Feast (II)

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Kawkab al-Sharq, 1 January 1934

1 Say that it was yesterday, and say that it still continues today; for the judicial family celebrated it, and it joined on to the first day of the new year, so that it was a feast in not one sense but two, or rather in many different senses almost beyond counting, and it was, like other feasts worthy of the name, filled with what fills souls with joy and delight, and with what stirs in hearts pain and sorrow. For where is the Egyptian who does not rejoice and delight at seeing the judicial family rejoicing and delighted, celebrating its golden jubilee, bidding farewell to half a century it spent striving, sincere and faithful, in bringing justice to life and securing for people the thing they most covet security in, in reviving Egypt through justice and raising its name among nations and exalting its word among peoples, and welcoming a new half century — or say, welcoming time itself — with hearts filled with faith in justice and zeal for protecting it, preserving it, and raising it above life's private aims and its maladies, which spoil people's affairs and disfigure their highest ideals, and would, were it not for justice, reduce them to a life unworthy of man? Where is the Egyptian who does not rejoice at seeing the judicial family rejoicing, bidding farewell to the fruitful days it has bid farewell to, and welcoming the happy days it welcomes? Indeed, where is the Egyptian who does not feel that the judicial family's rejoicing is the rejoicing of all Egypt, and a covenant for Egypt with time that it will press on, in earnest, along a straight and easy road toward progress and the completion of its natural share of independence? Every Egyptian shared yesterday in the judicial family's feast, every Egyptian was glad of this feast, every Egyptian felt yesterday what the judicial family felt of honor and dignity, and felt what the judicial family itself did not feel — a love for it, a pride in it, a sense of that sacred honor felt by the free man in a free country sheltered by a free judiciary.

2 But where is the Egyptian who did not, at the very same time yesterday, feel a stinging sorrow and a bitter pain at seeing politics intrude between the judicial family, splitting it into two factions, cleaving it into two halves, driving one group to the Opera and the Semiramis and another to the Heliopolis hotel?

3 Let the ministry's supporters say what they will, and let the ministers themselves say what they will; they will never be able to deny that politics committed, yesterday, a grave sin, and that the whole judicial family felt yesterday what all Egyptians felt of stinging sorrow and bitter pain at this division, which no cause called for and no necessity compelled, save those passions that toy with politicians' souls, loading upon them and upon other innocents an excess they ought never to have had to bear. The ministry could have spared itself this burden it had no strength to carry — the burden of division where union was called for. And it could have spared its nation this pain it had no need of — the pain of watching brothers share in the joy of a feast, yet unable to gather to display that joy together; hearts and souls united, bodies and voices sundered, because this worldly political power forbade bodies and voices from gathering and meeting. The ministry could have spared itself and spared the nation this division that occurred yesterday, which pained Egyptians and gave foreigners a picture of them that suits neither the truth nor reality; for Egyptians, and the men of the judiciary among them in particular, are united, not divided, and in harmony, not at odds, above all in their love of justice and their esteem for the judiciary.

4 The ministry could have done this, had it been able to govern itself, curb its leanings and passions, forget politics in matters politics ought never to enter, and remember the highest ideals in matters where nothing but the highest ideals ought to be remembered. And the chief justice alluded to this yesterday, in a phrase that, however gentle, was bitingly sharp, picturing the pain the judges and the men of the public prosecution felt yesterday at the lawyers being forced to forgo sharing with them in their material celebrations, even while sharing with them most fully in their spiritual ones. I do not know how this gentle, harsh phrase landed upon the ministry and its conduct, in the hearts and consciences of the ministers and the hearts and consciences of the ministry's supporters; but I do know how it landed in the hearts of Egyptians — as a judgment upon this conduct, which can be described as nothing less than a surge of unruly passions, over which calm, composed will held no authority.

5 All Egyptians were rejoicing yesterday with the judicial family, and all Egyptians were grieving yesterday with the judicial family. And the ministers, had you searched their hearts and read their souls, stood in a position resembling neutrality — neither rejoicing nor grieving, but merely performing one of these official duties, discharging one of those

obligations ministers must take up on days of celebration and feast, which they would not otherwise discharge.

6 And while the lawyers were gathered at Heliopolis, and their brothers gathered at the Semiramis, Egyptians were speaking among themselves, saying to one another: what did the ministry gain from this impulsive act and the division it led to? It wished to expel Makram from the lawyers' syndicate, and so it gathered around him the hearts of the lawyers, across all their factions, leanings, and opinions, and it gave Professor Fikri Abaza the occasion to deliver his eloquent address yesterday, in which he recorded that had the government and parliament wished to honor this man, and to record their esteem and admiration for him, they could not have achieved yesterday what they achieved by trying to expel him from the lawyers' syndicate. It wished to display strength and might, and to show that it is capable of commanding and compelling obedience to its commands, and it achieved nothing more than to gather more than thirteen hundred lawyers who came from every corner of Egypt to display — and they did indeed display — their solidarity, their self-respect, and their sound grasp of the meanings of justice, fairness, advocacy, and the judiciary.

7 And what were the ministers thinking yesterday, when they knew that the number of lawyers gathered at Heliopolis had exceeded a thousand, all of them rejecting what the ministers had done, indignant at what the ministers had done, passing judgment upon it with a firm, just severity that admits no leniency or softness? What were the ministers thinking yesterday, when they knew that fifteen hundred educated Egyptians, representing without any doubt every corner of Egypt, had gathered to pass upon their conduct a judgment that admitted no mildness? They were thinking of nothing; they were only listening to Umm Kulthum's singing and the musicians' playing, and watching the dancing along with the other spectators. As for those who properly weighed the Heliopolis gathering, understood its significance, grasped its consequences, and took it as a measure for judging the ministry's conduct — these were the Egyptians the ministry never thought of, for it thought only of itself, and never cared for them, for it cared only for itself.

8 Yesterday was a feast, and like other feasts it was filled with weighty sermons and useful lessons, but it was not, for all that, without its humor. God, exalted and glorified, is gentle with people and compassionate toward them; He tries them with sorrow and tests them

with pain, but He sends them, too, something to bring consolation to their souls, and to lift from them some part of the care they bear. For the lawyers were gathered yesterday over tea and over speeches — and what speeches! All of them earnest, firm, severe, as though they were justice itself. And the ministry, at the same time, was holding for the men of the judiciary a soirée that was itself harmless and carried no slight to the judges. But in any case, it was a soirée that had no love for tradition, no sympathy with it, no confidence in it. For there is, they say, no harm in singing, and no harm, as people's talk has it, in music. But singing and music during Ramadan do not suit tradition; it is only the recitation of the noble Quran that suits tradition — were the minister of tradition to think it through, or rather were the ministry of tradition to think it through. As for the dancing, and what dancing it was! There are two views on it: the moderates see no harm in it, provided it is not the month of fasting, while the scrupulous see every harm in it, in the month of fasting as in the months of feasting. As for tradition, it forbids it at the theater and permits it at the Semiramis, in the presence of the great men of state and its notables. As for the sheikh of al-Azhar, the men of religion, and Abd al-Hamid Effendi Said, they say nothing for now, being too occupied with obeying God to criticize other people.

9 May the whole judicial family rejoice in yesterday's feast, and may all its days be feasts! May Egyptians rejoice in the judiciary and the judiciary's feasts, and may the government be content with the victory it achieved yesterday — a victory that can be described as nothing less than a faithful picture of overwhelming strength and exquisite taste!