the easiest things imaginable to avoid, had they acted from their own reason, rather than from their own hearts, hearts already filled with hatred, rancour, and malice. Their own heads carried them away, then, driving them into depths whose own beginning they knew, but whose own end they never knew at all.

They grew genuinely impatient with the Arab world's own aspiration to free itself from their own authority — an aspiration in which their own interests are considerable, their own benefits genuinely countless, interests belonging not to them alone, but to a great many nations, all holding a genuine right to life, and to prosperity, and a genuine right to seek out the means toward life, and prosperity — a right no less genuine than the British and French own right to exactly the same.

I shall not even mention the Arabs' own right to live free in their own countries, and enjoy the fruits of their own land, before anyone else ever enjoys them — since this is exactly the kind of thing British and French statesmen simply do not believe in, believing, before all else, that the

West alone holds any genuine right to that same contented life, filled with prosperity and abundance. I shall not mention the Arabs' own right to freedom, dignity, independence, and enjoyment of their own land's own fruits, before anyone else enjoys them — I shall mention, instead, the right of other nations, in East and West, in the old world and the new, genuinely needing one another, unable to live, or to prosper, except through the exchange of mutual benefit, the sharing of mutual interest, and continuous cooperation in developing civilization, and sharing in its own fruits, and its own benefits.

The West genuinely needs connection with the Far East, and this same Far East genuinely needs connection with the West, and the Near East is exactly the path connecting them — any disturbance within it, any corruption upon its own soil, severs this same connection, rendering it impossible, or very nearly impossible. But the British and French remained genuinely blind to all of this — led astray by whatever hatred filled their own hearts, whatever resentment seized their own souls, whatever bitterness gripped their own conscience — seeing, as they say in their own countries, no further than their own noses. And so they dared commit exactly the folly they did commit, filling the Near East with horror, and filling the entire world with fear, terror, and dread, over these same momentous events.

They attacked Egypt, and the countries of the entire Arab world fell into every variety of turmoil; trade was severed between them and the Near and Far East alike; Western Europe's own petroleum resources ran dry; her own industry, commerce, and agriculture fell into genuine disarray as a result; her own entire civilization found itself exposed to genuinely grave danger; and the whole world rose up, within the United Nations body, to repel this same evil from itself, defending its own civilization against this same aggression — an aggression aimed not at Egypt alone, but at the entire world, and at civilization itself, since aggression against this particular part of the earth never harms that part alone, but harms the affairs of every people at once.

The world's own support for Egypt, then, was never mere favouritism toward her — nor was it a triumph solely for the higher ideals of right and justice — it was, rather, a genuine precaution the world itself took, against a lasting danger on the very verge of erasing civilization altogether.

The British and French had, before all of this, spoken a great deal about Egypt's own geographic position, about the effect of this same position on the life of the civilized world, and about the entire world's own need for security, peace, and tranquility to settle in the eastern Mediterranean. But the ostrich's own foolishness, which we have already noted above, led British and French statesmen astray from exactly these self-evident truths — truths only fools could ever possibly stray from.

Among the most extraordinary things people read, and heard, was this very delirium the British Foreign Secretary delivered, on Monday evening, before the House of Commons, straining himself to deceive his own self, and deceive his own listeners and readers, across every corner of the earth. And what deception could possibly prove more accomplished, in depicting sheer obliviousness and folly, than the claim that this same aggression achieved exactly the aims the British and French sought when they undertook it? By this same aggression — so this same minister claimed, to himself and to Parliament alike — they had prevented a small war from turning into a great one. Yet search as you might for this same small war, you will never find it: Egypt never attacked Israel, nor did Israel ever attack Egypt — it was the British and French themselves who pushed their own pawn, Israel, into aggression, assisting her in it with troops and equipment. Nothing proves this more clearly than the fact that, when they came forward to prevent this same small war from turning into a great one, they only fanned its own flames further, joining Israel, and joining themselves, in that same aggression — attacking Egypt herself, when it was their own genuine duty, instead, to come to her aid. And they wanted, too — so this same minister claimed — to free the Canal, and make it available for the use of everyone alike.

Yet they never freed it at all — they blocked it, instead, against themselves, and against everyone else alike, suspending its own use for a time that may prove short, or may prove long. And they claimed, too, that they wanted petroleum to keep flowing to their own countries, and to the whole of Europe — yet cut it off, instead, from themselves, and from Europe, plunging her into exactly the same crisis they plunged themselves into, a crisis neither they themselves, nor Europe, ever genuinely needed.

And they had exposed, too — so this same minister claimed — whatever scheming Soviet Russia had been plotting against them, and against others, in this same Near East. Yet they exposed nothing whatsoever, since Soviet Russia had never been plotting against anyone

in this same East at all.

Nor would this same East itself ever have simply let her scheme freely, had she genuinely wanted to, or even considered it. Nor did they ever sever the connection between the Near East and Soviet Russia — nor will they ever be able to sever it — since the Near East bases this same connection on genuine, open independence, entirely free of favouritism, and this same connection will remain exactly as it stands, so long as the Near East remains genuinely committed, first, to open independence, and, second, to genuine, open neutrality between the two rival powers. All the British and French managed to achieve, rather, was receiving this same humiliating ultimatum from Soviet Russia — one that stripped the veil from their own hearts, and their own sight, and restrained them from proceeding any further in that same sinful venture of theirs.

They achieved, then, none of their own aims whatsoever — bringing down upon themselves, and upon other, innocent nations, a genuinely great evil instead. They may well talk, and talk at length; may well obscure, and obscure to excess; may well mislead, and mislead ever further — but they will never be able to deny the crisis they entangled themselves, and entangled Europe, within; nor deny the corruption, and disorder, that has struck their own economy; nor deny that Britain's own Prime Minister found himself compelled, after having stoked the very fire himself, to flee, and leave others to extinguish it; nor deny, in the end, that they resemble nothing so much as that same ostrich, who went seeking two horns, and came back without even her own ears — the very ostrich who buries her own head, the moment she senses danger closing in around her, and the hunter drawing near; nor deny that they set out toward Egypt with genuine malice, wishing to strike her down, yet found themselves powerless against her, and returned from her empty-handed. And the truest thing ever said of them is the ancient Arab poet's own words:

*And I was such that, whenever I descended upon a people's land,
I departed in disgrace, having left shame behind.*