Injustice

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What I know, and what the prime minister and his fellow ministers know, and what his officials know, and what everyone knows with absolute certainty, is that Egypt has a constitutional order that states in plain terms admitting no ambiguity that the nation is the source of all powers.

This clause appeared in the constitution Sidqi Pasha abolished, and it appears in the constitution Sidqi Pasha himself brought into force, the very constitution the present ministry has risen to protect and preserve, enforcing its provisions with justice, as it claims, toward all people alike, discriminating against none. These powers, issuing from the nation under the wording of both these plain constitutions, are the power of deputies and senators when they legislate, the power of ministers and officials when they execute, and the power of judges when they rule. This means that deputies, senators, ministers, officials, and men of the prosecution and the bench were not thrust upon the nation, nor imposed on it by force, nor did they draw their authority from some foreign power remote from the nation, imposed upon it, pouring authority down upon it; rather, the nation itself appointed them, granting some of them the right and the power to legislate, others the right and power to execute, and a third group the right and power to settle disputes, setting aside for all of them, from its own funds, what enables them to discharge these duties in the best and fullest manner.

Whoever among them oversteps these bounds, or assists in overstepping them, whoever departs from this order the constitution has plainly defined, or assists in departing from it, is unjust and oppressive, is an aggressor against right, guilty of excess in squandering justice. This is something no one can doubt, that no one can dispute, and perhaps the source of the evil we are in is that many people are content with mere words, without reaching the meanings behind them, without properly grasping their own inviolable rights, which can be touched only by injustice and oppression, by transgression against order and constitution.

Had the members of the ministries and their officials believed in this clause and others like it in the constitution, with a belief carried not

merely on the tongue but settled in the heart, as the hearts of believers settle at the mention of God, they would have spared themselves much excess, and steered clear of many kinds of oppression.

Had Egyptians, for all their differences and the disparity of their ranks and social classes, embodied this clause and others like it in the constitution, so that their tongues spoke it out of belief and conviction, rather than merely repeating it outwardly the way a parrot repeats words it has memorized, they would never have allowed a minister to overstep against them, nor accepted from any official the burden of injustice he had no right to impose on them and they had no duty to bear. But people ordinarily content themselves with words, without reaching their meanings, and so fail to understand what rights are theirs, and fail to understand what duties are theirs. And I would like to understand, after all this beyond any doubt, how any official — however great, even if he be the prime minister — is permitted to say to a group of Egyptians — whoever they may be, even if they be among the poorest of Egypt's sons, closest to wretchedness, weakness, and destitution — that they are sons of dogs.

I would like to understand how any Egyptian official, under a civilized constitutional government, is permitted to let such words fall from his tongue, directing them at his fellow countrymen, whoever they may be, and where the constitutional text or the law, or even mere constitutional custom, can be found that permits an Egyptian official to call his fellow countrymen sons of dogs.

And I would like to understand, too, how any Egyptian official — whoever he may be, even if he be the prime minister — is permitted to charge a village headman with sucking the blood of Egyptians, and in what dictionary of constitutional law or administrative order this expression is to be found — the expression of sucking blood, the blood of the sons of a nation who are the source of all powers by the text of the constitution.

And I would like to understand how any Egyptian official — whoever he may be, even if he be the prime minister — is permitted to announce to a group of his fellow citizens — whoever they may be, even if they be the poorest and weakest among the people, closest to wretchedness and destitution — that he is charged with destroying their homes; and where this power exists that charges officials with destroying the people's homes; and where the constitutional or legal text is to be found that

authorizes officials to destroy the people's homes, and permits them to proclaim this openly to people without shame or embarrassment.

I would like to understand all this, or, at the very least, I would like the prime minister to assure people that none of this was said, that none of it happened, that none of it can be said or can happen. And I would like the prime minister's assurance of this to be plain and decisive, resting not on words alone but on both words and action; for Al-Siyasa reported this morning that a district officer said these things to a group of country people, in the presence of others who heard him. Did Al-Siyasa report the truth, or did it report something other than the truth? If the former, the prime minister's duty is clear, with no ambiguity, decisive, admitting no rebuttal: he must ask his colleague, the interior minister, how this came about, and instruct his colleague, the interior minister, to refer this officer to a disciplinary board. If the interior minister does so, so be it; and if he does not, the prime minister's duty is equally clear: he must choose between condoning the interior minister and his officials in insulting the people and charging headmen with sucking its blood and officials with destroying its homes — in which case the people will know that the present ministry openly admits it draws its authority from something other than the people, and that it has come to humiliate this people — or removing the interior minister from his ministry outright.

And there is another ugly injustice, one that touches not a single person but hundreds and thousands, not one village but vast numbers of Egyptians scattered across the length and breadth of Egypt. We would like the prime minister to attend to it, to establish the plain truth of the matter: if it proves true, let him blame the minister of traditions for it and charge him with correcting it and erasing its ill effects; and if it is not true, let him announce to people that it is a fabrication, invented from nothing. This is the injustice you can find detailed elsewhere in these pages of Kawkab al-Sharq, said to have been falling on the men of compulsory education for some time now.

Some deputies made remarks touching the men of compulsory education in some of the assembly's sessions at the start of summer, and the minister did not defend them — though it was his first duty to defend them, if they were wronged, or to dismiss them from their posts, if the deputy's description of them held any truth.

The teachers objected to the deputy's remarks and the minister's silence, and wrote to the ministry about it; this objection was counted a

sin requiring punishment, this self-defense was counted a fault requiring atonement. A certain writer defended these men, and they thanked him for it, and this gratitude was counted a wrong for which they had to answer, a crime from which they had to be cleansed; and then a strange kind of torment was poured upon them, one involving exile across the land: some who were in Cairo found themselves in the farthest reaches of Upper Egypt; some who were in Upper Egypt found themselves in the farthest oases; some who were in Edfu found themselves at the border; some who were headmasters found themselves ordinary teachers; some found several days' salary deducted from their pay.

Some who were secure found themselves under investigation, expecting harm and waiting for it to come with the dawn or with the darkness of night; some who wore the tarboush found themselves given the choice between the turban and dismissal from their post; some, while at their schools, found the headman visiting them, then the chief of the village guards visiting them, then some policeman visiting them, to determine whether they had changed their dress during teaching hours; and some, leaving their schools, found an inspector waiting for them, with police visible and hidden along the road, to determine whether they might return to the tarboush once they had left the school.

The men of compulsory education say that all this has happened, that some of it is still happening, and that something like it is still expected to happen this evening, tomorrow morning, or after a short or long while. We would like the prime minister to attend to this, to deny it plainly if it is not true, and to lift it plainly if it is true, punishing those who unleashed this harm upon people.

The prime minister surely knows that the ministry of education was not established to wrong teachers and burden them, to make them accept insult and endure injury, to strip them of their most basic rights and freedoms; it was created for something else, altogether different, just as the men of the administration were not sent into the provinces to tell people they are sons of dogs, to charge headmen with sucking the people's blood, and to announce to people that they have been charged with destroying homes.

All this is injustice the prime minister must lift at once, punishing those who committed it, or deny at once, proving to people that it is untrue. If he cannot manage either, his remaining in his post is meaningless, and his first duty is to resign.

Finally, both those who govern and those who are governed must become alert to the fact that the constitution's provisions were not set down to serve as ornament or decoration, but to serve as the foundation of Egyptian life and the basis of the relationship between the people and authority. The clearest of these provisions, the most deserving of understanding and respect, is precisely this one, which records that the nation is the source of all powers, and which establishes, in doing so, that the men of government are not the people's masters but its servants — and the first duty of a servant of the people is to be faithful, honest, and true.