

The Spider's Web

Mosamarat al-Gaib, 14 March 1948.

1 It is this that shades us now, yet wards off from us no evil, and turns aside from us no calamity, because it is frayed, because it has no strength to repel, or turn back, or resist, and all it can do is slow our movement, and come between us and any steady, sustained activity. It has all the outward forms of governmental authority: ministers who gather every week, and may gather more than once a week; ministers who go to Parliament and there listen and speak; ministries and departments that open their doors with the morning and close them as the day advances; officials who go out to their offices in the morning and return to their homes in the evening, with mocking smiles on the faces of one group of them, unconcerned with offices or homes, and bewildered smiles on the faces of another group, who cannot tell whether those smiles belong to mockery or to gloom and sorrow, and a scowling pallor on the faces of a third group, resembling nothing so much as the pallor of those who advance upon disasters, or upon whom disasters advance, with no power to repel them and no way to escape them. And to these, and to these, and to those, there is disbursed at the end of every month a wage, whether considerable or paltry, that scarcely settles in their pockets, and that in any case never reaches their homes.

2 So everything indicates that Egypt has an organized political authority, just as other civilized countries have an organized political authority. And everything indicates that this organized political authority in Egypt is meant to shield its people from calamities and disasters, to protect its dignity from foreign aggression, and to protect its people's lives, property, and rights from domestic aggression. But look at what the newspapers set before you morning and evening, every day, and you will see, whether you are pleased by it or not, that this organized political authority in Egypt wards off neither from the country nor from its people, nor can it ward off from the country or from its people, any evil that descends from the sky, or arises for it from the earth, or comes to it from the foreigner abroad, or comes to it from the resident citizen.

3 Crimes are committed in broad daylight and in the darkness of night, and the newspapers publish their appalling reports, and no one is alarmed by them, because people have grown so accustomed to alarm that they have come to find peace in it, and live within it just as other

people find peace in security and live within that. And bombs are scattered wherever their owners wish to scatter them. People find them in the clear light of day, and people find them in the murk of night, and the police are summoned and look upon them despondently, and move them sluggishly, and the specialists among the technicians determine that they are of this kind or that — unless one explodes before the police reach it, taking lives, spilling blood, and spreading wounds, which scarcely manage to spread fear or terror, because people have grown accustomed to it and resigned themselves to it, so that they have come to feel neither fear nor terror. And the owners of these bombs sometimes toy with them, or press on in earnest, playing games with the police, teasing the government, and writing on their bombs to ask whether the fifteenth of this month will be a holiday or not.

4 And the ministers gather every week, and go to Parliament, and the officials go out to their offices and return to their homes, and the wages are disbursed at the end of the month to ministers and officials, and the allowances are disbursed at the end of the month to senators and deputies, and the sons of the people toil and labor, and hunger and fall ill, and struggle and strive, to bring forth for the state these funds from which the wages and allowances are paid.

5 And this epidemic or that may well arrive from whence no one knows, indeed from whence not even the ministry assigned to repel the epidemic, should it arrive, and to stamp it out, should it reach the people of the nation, knows. This epidemic may arrive from whence the Ministry of Health does not know, finding none to turn it back and none to block it, so it descends upon Egypt in welcome and in plenty, and roams freely through the souls of the Egyptians, unopposed and unhindered, then departs from whence it came, having filled its hands with death, orphanhood, bereavement, widowhood for wives, widowerhood for husbands, poverty, and hunger!

6 And the ministers gather every week, and go to Parliament, and the officials go out and return, and the wages are disbursed at the end of the month to ministers and officials, and the allowances are disbursed at the end of the month to senators and deputies, and the sons of the people draw out these wages and allowances from the blood of their hearts and the sweat of their brows.

7 And it may occur to the Governor-General of the Sudan to toy with Egypt and the Egyptians, and to take the first steps, or the last — I do not

know which — toward adding to the British Empire a new, or an old, colony called the Sudan. And the Administrative Secretary may well take it upon himself to say in the Advisory Council that the Governor-General of the Sudan appoints and dismisses the members of the Executive Council, just as the King in Egypt appoints and dismisses ministers, and all of this is published in the newspapers, and read by the ministers, senators, deputies, and all other citizens, and it provokes in them no anger, no resentment, because they have grown so accustomed to anger and resentment that they no longer feel anger, and resentment no longer reaches their hearts at all.

8 And it may occur to the English to seek the Egyptian government's agreement to whatever they are scheming against Egypt in the Sudan, and if the government, wary of giving this agreement, does not accede to all that the English want, some of those who speak in the name of the British Foreign Office will not hesitate to say that the British government has already tolerated more in Egypt than it ought to tolerate, and that Egypt has gone to excess in false complaint, and has drowned itself in airs and pretension. And this too is published in the newspapers, and provokes anger in no one, because the Egyptians have grown so accustomed to anger that they no longer know how to feel it!

9 What matters is that the outward forms of organized political authority stand in Egypt just as they stand in every civilized country, but in Egypt they are forms behind which there is nothing, resembling nothing so much as a spider's web, which repels no evil and turns aside no calamity, but only slows movement, spoils activity, and weighs people down with what they dislike, bringing them nothing of what they love ... and the old poet spoke truly when he said to his adversary that line which has never suited anyone as well as it suits the Egyptians now:

*The spider has spun its web over you,
and the revealed Book has already decreed your undoing.*

11 And God Almighty spoke truly when He said: "and indeed the frailest of houses is the spider's house" — but do you know why the organized political authority in Egypt should resemble a spider's web? For a reason exceedingly simple: that the representation of its representatives and senators, the ministry of its ministers, and the administration of its directors have none of them been built upon a foundation of the people's love, will, and trust; and when the affairs of government are built on anything other than the people's love, will, and

trust, they cannot help but resemble a spider's web.