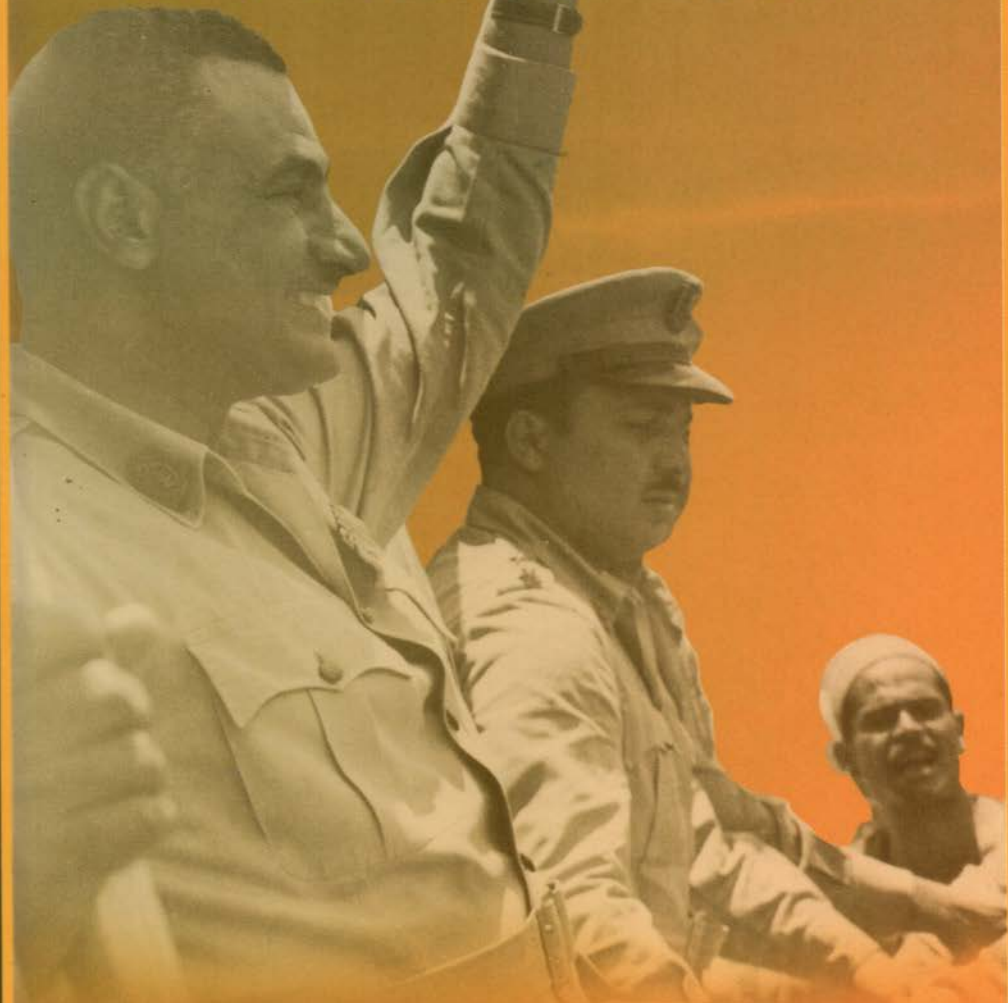


بكرة المشمشي
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In the Time of the Mishmish



A PAINTING IN TWENTY PARTS
ALIJAH GORDON

IN THE TIME OF THE MISHMISH

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by

ALIJAH GORDON

2002

a man named Goha deeded his house to another man on condition that he be allowed to examine a certain nail in one of its walls whenever he so desired. The very next day he chose to examine his nail at breakfast time, and of course he was invited to breakfast. The next time he came to examine his nail was lunch time and so he had to be invited to lunch. Soon he began to examine it at all hours of the day and night, even when the new owner was not at home and his wife was all alone. Finally, after the man had been carried away to the insane asylum, Goha married his wife, reoccupied the house, and declared himself the owner of all that it contained.

On behalf of the Egyptian people, I should like to say to the British Government: Move out of our house and we'll be your friends; but please don't leave any nails behind or we'll be your enemies forever.

General Mohammed Neguib, *Egypt's
Destiny* (London: Gollancz, 1955) 255-6.

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THIS IS AN EGYPT I KNEW

this is an Egypt I knew, every sound heard, every nuance felt. It is not, as it might appear to the untouched sophisticate, a combination of 'historical fact and imagination'. The writing was never intended and is without plan, it is only a ridding of myself of what so consumed my consciousness as to make me unready, unable of new perceptions.

I put it down only to rest, and dedicate it many fold: to my Mother who allowed and gave of herself for all of this unstructured fulfilment; to the *Fellahin*, Egyptian peasants whose cotton tax, made government revenue, gave me a grant on which to study and perceive; to the individuals, and especially to 'Adel, who allowed me to trespass so close; to the Responsibles all; to Penang which provided the quiet that made me release what became pages, in particular to Cheelie and Shantha Sundram whose love dissipated my now deep blockage from fear; to Singapore: Coral and Gerald de Cruz, Gregory, Nazir Mallal, Uncle Ike, who gave me the encouragement and place to complete it; and finally to Egypt, which cast me out, Egypt which accepted and rejected, Egypt which accused. My guilt was true: I was by chance of birth a *farangee* and all the assimilation did not finally shed me of my skin — my otherness — which the bureaucracy could only have seen as 'white' and thought this colour perception told them

THIS IS AN EGYPT I KNEW

who I was: a *farangee* and involved; yet time and space cannot obliterate involvement, only this ejecting from myself may unravel this untenable in 1956 ravelment. I try thus to cleanse myself of my unpardonable guilt and do so dedicate in contrition, for the times are out of joint, and this is the wrong generation.

Penang
March 1958

1

OCTOBER 1954: THE JOURNEY

her journey to Egypt a selfless and self-full dream, made of a knowing and a non-knowing, formed of yesterday and today and filled with the possession of a vague rumbling tomorrow; purposeful and purposeless, conscious decision covering an unconscious compulsion; an accumulated act of all her life, an image conceived in gnawing loneliness, Egypt the embodiment of her self's projection; a nation like unto herself: understood, never to be understood, essence ignored, superficially aided, vehemently self-assertive for the presence of a trembling inadequacy known as the inner.

Yet hope is born in dark places, in the confusion of a mind, in the mud of a *fellah*¹ home. Hope mixes itself with dirty faces, seeps into the looking of trachoma-distorted eyes; persists in camps; grows madly in prisons; in the obscurity and mediocrity of an office clerk does it reside. Hope: man's condemnation and man's release.

And they mirrored one another, the hope of the two, the blonde out of the paleness of an endless Nordic fog and the warm brown out of the brilliance of a dry unmitigated Egyptian sun; a projection of self multiplied by twenty-two million beings, a worthy ally.



2

THE NILE

the Nile had since reached its peak, its silent message enveloped, protected within itself, a jugular vein reaching down and nourishing the body of the land. A Nile of washing bodies, of scrubbing clothes, of quenching thirst; a Nile of liberating fertile water that plays havoc with the land's sterility; the god in the world; the redemption of existence once a year; the host, the sustainer; the replenisher where the cupboards are bare; life continued, carried from one generation to the other until that body which can give it meaning ... endless carriers of the germ of being.

Mahmoud swims in it, see his healthy body; 'Aisha laughs from her deep-bosomed self as she rubs the clothes clean in the muddy water on the black rock; Muhammad watches its signs of swollen fullness, fingers his *gallabiyya*² and thinks of the new one he shall wear after this year's harvest of white soft-blown cotton; the children Amal and Ibrahim wash themselves at its silt-rich edges; bilharzia,³ a parasite unseen, travels upwards through their bare feet to lodge itself in the body and squelch their tomorrows before today is done.

The Nile of Atun's belief in one God, symbolized by the sun; the Nile of Muhammad 'Ali, wresting Egypt from Khalif's run; the Nile of 'Arabi, of brown skins

pushing up through the Circassian-Turkish command; the Nile of Nasser, of a screaming insistence to be.

The Nile of an unseemly stern, tenacious protest, still, yet forcefully moving; and as it is channelled through six million acres, it yields a malleability; the *fellah* bends his back to the sun, the *gamousa*⁴ stretches its plodding frame, the earth turns upside down, seed impregnates, sun warms, a plant grows green, cotton emerges, is picked, exported, and proceeds distributed: to the water in payment, to the seller of the seed, in fodder to the *gamousa*, to the government in tax, to the landlord for being born a landlord, and finally to the patient one who watches over the seasons of swell and retraction, of planting and reaping, the *fellah* — the Egyptian of her tomorrow's dream.

3

NASCENT FEAR: IKHWANI HANGED

i walked on the surface of the world, slid on the utter flatness, at the edge of east; an area for a dance, an expanse stealthfully entering and pushing out minds' more circumscribed range.

Boys romp, loosely housed in green and red stick-candy pyjamas, day's happy, uninhibited dress. Men float in *gallabiyyas*, a night-dress made grand, generous sleeves flapping as a swan's wings clapping the amenable air, grace not a woman's preserve. Black-cloaked *fellah* women wrapped from all penetrants, sun as alien as man's searching glance. Paris-designed chic of upper classes, Italian cut bob of the 'U's of Cairo.

A man sleeps on the pavement in front of Groppis, his foot turned upwards, the ragged sole of his foot mistaken for a treadworn shoe. Groppis which straddles the coming together of two of Cairo's more trafficked streets, the focal point of the bourgeoisie. Inside are the eaters of sweets, the paper-readers and the watchers, the prosperous who but yesterday ruled the world, canes by their sides, red fezes with black ties dangling, full selves, protected while now they are deposed; they watch as vultures waiting for the fall, for the death of a regime, for the backsliding of a nation. Numberless cups of coffee have they drunk while yet they wait.

Time, time, time, what have we more of than time. The trials begin, the city watches, the trial of Islamic revolt, the trial of opposition, the trial of the Brothers, the *Ikhwan al-Muslimin*. They say the man who shot at Nasser merely fingered the trigger, the leadership of the *Ikhwan* made the plan.

Late November chill settles in, invades the houses, sneaks under the looser garments, reveals the cruelty of the torn sleeve. Chill, cloudy chill, but the sky never yields, neither snow nor rain; the atmosphere changes, yet nothing changes, no stark revolt of hard driven precipitates, only the chill, finally subdued by the endless sun, and nothing happens.

They are found guilty and hanged, and Cairo vomits within, not an outward throwing out, but within; the swallowed vomit gives an endless sickness, a taste of rotteness not ejected ... they are hanged. Salah Shad, accused of directing the *Ikhwan's* military corp, scheduled three times for trial, postponed and postponed again, to be finally tried, found guilty, sentenced, but not hanged; the interim between the hanged and the not hanged was for Nasser a period of perception, a nascent fear lest Cairo vomit outwardly.

The murmur is heard, brothers, sons, relatives, sifted out; in a Masjid there is emptiness; in another Masjid the people push out the walls with their coming — the Imam is known — he is a Brother. An underground of perfume sellers comes into being, the 'financial arm of the Muslim Brotherhood' to feed the scattered dependants, the aged, the young, the suckling, a family thrown off balance by the removal of the key peg of its grouping. We carry and sell perfume, not for this, Islam's more extreme rebellion, but for a many-sided protest against repression.

Pull our collars up around us, move quickly, yet slowly, as not to attract attention. The listeners are everywhere, no man winds his watch lest the motion remind and inhibit (the police have imported technology, a white-haired American from LA advises), no conversations in threes, no witness to dissatisfaction. Neguib is locked up in a house further up the Nile, at Marg, so they say. Along the Nile, in their inner muttering, the people share his fate ... and Cairo waits ... swallowing vomit.

The Judge of Islam's trial, Wing Commander Gamal Salem, tall, lean, intent, violent, erratic concentration, a plate in his head, a plane crash; the people, less kind, say madness! He is one of the fourteen who could not do other than what they did, the fourteen of the unexpected *coup d'état* of military demands. Nasser, wits quickened as the *fellah* who must cheat in the night for tomorrow's bread, chose each one, an instinct choosing, a non-intellectualized sifting out of those who could not do otherwise.

Gamal Salem, 'gamal': the unbeautiful 'beautiful', greying, thinning hair, high peaked forehead. He sits before me now exonerating himself. The green plush carpets of the Presidency, once Farouk's lushly to tread, now housing these plotters of the middle-class night.

"It's true that one man shot at Nasser, his was the finger, but others were the body which directed the finger, which moved the trigger, which shot at Nasser ... and this body had to be cut off at the head,"⁵ he screams into the air, his full frame now erect, and I jump as electrodes collide with nerve endings They are dead, be silent, absorb the warpness, swallow, listen, and record.

Cairo says he has the *Ikhwan's* blood on his hands. Cairo's inheritance of *fellah* logic predicts evil will befall him, the blood of the *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* — the Muslim Brotherhood — unwashable, though he wrings his hands every second of every day.

4

“BACK TO THE BARRACKS”

Life turns on the day after tomorrow, a pale green pushes up, the air clears, and the mist is forgotten.

Kicking along Cairo's streets, sidewalks appear, blocks of expensive yellow and red, a grand promenade of intention 'that life will be grand, life will be beautiful.' Beautification of Cairo, £78,000,000/- beautification.

Groups sit and argue into the dimming day ... the new Corniche replacing mud's ugliness, a gracious compliment to an older Nile: 'uneconomic' — 'grand' — 'a people's walk' — 'uneconomic' — 'work is the essential thing' — 'create work' — 'no ideology' — 'good intentioned nationalism' — 'empty of method, empty of concept' — 'pounds spent, gone' — 'finance capital destroyed' — 'WHO IS THIS NASSER' — 'his Philosophy of the Revolution, where is the Philosophy, no Philosophy' — 'a military man of military complaints, Faluja, defective arms, corruption, the King.'⁶

“BACK TO THE BARRACKS”

'Purpose served, now back, back.' 'Dangerous confusion of civil and military, army discipline breaking down.' A Captain thinks: 'If I had power I'd build a home for the

aged ... if I had power ... I could have power ... *coup d'état* ... *coup d'état*.'

Slowly the army pervades every fibre of the civilian body. A Colonel in industry, Wing Commander Hassan Ibrahim el-Sayed, now head of the Industrial Development Board: background, flying. He's learning, learning, his education a costly thing, of mistakes and time and expenditure.

The officers sit pat: 'We can't help it, we can't trust the civilians.' The civilians ... Nasser's men tell the *fellah*: 'Beware of the man of the coffeeshop who would turn you against me, beware, he is your enemy, his leisure is your enemy!'

Salah Salem, consciously sensual in moving, speaks out in colloquial 'Arabic, the people's tongue: "I saw a man today without shoes, a loaf of bread under his arm, walking beneath the new overpass and I thought who created that overpass ... he did — he did — and this creator of wealth walks barefoot;" a Marxist concept of value made simple, and they jail the Socialists, the Left, the Communists. Each day more and more are added to the camps for possessing dangerous ideas, dangerous definitions of the creation of wealth, yet they possess dangerous definitions of the creation of wealth, but in their hands they are tools, splintered understandings without conclusion, never to be taken so seriously as to bring any total breaking of the existing structure. More concept carriers are isolated, ideas quarantined, while Salah Salem rants at the *fellah*: "It is you who create value!" and distrust spreads its malignancy everywhere, is digested with the daily bread, the air carries it, till the nostrils twitch in recognition of fear.

'Sincere ... sincere ... Nasser is sincere ... yet what does it mean, sincere ... ? Bread to eat!'

"BACK TO THE BARRACKS"

His face is brown, a brown-faced ruler, a reflection of the *fellahin*, no Turkish fairness; Egyptian integrity re-established in the blood, in the colour of his face. What was the colour of 'Arabi's⁷ face seventy years ago? The Ottomans, the fairer Ottomans, now set aside, the upper classes contained if not broken, feudalism attacked, destroying the politician's guaranteed political base. No fez does he wear, this Nasser, large and broad and brown is he. The people scream around him, touch him, reach to kiss the brown hands. He pulls violently away; don't they know he came that they may never kiss hands again? They do not know. Years of bending, fearing, kissing, why not then kiss his hands, is he not the most powerful and is he not brown, brown of the Nile's flood, of mud houses, of turning earth, how beautiful is his brownness! The ideological can never measure brownness to the brown.

'Who is Nasser?'

"BACK TO THE BARRACKS"

His father was a post office employee, his father's father a *fellah*. Younger in years he felt the confused surge of feeling that rushed into the streets in protest ... the British ... a policeman's club ... a beating.

'Adel becomes more cynical, he knows, he serves them, he laughs, he protests. Confusion. Who is ideological? The *Wafd*, all political parties corrupt, then they defaulted. This is clean, stupid, but clean.

The people rise in the tram for the officer, they rise in the face of power. Yesterday they spat on officers, the wife of Captain Baghdadi silently jeered. Today Baghdadi, like the other thirteen, is a Minister, communication, development, unfold beneath his order. Yesterday the army, the police, were used to beat down Egypt's libera-

tion. The flying, singing, stinging severity of a five-five's whip, masses dispersed. The people spat on officers, army and police.

'Adel's mouth pulls at the corners, as he answers the journalist, knowing there is no answer to this dictatorship's existence. In the night he takes the writer to meet Nasser. At 4.00 a.m. the writer man emerges, slaps 'Adel's cynically turned back: "Nasser, Nasser, he's great, a leader, a personality!" Again defeated, logic's defeat, and sorrow is kept in silence, a sorrow for the knowledge of superficiality. Before the writer man had asked and probed and knew, "Clean but dictator, honest but where is the necessary economic development", and now he champions the large-framed man who is 'sincere'.

'Sincere, we can't eat it!'

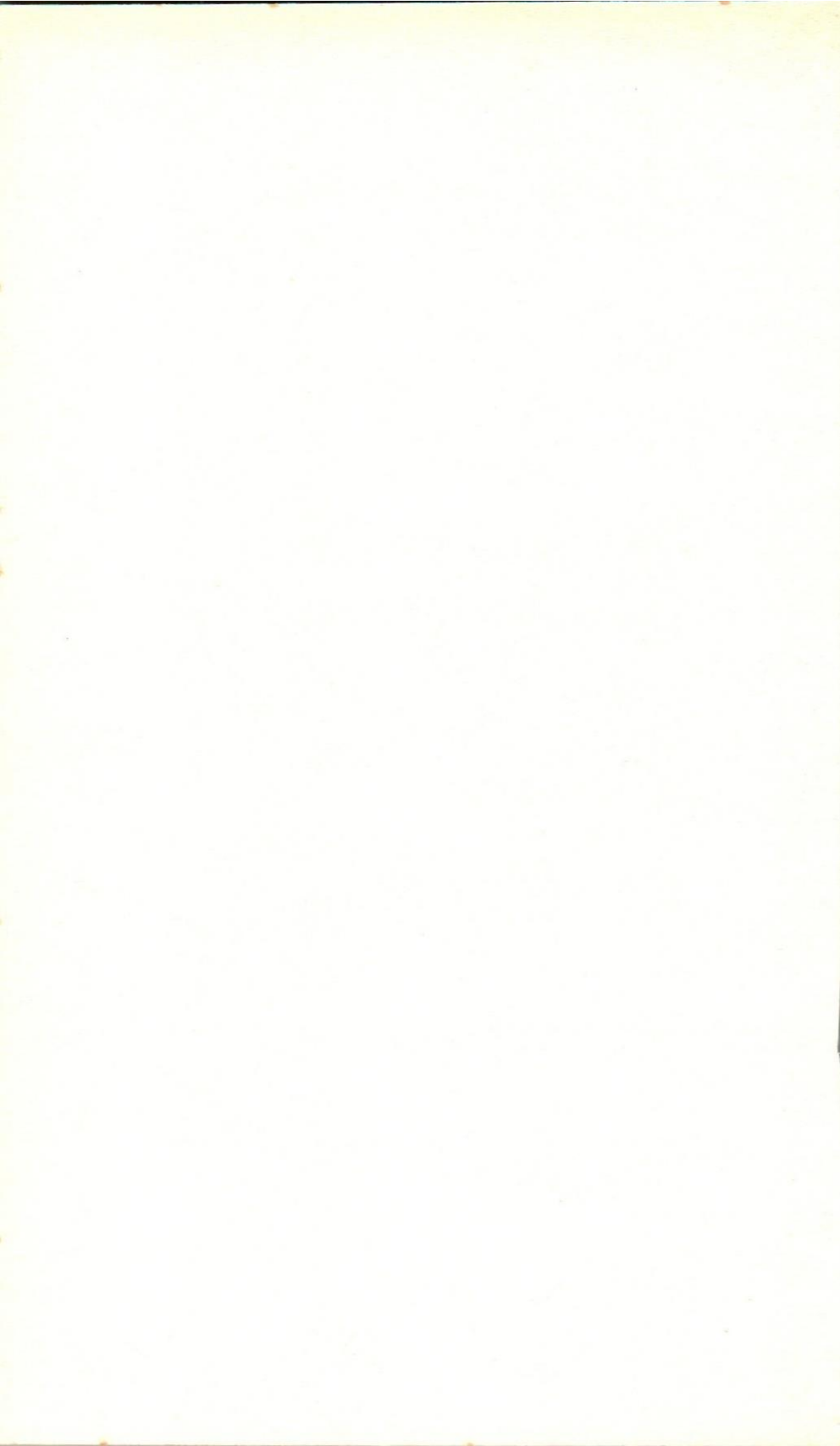
"BACK TO THE BARRACKS"

'Adel kicks the expensive yellow and red tiled sidewalk as he wanders home in the night. Bulak, Bulak, where is the beautification. Bulak a back-drop of Tennessee Williams. Loosely framed houses, pouring dirt, humans, chickens, excrement, pouring children, pyjamaed children ... the population will double in twenty years ... twenty years. Bulak, Bulak, refuge of fleas inhabiting proletarian bodies. 'What if there is a Corniche along the Nile?' His propaganda slice of mind answers: 'It's for the people, see them walking, talking, sitting, piled high on the Corniche? Benches, grass, trees, a Nile below whose permanence compensates for their impermanence'

'Adel shrugs, shrugs and walks on, kicking the yellow and red tiles. Yet there's a pride, isn't there 'Adel, a pride, his shoulders straighten, yes, it's nice, nice to hear the foreigner admit: 'I can't recognize Cairo, so

"BACK TO THE BARRACKS"

much has changed!' The sweepers move, brushing away the dirt of the West's derision; there's a pride in it, yes, a pride ... he'll go home now and sleep.



5

MACHIAVELLI IS BORN EACH DAY

Machiavelli is born each day, using the very gods as his tool. He believes he alone did everything, is doing everything, will do everything.

When Egypt lay sacked by the foreigner, when Egypt lay her escutcheon besmirched, when a Farouk could live in filth and live again tomorrow, when pimps advised, when sons lay dying in Palestine of defective shells, when fellah lived a plundered being, when illness corroded and distilled, when politicians extorted, WHERE were the people, where the intellectuals, where the ideologues?

He was there, aware, plotting, planning, biding his time. A cage of the living for the fourteen plotters, the price of failure, and 'where were those who now demand political rights ... the café idlers? I did this and where were they?'

He doesn't understand, if the people were not receptive he would have failed. He believes he was alone! An atmosphere was prepared to accept him, created by we, the writers, the intellectuals, the nationalists, the young dreaming of tomorrow. He doesn't know. He thinks he was alone. I was beaten, beaten yet I wrote and fought. He was plausible because of our preparatory work, a work of criticism and attack, the awareness of the people not brought about in the deep of night but by our open abuse of a corroded structure. He does not know, if

Egypt had not rallied round him he would have failed; *coup d'état* demands acceptance, and had he failed, Farouk would have made a public cage the gaol for him and the other thirteen.

I can't trust the civilians, who are they: the feudalists I wish to break, the old politicians of the upper and upper-middle classes, the collaborators, the slaves of the West, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Communists, the pseudo-Socialists. I shall retain political power. I must for the sake of the people. I will protect them from vultures.

Vote, vote, what does it mean vote, who shall be the candidates? A landlord, now disinherited of all but two hundred acres, still looms large economically and his power in the fellah's mind is not extinct. Vote, vote, when in the name of Islam the people support the political, para-military Ikhwan al-Muslimin.

Vote, vote, I shall sift the candidates and they shall vote, each man will vote ... and women who ask to.

The West attacks me as a dictator. I'll be a dictator no more! A 'constitution' will I have, with civil rights 'subject to the law'. Come, come, I'll make a constitution! Freedom, freedom, discuss my constitution!

Against, against, an enemy plot. A professor barred from school, a newspaper burned by Nile's bank.

Constitution, free discussion, a trap.
Silence, silence, veiled commentary.
All males forced to vote:
Vote yes, vote no:
for his constitution, against his constitution,

for his candidates, against his candidates.

Vote ... vote. What shall we do,

vote or not vote,

vote yes, or vote no ...

constitution, a prostitution!

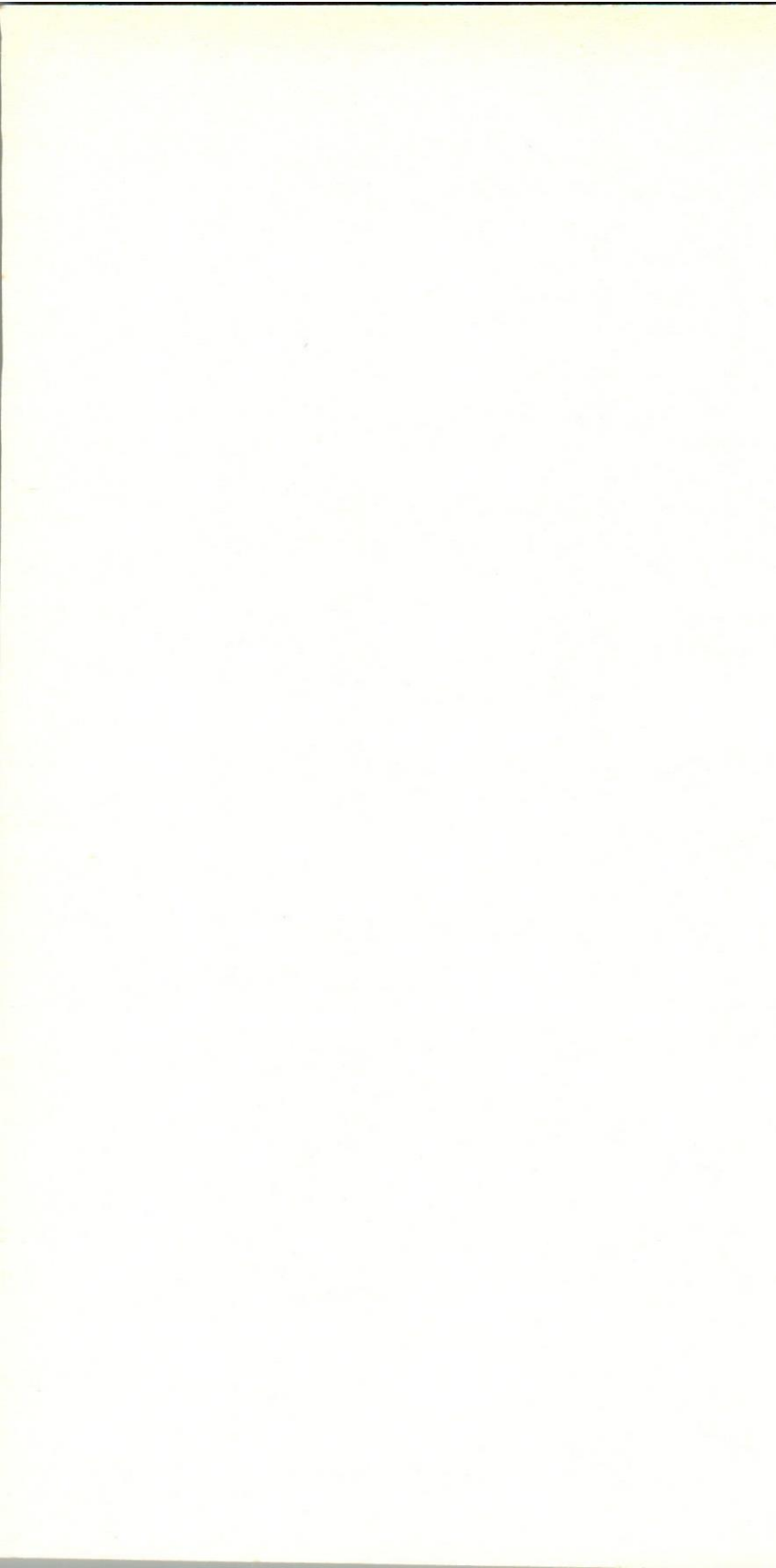
He should have continued as he was, if he insists on power, to feign a constitution, to feign a vote, is infinitely more harmful.

How shall we vote?

Control of the possibility to work increases, government jobs, teaching, foreign firms, writers, unions,

how will we vote no?

How shall we vote yes?



6

IN THE FISHAWI

*i*n the Fishawi, a store of chairs hung from the ceiling, the silent dusty restful inside booths, the smokers of waterpipes, drawing on patience's store, asking entrance from patience's hard-sucked at container, coals heating tobacco or a more quieting hashish, of Assassins, of the loss of the painful illusory concepts of time and space ... delusion ... illusion 'I slept with my wife for hours last night' ... guilt, the knowledge that it was but a minute, sixty minutes less than necessary to a cut-out clitoris, covered over in a more kind hashish dream.

Simpler, less satisfying cigarettes offered and smoked, bought in ones more dear, in tens still precious, in twenties unappreciated in fullness.

The boy cleans your shoes, there is always a boy who cleans shoes, no sleeping hour does he have. He grows as weed.

The gaunt man, a remnant of a clerk's respectability, carries *tasbihs*, rosaries — the Names — attributes of Allah ninety-nine: the 'victorious', the 'generous', the 'merciful' — with the other hand the humble sunken chest proffers books remaindered long ago in tens or hundreds: Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt* for three piastres or ten cents.

Fishawi of a hundred nights and one, the retreat, the hour of pleasure, the sanctuary. Fishawi, in a Cairo

old yet permanent, if now obscured. Al-Azhar's dome built a thousand years ago in the time of faith, still Islam's fulcrum, the wall of a Cairo old and trespassed, the gate now leading to practically nowhere ... to an alley and a tree-shaded café of coffee drinkers at the end. There walks a woman, in black long dress, hair as long and loose, sharp beautiful features, clear straight looking-at-you brown eyes, a Palestinian refugee selling nuts tied up in a burlap bag, the proud, the beautifully undaunted, if now a look of primitive wildness about her. Majid, a Palestinian, of a Palestinian family made good, feels her and in the feeling an intense outrage at yesterday shoots upwards in his veins. He offers her a bed, a home, work and respectability, but she fears and refuses, thinking it is of her services in a bed he would finally demand. Majid young and still believing turns his face from her smite, tears rushing in to make crystal clear the black Bedouin eyes ... the gate now leads to practically nowhere.

The people sleep outside the Masjid of Saidina Hussain, an unblanketed bed of grace; the place nearest the door the more venerable stone for a bed.

At Fishawi's door the man of brown and warm all over smiles. He commands coffee, Turkish coffee, thick with the essence of the thing, brewed cup for cup only for you ... *Saada* (Bedouin *Suker*), without sugar, *Mathbout*, the correct sugar amount, *Ziada*, extreme sugar content, with *Habhan*, cardamom of old 'Arab flavour sifted, grounded in. Tea in tiny hour-glass figured glasses, in colours green and red, to be savoured for itself or diluted, enriched, by cinnamon or mint.

Fishawi, the holy and unholy share its roof, the turbaned 'Ulama',⁸ the bare-headed artist, those who come to see and those who come to be seen, and those who come to be. Tolerant Fishawi ... sit into the night as it meets morning! *The roosters crow above, the slats of the*

roof allow a yet uncertain light to remind you it is morning in ancient Cairo.

Outside, the small carts of *mishmish*, apricots, of a *bukra*, a tomorrow, which comes but in short seasons hardly to be grasped. A small yellow light reflects on their soft orange-covering-yellow skins. *Mishmish*, *Bukra fil mishmish*, tomorrow of the apricots which comes in short seasons. Inside we wait for the time of the apricots, for a new world that but hesitantly filters through the slats.

Baha eats his *foul*⁹ in a quietness which is him. The lawyer pushes back his long thick hair. The artist sketches an unpaid bill, using many cross-bars of a strong stroke of pen, these lines lie behind all our eyes' seeing, lines reinforced by a foreign power's approval; bars a school of State Department thought equated with 'stability'; they fear a parliament, the absence of the strong crossed lines Abu Anain now draws in profusion. 'Stability', power crushing down, hiding what surely is and was in the beginning and ever shall be world without end, crushing down the people and their crying into the interminable night of existence. Baha stops eating to look upon Abu Anain's work, he speaks and acts not in anger, he sees, has seen, knows, another perception added in, Abu Anain's cross-bars, it incites him not, it is but written in his ledgerous mind to account for the conclusions of what must be in that hardly grasped, possibly unnoticed, scant interim, the time of the apricot's bloom. Baha will remember, though Abu Anain, then bent on other drawings, cross-bars less pronounced, may forget.

The lawyer of pushing back the hair feels less threatened, it is his charge to defend us, the undefendable, when the machine decides that we are guilty, and in our defence he is not accused — not yet — the more easily does he digest a more wide range than *foul*.

Why do we eat *foul*? Is it a metaphysical mixing with those of the mud with whom we are forbidden to mix, except in habit; is it possible that this non-intellectualized process of preferring *foul* is intellectualized too deep within us to tell or be told? Or is it the only food to eat, a non-joyous nutrition in the face of the attrition of a nation's people?

'Let them eat *foul*.' Let it be that we all eat *foul* till the apricots descend with sweetness upon us, a fragrance long awaited, the cross-bars of an artist's drawings no bulwark against the air, calling us out, out of our hiddenness, to Be, to surely Be, to Be in fullness, in texture, in the luscious fibre, in the warmest colour, of this enchanted tomorrow which but rarely comes.

We sit conjuring up what will be in that time. At intervals, awareness of the presence of fear streaks a more earnest face, inhibits the building of tomorrow's structure. If then it be built with odd joinings remember that it is you, who never allowed the fearless time, who are responsible for the crags, for its abrupt endings and beginnings In the camps there are many.

As a reflection of the forehead's frown of insecurity, a brain associates: "In prison even he learned to pray, he whose writing had never known God." Was he tortured that he trembles now? "No they did not torture him, but it is not like before. Before he was sent to prison in an indiscriminate, unpremeditated van which rounded us all up, the result of our protest, and while we were brusquely hurtled in, we knew that in three days' time we would be released, knowing a people's cheer but waited outside, knowing this the road to certain glory. But now, though he escaped the method, you are blown up from below. 'They blow you up', is whispered about Cairo. He can never forget that others have been blown up from below. It's not the quickly forgotten experience that

once was an already beaten political path when on the day after tomorrow a Prime Minister was overthrown. Now the government is solidified with the possession of all the guns." Saad is dragged out of his house for writing his book about the 'Revolution', 'revolution' a new word the military introduced ... repeat! repeat! believe! believe! a people laugh, jeer in silence, they have not seen 'revolution' but a *coup d'état* which disclaims their participation.

He who now prays had written to the Government in March of '54: "You behave in power as a secret organization that you were out of power", he had commanded to that portion of the Army now bedecked in ministers' chairs:

"BACK TO THE BARRACKS"

and now he prays, is basically silent. A metal mug, his only container in prison, sits on his mantle, the dates of his internment inscribed as a reminder ... one by one they flee ... are imprisoned ... capitulate to fear ... learn to pray ... are silent!

Khaled of March's rebellion, freeing himself of the 'Free Officers', is in Switzerland and dare not return. He had rallied round Neguib, had supported the writer's cry:

"BACK TO THE BARRACKS"

The men of his Tank Corps having committed 'treason' are now dispersed to the innocuous army duties of supplies and stores. Some had said 'Red Major': Khaled believed in free unions, the broken syllogism applied, epitomized. The right to strike only to be allowed, yea, to be ordered when led by Sau Sau (whom the writer had

said behaved like Mau Mau) for political purposes to cry: "Down with the traitor Neguib, no parliament, Nasser stay!" Khaled of unions of labourers, to be used by and for labourers, removed, AND NOW THERE ARE TEN. Rashad Mehanna¹⁰ of Islam's total belief 'relieved' before him

Tomorrow of the *mishmish* it will be the People or THERE WILL BE BUT ONE, so say those who inhabit the congenial cobwebs of Fishawi's booths.

We sit till morning, the legs of chairs, once sat in by the many removed, dangle high above our heads. Only Fishawi allows us all, for the day of the *mishmish* which may yet come.

7

ANWAR SADAT, THE PLOTTER

*i*n the Palace, once Prince Abdel Moneim's, mosaic its walls, sits a brown thin man, agile frame, a black mark on his lighter forehead that 'tells' he prays, bowing his head to the floor, many times repeated. He prays (and smokes his Lucky Strike from a Dunhill holder). One of those who could not be otherwise than a 'Free Officer', personalities that could not choose other than *coup d'état*: Nasser's correct *fellah* sifting.

Anwar Sadat, a history long has he, a plotter's history, a history of assassins with comprehensive lists of those who must die for their national deceptions, an unfulfilled scheme of justice exposed in the inquiry made on the death of Amin Osman of British leanings.¹¹ Justified was the political murder committed by his assassins (long before power became his to share), justified in the innocence and frustration of the ravaged nation. "We did not kill Egyptians, we killed Amin Osman, of British sympathy; no we did not kill 'real' Egyptians."

His admission of political murder, his justification of assassination as a political weapon, could have no bearing on the position of the 'Free Officers' today, as they are 'real' Egyptians; though others may differ in their definitions, Anwar Sadat now full with power and many the enemies, differentiates between 'real' and 'unreal'

Egyptians ... the man who shot at Nasser accordingly hanged.

Anwar it was who kept radio open to Field Marshal Rommel as he swept the desert sands of North Africa, driven in wind which touched the face in a still more eastward Cairo, a sharp wind announcing a 'liberation' from a Britain now quivering from a fascism still to be understood by the non-ideological 'nationalist'.¹² Anwar, who furtively lived in those leaner years as a pusher of carts, a seller of wares (his first wife starved to death while he struggled), moving under different labels of Haji Ahmad and others, from one mud village to the other, a not yet vindicated plotter.

An Ikhwani also was Anwar, long ago before the power, before the denial of the Free Officers' belongingness, and now he sits a director of an Islamic international alliance, the Islamic Congress, his head marked black with praying. Confusion, what means this word, to him there is clarity.

Today in government's subsidized journal he writes in historical ignorance, consciously excluding Japanese intentions and effect in her 'South East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere' (for were the Japanese not Rommel's ally?) to rant solely at the white man's domination of Indonesia, on the day of Merdeka remembered. He calls to hate not a system of exploitation, any colour skin its tool, but to hate what is 'white'. Rommel was also white, though never perceived as such by him. At night, in the darkness, when lights are off, he, Anwar, of the anti-white symptom of confusion shocks logic by laying himself down to rest, a white body of an English wife beside him. Confusion there is none, had he known he was confused, he would have unconfused himself.

Islam's Revival: and the bodies of the hanged leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, accused of instigating

the attempted political murder of Nasser — this political device now rejected — have not fully decayed. Islam to be propagated, but not as they saw Islam, 'they': the 'religious fanatics', but Islam as he sees Islam, fostered while contained, a golden link halfway round the world to reach its more fertile belly. Islam, excluding the Christian West, seems an unpolluted device, long before Pakistan's anti-Egyptian position. Islam, to be supported politically abroad, to be outraged at home, yet confusion there is none ... (till there will be but One ...).

Anwar Sadat, confusion of ideas never to affect a more basic loyalty of one who could not be otherwise, plotting not a dilettante's pastime but a physical fact like his arm, inseparable from the head, Nasser's wise *fellah* choosing.

In Anwar Sadat's office a fairer man speaks in an 'Arabic of the *farangee*, a Germanic 'Arabic: *walad* — 'boy' becoming '*valad*' — though 'Arabic has no 'v'. How has a German, outside the pale of *Dar ul-Islam* (the World of Islam) penetrated here, where there are no Western-understood machines to construct? A German named Ga'far, an Egyptian of German tutelage, a fellow of the days of Rommel's radioed messages, the clan of the non-ideological, those who in frustration's rage looked to fascism for liberation, for freedom to be Egyptians, making Egyptian mistakes or sowing further tales of Egyptian glory.

Freedom to be inept today, to more surely learn tomorrow; freedom to be brown and seek the white through the osmosis of a bed; freedom to make or be a confusion of black marks and cigarette-holder; freedom finally to see what we are, and freedom at last to admit what we are not; freedom to make roads in constant curves, if straight lines fail to win our side, please *our* sense of beauty; to wear pink with red, to discard a tie;

freedom to be 'vulgar', if 'vulgar' we desire to be; to do tomorrow if we feel not today, or do today what can't be accomplished till the morrow; freedom to inhabit what is ours, to gaze with pleasure not hidden at the fine line of a dancer's muscular vexations; freedom to eat *foul* sandwiches in the street, to hear Umm Kalthoum crying *Ya Zalimni*, 'Oh Injustice', into the night (a cry of a thousand years and a million people) and not go to work tomorrow, to smell the unequalled sweetness of quieting thick hashish filling the evening air; freedom to sweat, to breathe in or wash according to our pleasure.

Anglo-Saxon troops withdrawn, Anglo-Saxon values overthrown, and then there shall be freedom! 'Arabic rolls in the mouth, sweet to taste, French or English an unnatural turn of tongue, but until now considered 'better'. Freedom and let Europe kill Europe, fascism an ideological question not the concern of we who have lived beneath a perhaps more genteel, but nevertheless foreign, authoritarian state, and who is the yellow-bellied seller of Egypt who would fight by the Britisher's side? Down with traitors! Communism — Fascism — questions for when we are free, then shall we discuss, ally, for now all words deceive us, as in the past, with words like democracy and self-determination.

We shall ally only within words whose definitions have never deceived us. Words we know, words born on 'Arab tongues, words and phrases commanded by Muhammad who turned his back on a Jerusalem then foreign, to face a Makka known. Muhammad who knew the confusion of Christian and Jew, their distortions of the 'eternal and uncreated' truth, turned his back on their diluted books. We shall use and ally within what is understood, within which we are 'experts', deception then disallowed. We shall preserve ourselves within *Dar ul-Islam* (the World of Islam), within what is known and

certain, the *Dar ul-Harb* (World of War) — the others — have plundered us long with their words, phrases, foreign ideas they have used to subdue us, called on their international law to protect their accumulated property, to justify what was taken before the law evolved to protect. Assemblies, their tool as well, understood by them, rules of procedure their invention to thwart us forever. We shall go back to our beginnings in al-Qur'an, and within this Holy Book, within this 'Arabic language, we shall begin to discuss and grow.

Press us not for alignment, solid are our newly-built walls of defence, no spaces of freedom in between shall there be, where you may filter in to dismember our nation. International decisions, born of power relationships, and we have none. Votes touted, wealth counted, and we are done. We must recognize, why we must? After liberation is ours we shall sit, concur, take exception, abide, recognize, but now it is your house, built by your power, your design, your colour, complexion and your rules, and we are asked to come in and sit to be annihilated in ballots not freely cast. In Palestine you changed the vote of Liberia via Bernie Baruch, via Firestone, via the government of Liberia, and on and on, till a 'majority' decided on partition. Your Assembly, made to bind us, we must argue in your terms, in your logic; our logic of honour, of feeling, of passion, 'barbarian', basic, 'primitive', real, 'disallowed', 'the emotional 'Arabs'; our codes scoffed at in a day, our values unmentionable, not persuasive, 'out of order', and we will not mimic! Anglo-Saxon values, supported by power, win the day. Down with their values. I AM regardless of what I AM, and it is not yours to disallow. I am 'vulgar' you say, then I insist to be 'vulgar'. I am 'emotional' you say, then I insist to be 'emotional'. I am caring for 'honour', 'admitting not reality', thus I insist to be.

And did I tell you, I think you sterile? Did I tell you, I think you unclean: eating as you do, using any hand, right or left for any function. Did I tell you, you seem uncouth, your women seem prostitutes baring their backs, shoulders, upper part of bosoms to the streets. Did I tell you, filthy seem your women who imbibe whisky into the night till they are had by another, as you have another. Did I tell you, I find you abrupt, unkind, unfeeling: a mother passes a son by, a father denies his fatherhood, a daughter abandoned to a boss's rape! Dog society: lonely crying in the night, and no one speaking to the other. No honour worth the price of realistic victory or the expedient act, anything that works equated with the 'good'. No, let me not tell you, it has always been yours to tell, but one day, on the morrow of *mishmish*, I shall tell you well!

8

JULY 1955: ON THE TRAIN
WITH NASSER

Adel squints, looks about him at his charges, evaluates their potential for making trouble, and concludes with a shrug of his cynically-turned shoulders. Forty journalists invited, yea, gathered the world round to acclaim Nasser: 'Nasser — a million pounds spent to signify the occasion: it's July 23rd, 1955 — there is no one but Nasser'. An English colonel-type climbs aboard, he was here on this same train run of July two years before when it was to acclaim Neguib: 'Neguib, there is no one but Neguib' Now, all know. They must not mention his name (not even the colonel). No press calls for Neguib's release — the Sudanese the only free men who came, demanded, and gained the saving of his life, a life partly given by a Sudanese mother — he now locked up in a house further up the Nile. They say it is necessary or the Sudan, able to choose between independence or union with Egypt, would choose independence, making Neguib their symbol and their first president: Egypt would 'lose' the Sudan.¹³

All forty journalists put on the train, the special train to carry Nasser from Cairo to Alexandria to be applauded for what is now three years of a successful *coup d'état* and the overthrow of what was erroneously called a 'king': Farouk of lecherous design. (I was warned not to board the train as it might be mined or bombed with its

cargo of Nasser and Zakaria Mohieddin, the Minister of Interior: 'quite a catch with one small bomb' ... say the people of Cairo.)

We jog along, stopping at each small station, the ride from Egyptian Cairo to cosmopolitan Alexandria elongated from two to five hours. Alexandria by the Mediterranean Sea which washed Greeks, Italians, Armenians and Jews onto a tightly-packed Egyptian mainland; washed ashore in the tide of extraterritoriality, consular and mixed courts, and non-taxation of the foreigner. Slowly now they may wash onto other shores more congenial, for this is Egyptian Egypt of today, of the summer of 1955, and now that only twenty-five per cent of employees in foreign firms may be non-Egyptian, and now that the occupying power has left and undue foreign protection with it, and now that all are equal before the tax law, it is desirable to be an Egyptian. Knowing the opportunistic change of heart of the cosmopolitan, the government is wont to go slowly in the issuance of Egyptian nationality, while protests of discrimination, by those who once discriminated, are widely heard.

The train barely starts but it stops. The forty sit bemused, unheeding the warning they do not know: 'the track may be mined'. Had the forty felt the aggression packing the Egyptian air they would in discomfort sit, knowing its tightness capable of having its end, an outlet in a bomb's violent burst. Solve? It might not solve, but would express what is long repressed.

I look across at 'Adel, wondering does he know ... but would he really care: 'Care, why to care, the world has gone mad. Look at these forty, in ignorance travelling the train to inform the world of what they are allowed to see, smell or hear of what exists in 1955 Egypt. Innocence, long abroad, still innocent, though now witty and sophisticated with long wearing!'

A correspondent of the Christian-belief newspaper, a clean-looking fellow as all their men must be, moseys over. "Now, what I want to know is ... is this a dictatorship or not?" I turn my back, who dare answer, and how to answer that he may understand; can you build in a sentence a yardstick of value that he can judge from, and once having established that value system for him, can you sum up the nights and days of a regime in a 'yes' or 'no'. 'Adel smiles, smiles as a mother smiles down on a child. Answer 'Adel! It is your job to answer, and he answers: a muttered, now strong, list of grievances that existed before 1952, and thus the coming of the *coup d'état*, and the staying of the military, and the doing away, but even 'Adel cannot say 'yes' or 'no'.

Pity be we Our eyes meet, for a moment I stop my fact-replying to the incessant questions: 'Yes, there has been land reform in Egypt, land is now limited to two hundred acres and fifty extra for each of two sons: the maximum holding being three hundred acres'.¹⁴ (I do not put these figures into perspective, I do not estimate the class standard, the level of consumption, that this maximum will afford; I do not say: this reform when completed will affect only ten per cent of Egypt's land. I do not say: in Yugoslavia the maximum holding is twenty-five acres, I do not say ... and I would fool myself that I do not lie.)

Heavy lies the atmosphere ... long the journey to Alex. 'Adel looks out the window. The windows are sealed that no one should seep through and murder Nasser. At all the car endings, a soldier stands, gun at attention: 'you should not stand so at the joinings of the car', but some of the forty do, to take photographs. Outside, the platform heaves and swells with people: the men in *gallabiyya* dress, the Egyptian skullcap on their heads (the Turkish fez of the pre-'52 upper class now a rarity).

The *gallabiyyas* and the skullcaps shout at a car further up the train, intercepted from ours by a car of sitting-erect officers ... how many are the *Zubat el-Ahrar*, the 'Free Officers' of the 1952 *coup d'état* ... they say they are pyramided, probably equalling forty-four. The platform shouts and reaches for the open car: '*Aish Gamal Abdel Nasser!* – 'Life' – *Yahya Gamal!* – 'Long live Gamal!' The banners white on green background, the colour of Egypt's flag rewon. The banners of the *Tahrir*, The Liberation Rally, of the coup men's design.

The English colonel notes: 'not the same enthusiasm as for Neguib'. He does not note that these 'fewer' people have been brought in vans, paid for their appearance, and why not shout '*Aish Gamal*, had we not shouted '*Aish*, 'the memory of man runneth not back to the contrary'?

The people have been pouring into Cairo on free train tickets for the celebrations, and why not a trip to Cairo ... as to the moon ... as seen by a village-ridden *fellah*; the grass of Medan Tahrir, an equal, if not more combed bed than the one left behind in the village; and fireworks! ... who has ever seen, or even heard of the colours that burst into the sky high above in a chandelier design? Certainly man is ingenious! Why not come to Cairo? Why not come to stand by the train as it heavily journeys from Cairo to Alexandria ... (though not very deep are they).

The door of our sealed car opens. Nasser emerges: full of chest, structurally the leader-type, a loose-necked military uniform comfortably worn, black, tightly-knitted hair, kinked around his head, beak of a nose, eyes comprehending everything. Slowly he moves down the train's aisle, shaking hands with each journalist and looking into each face. Can he read in their eyes the words they will write? Will this moment of contact, this

germ of rapport, affect the conclusions they will later write?

Behind Colonel 'Gamal Abdel Nasser' — 'The Beautiful Slave of the Victorious (Allah)' — move the others: the sweet thin young man of the droopy eyebrows, now 'General' 'Abdel Hakim', 'Slave of the Sage (Allah)', Amer, Head of the Armed Forces (they say Nasser's most loved and trusted 'lieutenant' ... and seeing him you may know why).

I move into the aisle to photograph Nasser as he moves on shaking the many hands. *Ya Rais*: 'Oh Leader' ... *Stanna shuwayya, min fudluk*: 'Wait a minute! If you please'. Nasser turns, a wide smile breaks the solemnity of both the occasion and the face, white teeth emerge sparkling, eyes laugh warmly: *Takellem 'Arabi, Ya Sitti?*: 'You speak 'Arabic, My Lady?'. *Shuwayya bes, Ya Rais*: 'A little only, Oh Leader', I mutter through the camera lens. How beautiful his appreciation to find that here, in the forty apprehensively unknown, there is after all the known; the sympathetic tone of Egyptian colloquial 'Arabic warms his ears and what is foreign flees from the car. He stands, I photograph that of which I have only heard, read, and felt the repercussions of in the terror of a people's heart, and here the terror breaks and beams and a thousand sentences ring through my ears, criss-cross my mind in a profusion of light shades and black colour. I turn, the lens has closed... I'm invited to join them in the open car. I hesitate, my short-sleeved blouse might give offence. Colonel Hatem, Director of Information Services, reassures; I should move forward.

The droopy eyebrows bumps my head. I am horrified, I had blocked him, our small 'General' (Nasser still but a Colonel). He smiles, unconcerned, too humble to feel blocked or understand the necessity of apology. The procession moves on: Minister of Interior, Zakaria

Mohieddin, of sharp eyes perceiving movement of potential harm where none may exist and imprisoning or isolating his perception, with or without a trial of evidence. He passes. Kamal al-Din Husain, now Minister of Education, non-educational army experience before, dull black box of a moustache stuck like a wig over his upper lip. And now they have passed through the other end of the car.

The journalists reach under their seats for their unfinished beer bottles, quickly stashed away at the door's opening. Nasser, unlike Neguib, does not share with them the occasional easily-swallowed drink.¹⁵ Ill he thinks of those who would waste their time in such frivolity, for he believes in work; the slogan: *Work, Unity and Discipline* which reads from the poster, the banner looming large across our path, was first written in his jawline, in the black circles beneath his eyes: *Work, Unity and Discipline...*

My other camera, loaded with colour, looks up mockingly on the open car from which Nasser surveys those who line the track further up ahead. I dare! I pick up both cameras and move slowly up through the car, into the next car of the erect-sitting officers, walk assuredly past the Second and Third Line Free Officers to emerge in the car without sealed windows. Minister of Interior, Zakaria Mohieddin, looks me over from the side of his eye, 'of the emperor'. No sleeves have I on my white cotton blouse, my skirt is straight tan, unable to conceal even my uglier protrusions let alone hide any form of weapon. I am allowed to remain!

Before the magic dispels, I begin opening and closing shutters, and there, registered in black and white and colour, are the hands that rule a nation; particles of that nation crowd below reaching upwards to almost touch, and nearly feel, what they do not know, but the hands are brown and brown is familiar.

Then in a flash, Nasser sharply and in anger, pulls back his hand, the swift movement of his arm cutting the air like a whip. I photographed it, but what happened? Someone has bitten him, bitten his hand, as a dog who resents his master. Nasser's upset! He turns away from the crowd brought to cheer him. His face looks more tired and a disgust, or the beginning of nausea, covers his vision: *'When will they learn! When will they learn: THEY WILL NOT KISS MY HANDS! Kiss my hands as a Farouk or a landed Pasha before me. I am not a Pasha — will never be a Pasha — they must not kiss my hands!'* A fat officer leans over the car's railing and pushes a fellow back: 'You will not kiss his hands!' Nasser turns back to the crowd in waiting, his face is not smiling, his hands are not outstretched, they are placed on his hips as he surveys the depth of his problem for the future!

'Adel feels tired, though the three days have just begun. The élite of the world, come to judge. Can he judge? The journalists, each and every one, accept him. One man goes back to Bombay to write his praise in what appears to be more space than that given to Nasser. They accept him readily, for his likeness unto them, as if his German education had moulded the colouring, the structure, the assured turn of his face. Many languages of Europe has he commanded, but underlying them all is 'Arabic, though he fails in a written 'Arabic exam. It is this knowledge, this possibility of communicating with the 'other' Egyptians, of the non-European appearances, which sets him apart from those on the train who accept him as one of their own, for he understands what the European can never understand, what they consistently wrongly judge from the intonation of 'Arabic words; he understands the backdrop from which the not-understood-sound speaks; knows their mentality: knows how they 'see' what is done or not done. His constant

interjection to the correspondent: 'you misunderstand ... the fellow did not mean what you think', draws 'Adel apart from those on the train he may structurally resemble, from those who cannot correctly interpret, from those who lug their value systems around the world insisting they be the standard for judgment and therefore can never hope to understand; and understanding binds, where to the cynical, words and phrases pass as bubbles quickly lost in the immensity of the air:

Yes I am bound ...

I am an Egyptian after all!

Funny, to discover this as the train rumbles along the track.

Long have I walked, wondering of my identity:

is it the German of my school,

the English, my Father's perfected second tongue,

was it Europe, which with ease I walked in and out;

or was it Egypt, which tingles in resentment in my blood?

Identity on a train ...

I am an Egyptian!

'Adel turns to his flock and smiles, that faint smile that Mona Lisa gave before him, seeing into each layer, seeing into himself, seeing them, seeing the gap between what is and what they may think is; language, tones, understood in one culture, carried with them over to Egypt, to misinterpret in another culture ... but he shall not tell them! He shall watch their even blasé gropings with a faint smile ... never to be seen as hostile! But he is tired ... tired by his vision of the gap ... and the train rumbles on.

9

COMMUNISTS ARRESTED, SOVIETS ENTER UNSEEN

*a*cross the lawn, over the road, and down the cliff that stretches before the San Stefano Hotel, the Mediterranean washes.

In the night, the forty, after a few days' nervous anticipation, were suddenly rounded up like so much vagrant cattle and jettisoned into an *ad hoc* press conference with Nasser. In a meteor stream, in cars of varying shapes and efficiencies, they raced to arrive further down the Mediterranean's Corniche at the Army Officers' Club where Nasser and his security, firmly lodged, smiled at yet another coup.

It's 10.00 p.m. Nasser sits relaxed, a strong centre-point of the room, hands firmly folded, patient, sure of the nature of the questions and of the tonic which would be his reply. He smokes an American Lucky Strike (I smoke 'Hollywood', an Egyptian cigarette, one-third the price).

The journalists of the furthest, now hysterical West aggressively ask: 'Do you have Communists in Egypt? How many Communists do you have? Are they allowed to proselytize?' (as the more innocuous appearing Christians).

Nasser sits smiling, assured of his catch. He allows the questions to crescendo, to reach their terrified peak, to complete the net. The large eagle of brownness settles

back waiting for the calm — the other end of the emotional cycle — which his calculated instinct knows must come, and feeling its approach and settling in, he replies: “Today, I imprisoned the Communist leader Tantawi; now there are over one thousand Communists in detention camps!”

A murmur moves in a humming song-like appreciation around the room. A few ‘Arab journalists sit bewildered in the centre of the purr. ‘What does it all mean? Why the single-minded repeater-like questions? Will Nasser stand or fall on this splintered question and his splintered reply? What is the point? Is this question to establish, to determine, if this government has a valid *raison d’être*?’

The largely Western group has completely unsprung its coil. Anglo-Irish Shaun Mandy sits in his blue-eyed amusement. ‘He has won them!’ Headlines scream: “STABILITY IN EGYPT – COMMUNISTS IMPRISONED BY NASSER.” An American woman goes home to write again: “I LOVE EGYPT!”

While ...

The invariable other side of the coin drives up hesitantly before San Stefano. The Press Attaché, Boris, sees that the lobby is clear. A door opens and a white hulk of a man, his Slavic hairline immense, steps out unsmiling. A discreet tip-toeing entourage makes its way through the lobby, following an Egyptian Information Officer. The ‘worm that swallowed the pig’ looks nervously over at me: “You shouldn’t have seen!” But quickly does he elaborate. “Yes, I am delegated to take care of him; of course, you understand, Nasser is embarrassed; you see he was invited before, when he was only an editor of *Pravda*; could you expect Nasser to have anticipated that he would soon replace Molotov as Foreign Minister? You understand, don’t you ... !”

Boris watches, smiles, confident of a precocious tomorrow, a simple default, the unmeasurable catalyst. In Cairo before coming he had nudged an Egyptian journalist of the loosely termed diplomatic round — an authentic and perhaps the original chameleon — and said: “Our position will soon be clear! Things will soon be different!”

Art shows itself; Voks opens; opera tours; invitations once burned are now hurriedly accepted, as those of the upper and middle classes who sniff the turn in power crowd the red-flag embassy with their anxious-to-please selves, while the others, far out and into the Peninsula of Sinai, in Tor of no relief from burning sun and unimaginative sand — everywhere sand, here stationary, now blowing — encircled by barbed wire like the skeleton of a twisted human (their wall), sup at no table... . ‘TONIGHT I ANNOUNCE THE IMPRISONMENT OF THE COMMUNIST LEADER TANTAWI!’ Headlines omit the tall bulk of a Russian man, the editor of not attending press conferences, ushered through a hotel lobby, behind him champagne gently carried by ‘the worm that swallowed the pig’.

Strange journey down from Moscow into this uncertain, slogan-waving, unreliable thing now celebrating three years. Interesting for a turn perhaps, but essentially unreliable ... as if an inner ear heard the words and felt the tone: ‘I have imprisoned Tantawi!’

While ...

Back in February 1955, in Cairo, another man once too young a general, direct, not participating in the diplomatic while defined as a diplomat, sat down at his desk to report:

Nasser is convinced he must have arms. The Israeli attack on el-Auja in Gaza has made the army insist on more and

better weapons, it is only Nasser who has held back the army from total retaliation. You must realize, this is a military regime, relying on military support, and that support is now demanding guns; guns, or new, more adamant leaders will appear amongst them. We must put an embargo on further shipments of arms to Israel! We must supply Nasser with arms, or they shall purchase their arms elsewhere! Nasser is pro-West; he holds his nose with his fingers when he deals with the Russians and proscribes the Egyptian Communists. He is with us, and we must support him.

It is useless to speak of a direct alignment. If he accepted the Middle East Defence Pact he would be overthrown, so what is the point of this insistence on form? He rants at our mass production foreign policy, contracts not keyed to his reality, feels, as with Tito, that we must not force signature on a dotted line which he cannot accept or he will be considered to have capitulated and will be overthrown.

He needs arms; if we don't supply them ... someone else will!

... and now it's July — the State Department has dallied or incorrectly evaluated their man. Shepilov sleeps in San Stefano. And now it's September. "Arms Agreement" looms in large bold-type headlines. George Allen rushes to Cairo as if the other direct man, who understood as a militarist understands a militarist, had never written and rewritten since the 22nd of February.

Having no insight into semantics, a world rocks back on its feet: 'Czechoslovak arms ... Communist penetration ... control ... Egypt a satellite!' American arms gift — sovereignty not lessened — 'free mutual alliance!'

While ...

In Cairo a people look up — a suspended looking up fills the air. Nasser — the devil whose regime Allah had cursed by sending poliomyelitis to its children — Nasser whose slogans we mentally rewrote — Nasser whom we said we would chase back to the barracks with books or with the shoes of those who have shoes if he did not quit by January — Nasser who in the security of our hearts we had each plotted against ... Nasser has done something ... he has indeed done something!

Intelligence officers, still unsure of their success, begin baiting Americans: 'How do you think your government will react?' The people continue their looking up ... 'no we do not love him, but he has done something, he has at that! He's powerful — he's used his power in the name of our nation — we are powerful!'

An Indian diplomat nods a head accustomed to watching closely political manoeuvring: "He has diverted the people again; first it was Israel and now arms; arms and where's the economic development! Another coup to keep him going for more months, while he refuses to recognize that the overriding necessity is to raise his people's horizons beyond the mud. He would collapse but for these external issues made to divert, and what will he do after this jag has worn off? What will he then call forth to perpetuate himself, to keep the people from realizing he has done nothing but dabble in ignorance and alter the superficial?"

The people mull about in a yet inarticulated pleasure:

Why are we glad? Arms? But we are glad and proud. We are proud! Is it that Nasser has defeated the West? Yes, Nasser has defeated the West. Then we have defeated the West. Yes, we have defeated the West! He's done some-

thing, that Nasser! ... defeated Zionist America which thought she had the only guns to be bought in the world, thought she had a monopoly because of her scare campaign against the Communists; that Truman, defeated at long last. (Truman is still the American President when an Egyptian considers what is America or the American position vis-à-vis himself and his aspirations.) They let us die in Palestine, solving their problem! If Truman so loved the Jews why didn't he let his hundred thousand into America? Or didn't they want them there? They never would have done that to a Christian nation, to a European nation! Backward — they think we're backward — feel they can come with their know-how and build a European nation in our land and throw us out — because we're 'backward' — and now they tell us: 'don't be stubborn ... learn from the Jews!'

Yes, Nasser kicked that Harry Truman! We have arms! Those Jews will remember we have arms before they attack again in Gaza! No one knows how many arms, that should keep even the Jews pondering for some time!

Arms — power — arms — the West has power — it has arms. India understood that, so she built armament plants, and even produced jets! Power — steel is power! We will have steel! Cotton is soft and leaves us a nation of soft, fluffy, incapable-of-resisting cotton! Steel is the answer! Answer to our one crop, cotton-dependency weakness ... and arms! Nasser's really done something this time! He's a man of courage, a man zay el-hadid, like steel, who defied the West and won. And the walls came tumbling down. Where is Russia anyway, way up there to the north somewhere; how is it that she is THE ENEMY when America it is that pours money to sop up Israel's deficit, and Israel attacks us! 'A rose blooms in the Negev' ... and that proves something to them, that somehow the

Israelis are better than we. Give us that capital to absorb our deficits, give us millions of rich fingers outside plugging the holes, the deficits in our fiscal dyke, and we, too, will grow 'roses in the Negev'. We have Liberation Province, carved out of the desert, as much a desert as the Negev. Tomatoes we have grown, not roses! Yes, Nasser's done something this time!

Egyptians mill about in Cairo's September of still too warm and close streets and mutter to themselves of something new, still not fully defined, that has entered an atmosphere unchanged for centuries. Pride and the ability to protect themselves, to stand as Egyptians, sovereign in the world of sovereigns. All this had happened in a default, in a tall Slavic man who entered the door of San Stefano ... unseen.



10

THE CRUEL CAMERA

back in Alexandria it's still July. The forty are on their last day, having talked to the Egyptians of the Information Office, to the occasional receptionist, to a cosmopolitan Christian or Jew; having smiled or barked, according to their respective digestive systems, at the Nubian-Egyptian servant or *bawwab*, the man who inconspicuously attends at the door, a darker man born deep in the south of a race which perpetuates itself that there may be men who migrate north and serve the table or the door to send back a pound or two each month to the inhabitants of the lonely unproductive hills of the south, where the silt-rich land nourished of the Nile grows too thin into nothingness.

This communication accomplished, the sudden interview with Nasser concluded, there is but one day left to wander in an unrepresentative Alexandria, accompanied, of course, by an Information Officer, then all that is left is quickly to drive through the desert road to reach Cairo (I say desert road, as my suggestion to drive back through the delta road for a glimpse of what is Egypt behind the Brown Man was quickly squashed).

The day is good as all days are in Alexandria where a sea-breeze unfalteringly fans your face. The Corniche curves a semi-circle, not unlike the 'Queen's Necklace' of the Bombay shoreline. Along its sides are the outdoor

cafés and the man who will carve you a pair of sandals from a previously cut Firestone tyre, all for ten piastres or US thirty cents. The sky is the colour of kodachrome, and a photographer (a not quite accepted or identifiable part of the entourage) puts camera across his heavily chipped shoulders to join us in the car.

We drive to Ras al-Tin Palace, at the going westward end of town, hoping that there we may find our way in to see both Nasser and the display of the Egyptian Navy, of unknown political potential. Here, for the last time, Farouk set sail for Italy, a parasite removed by the long-in-coming *coup d'état*; a deported king who now drinks in Rome's cafés and looks for a familiar face to pick up the tab. Proud the port which gave him leave!

At the Palace drive, our friend 'Adel — 'the just' — fails to convince the always wary Egyptian policeman to let us in, so we stay, hanging around the historic entrance to magnificence, waiting for Nasser to emerge.

Our blonde crew-cut photographer (a habit of hair-wearing which preceded the general dissipation and unkind line of his face) takes his camera off what, after three days, we see as the obnoxious line of his shoulder, to photograph the man who serves the wet, cool, lovely-coloured liquid to the unquenchable thirst of the people of the street. Today the liquid, carried about on his back in a large glass jug, is an orange-red, an inviting colour to capture. The American puts his camera to the eye, but instead of the small click of the shutter, a pained sound gushes forth as a dynamic boy of nineteen hard years rushes in front of him, shouting in indignity and intensity in 'Arabic, a language the American, though long a figure in Egyptian bars, had never learned.

'Adel, alert as a guide carrying his party through an ever-moving jungle, rushes forward to intercept. The Egyptian is undaunted by this suit-wearing Effendi of a

fairer colouring; he rushes on, his protest building momentum with each syllable. 'Adel listens, humbly listens to Egypt's now protesting voice, to an injustice long lived and a justice long sought, denouncing a camera!

Cruel the camera which gives a definiteness to a present undesirable form. The boy protests, protests today's reality, protests the camera which would give it permanence and propagation in a richer land abroad. Proud, proud, too proud to admit to what is, to what you know not how to change, in the lean years. At least you can deny and smash that impersonal instrument which records a truth made half without explanation, a truth made half without context, a truth lending itself to interpretation, conclusion, possible distortion. Stop here and now the cycle of misunderstoodness! Take away in your mind's eye if you must, but no tangible image shall there be to give your story credence. It shall not be! Down with what would be! Down with the camera! Down with foreigners and their foreign lands who would photograph our unasked for, individually unremediable plight!

'Adel fumbles for a cigarette to set right the day turned on its apex. He must answer, it's his job to answer; the word has gone out: 'Let the foreigner see and photograph, hold back nothing!' 'Adel is directed to say in the face of this purism: 'You see, we are now asking for loans from abroad to improve this, our condition. The foreigner must see to make our need sympathetic.' But the boy's cry of outrage denies negation, for behind the man carrying the juicy red liquid stands a water-fountain and at the carved-inward cement base sits a black-covered woman melting herself into that holloved coolness. The boy thinks she was the object of the closing shutter and protested, protested the poverty of

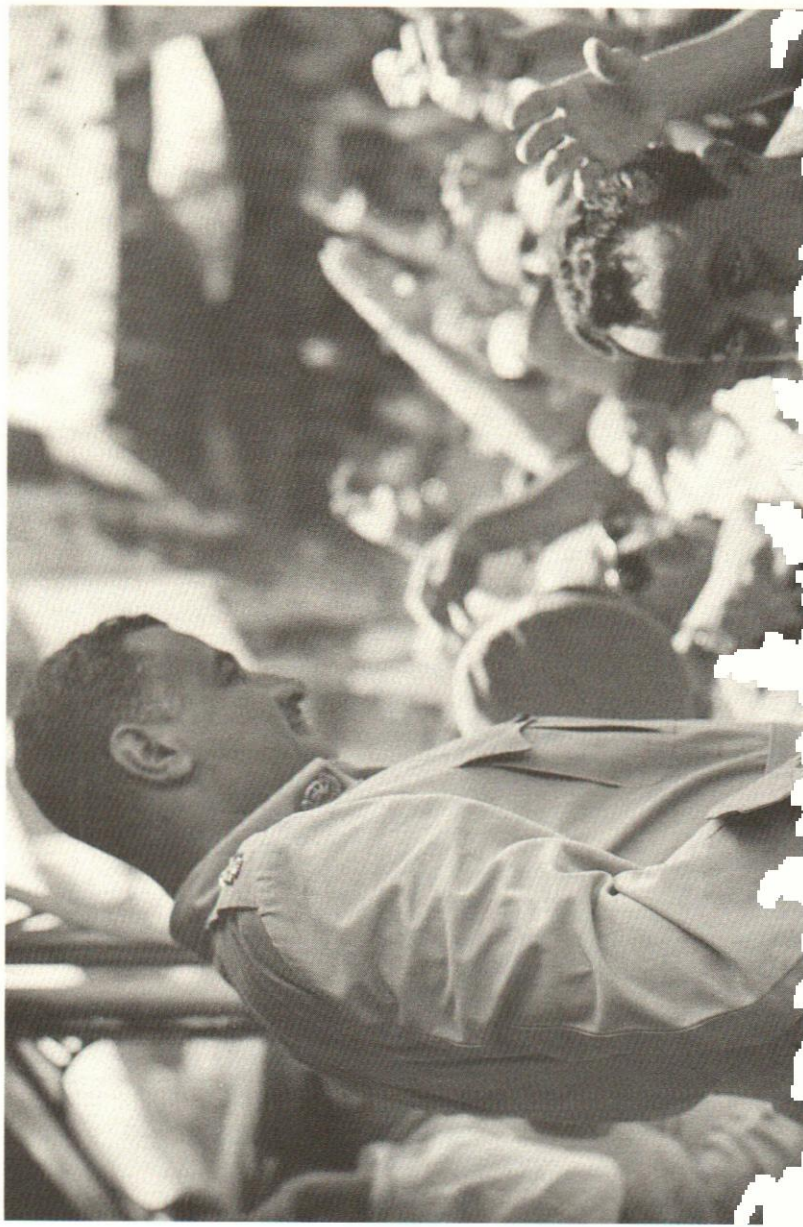
the woman who sat on the dirt curving her back into the water-cooled kindness of the cement, protested that a woman of Egypt should so be seen; screamed in 'Arabic: 'She is a mother', and as indignity carried in genes from one century to the other verbalized its aggression, he trilled into the air: 'She's *my* Mother!'

'Adel acknowledging the black-covered *fellah* woman as his Mother as well, fell quiet. His head looked into the ground as he felt a deep-gutted justice, logic beyond refute, choke sentences rationally, superficially prepared, a protest to be borne only in silence ... for today. As for tomorrow, tomorrow there will be rectification when all things will be rejudged, when Moses, Jesus and Muhammad return to walk the earth and put Judgment on man ... and his institutions ... here, and abroad.



July 23, 1955: on the train with Nasser.

“They will not kiss my hands!” Nasser surveys the depth of his problem for the future.

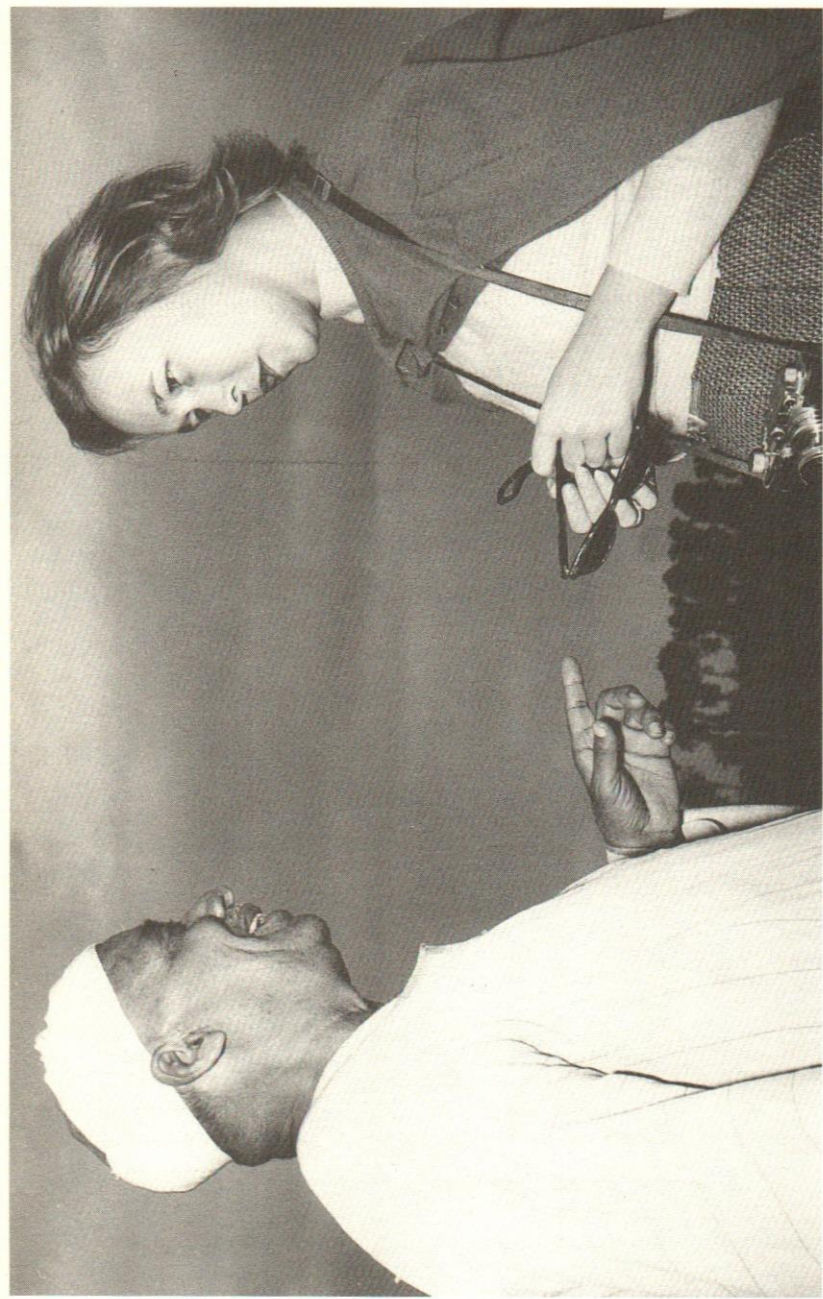




L.-R.: The powerful Minister of Interior, Zakaria Mohieddin and General Abdel Hakim Amer, Head of the Armed Forces (with cigarette); others unrecorded.



Nasser with the Author (on the left).



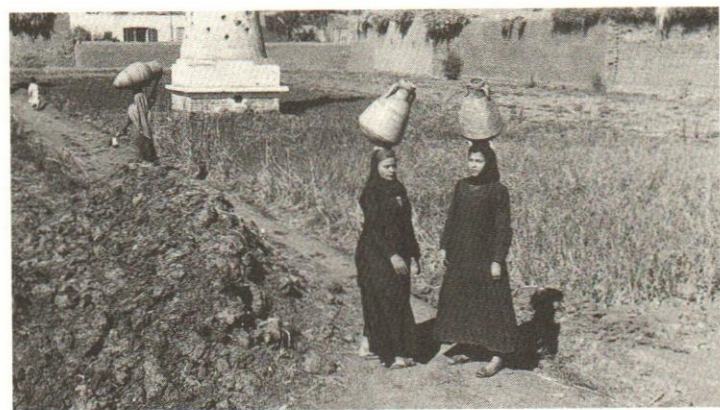
Alijah learns from the masses.



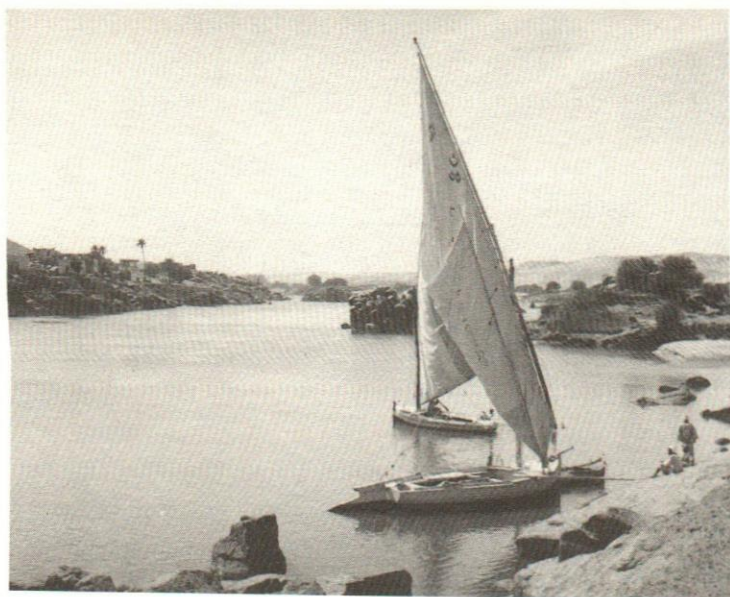
4. *Fellah* family, rock-bed of the nation.



Transport of millennia.



Incredible balance of village women.



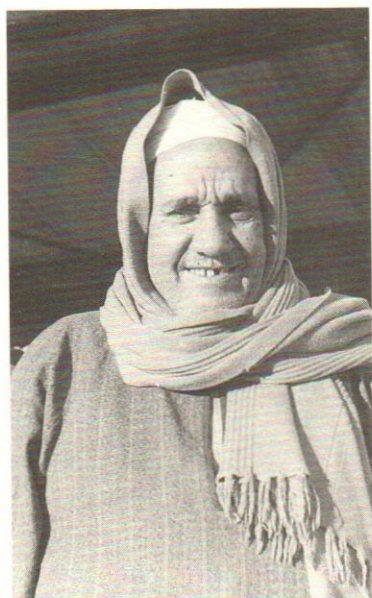
A *faluga*: small traditional sailing-boat.



The village people of Kafr Saqr.



Back Row, L.-R.: Coptic priests, Girgis and Kemal; a volunteer; researcher Dimitri Bushen and Alijah reading the Egyptian Constitution proclaimed 17 January 1956; Samira Megelli; Jesuit Father Henri Habib Ayroul whose book on the *Fellahin* was banned by King Farouk.



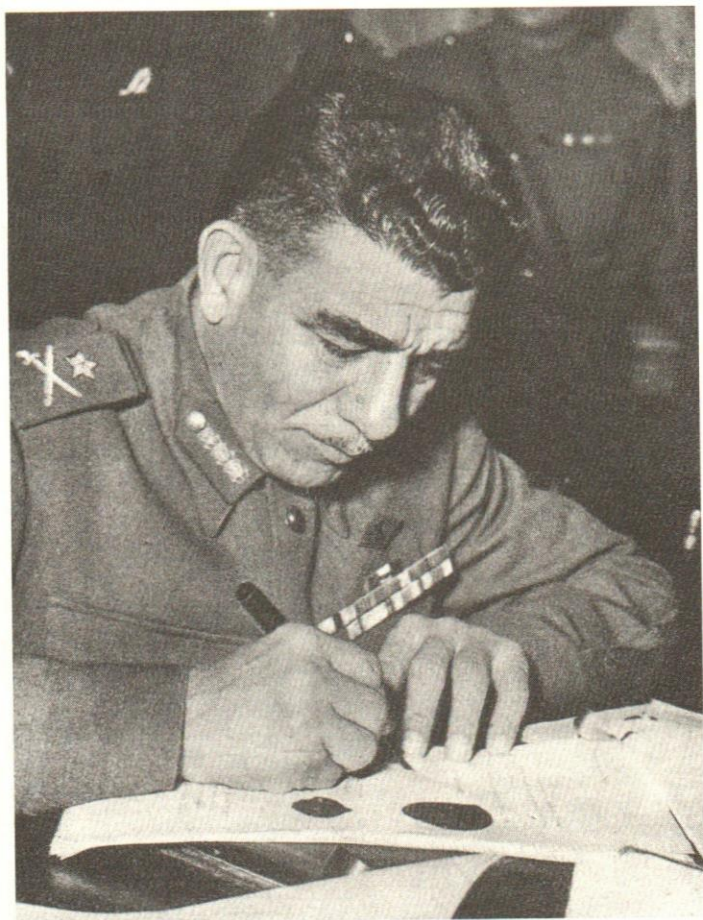
The Umda of Kafr Saqr.



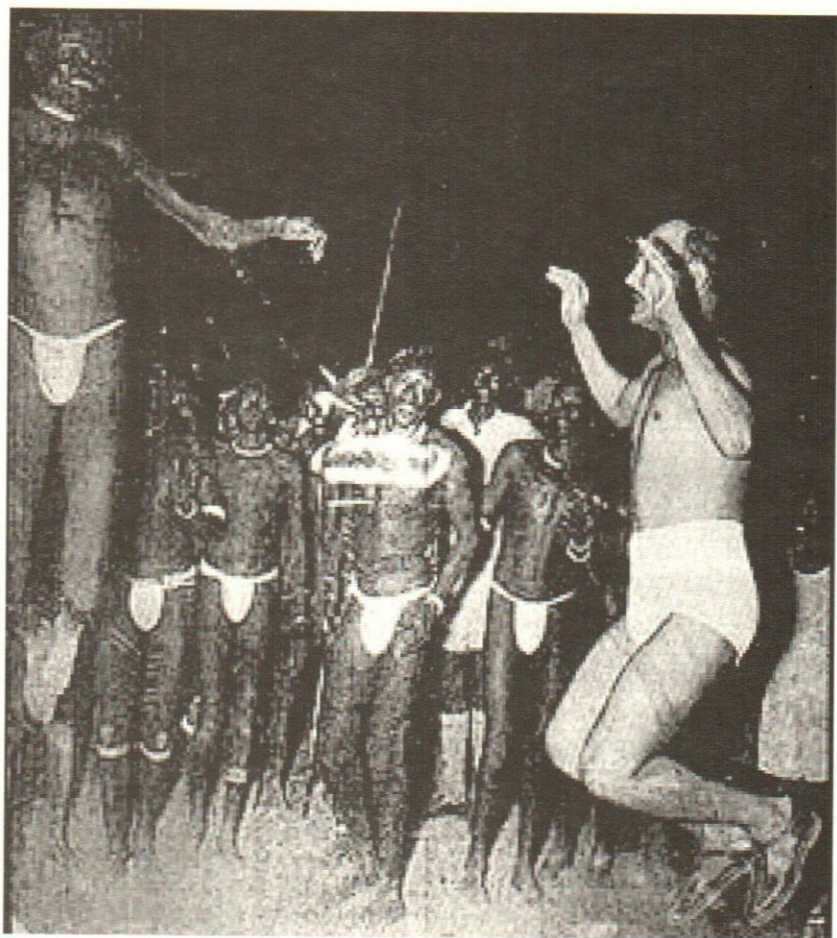
Muhammad, the trustee.



'Aish Gamal!': Long Live Gamal!



President Mohammed Neguib signing the Sudan Agreement.



Salah Salem, Minister of National Guidance and Sudanese Affairs dancing in his underpants with Dinka tribesmen in the Sudan, a photograph he was proud of.

11

JANUARY 1956: MUD-HOUSE VILLAGE

South of Cairo by about 370 miles, off from Luxor of Pharaonic power, lies Nag as-Siag, or Sawagi, a quiet mud-house village of a thousand Coptic Christians. I arrived there in January 1956, in Egypt's winter, a winter of cool air sifting the sun till at last it becomes an element friendly to man.

Six a.m., the mist slowly rises, discarding a damp chill, reflected through the body in an all-embracing shiver. Nag as-Siag separated from urban Luxor by half an hour as the cold of January hurries your step. Plodding the dirt road, carved from precious cotton or barley land, woven of unending ruts and the piled-high dung of water buffaloes, you dodge the boy on donkey-back, as Jesus rode before him. A bell tinkles as he rounds the path, his softness brushing the unheeding side. The donkey runs lightly, a small frame prancing; the larger body of the human echoing the running vibrations of this carrier of centuries.

Six a.m., a boy bare but sure of foot, partially clothed in a zig-zagged patterned, mended and unmended *gallabiyya*, a two-cornered cap of olive-drab wool pulled over both head and ears, moves ahead. (I would touch him but my fingers still fear rejection.)

Ruh fein, ya Akhi? "Where are you going, my brother?" *Amal eh, ya Akhi?* "What is your work, my brother?" The wizened twelve-year-old looks up, fear-

fully determined eyes, mucoused in the corners ... *Ana nagar, ya Sitti!*, "I am a carpenter, My Lady!" *Ana nagar!* "I am a carpenter!"

A carpenter, Oh child of twelve years, a carpenter. He rushes ahead, the chill licking his hardly-covered self; a worker who goes off to his work, and the mist has not yet risen. "I am a carpenter!", why the pronounced air of the word 'a carpenter'? Is it that his small self realizes the growing, the reaching beyond his years, can he feel the magnitude of his brave world of today, can he imagine, comprehend, his premature maturity; why the tilt of the head announcing to God and the world: *Ana nagar, ya Sitti!* My eye follows him, dodges in between the box-cars, as he short-cuts the road to work.

Six a.m., the morning has not yet completed its becoming, and he is made, fully formed, in twelve years ... 'and on the seventh day He rested'. Small boy, born to grow too soon; genesis rushed through in a less kind version. Small boy, small boy, today you have a Constitution, but can you write?

12

THE FELLAHIN

Man has not yet managed to take food when he is hungry! Immobile he lives with the power unknown within him, and no one tells him the secret. In each dying, power dies untouched, unexploited, existence carried, transmitted, from one to the other, with being and the infinite power for good, good for himself as he lies starving, unknown within it. He bears and bears, for in the conspiracy of utter silence no one dares tell him.

Each day he climbs out of the hardened mud his wall, walks in the dim never-never land of the garbaged unreality, consciousness choked into the mud of the fields. There with his back forever bending, his vision sees only the final mud, the ultimate mud, mud static, mud turning. He sees the shadows and believes them things, with his back bent low, hidden the sun; never to stand, look into the sun, objects seen as they are, and revolt!

Still unrecognized his Right to Be. You would shock the foundations on which his world is turning to say: 'The table is full, eat from it at will!' An intricate system and theory of lies has covered this elemental truth and he above all, he first of all, acknowledges and defends the system with his, the strongest of beliefs, a belief born of power acceptance, power relationships ground into the

marrow of things, and as he sups from this, the intertwined marrow of things and non-things, things as they are, and as they are said to be, it enters him, asphyxiates his bowels, and leaves him and his power to Be unknown to himself.

Beautiful, strong is he,
 but the beauty is bent only to the potter's wheel,
 the farmer's scythe, the carpenter's hammer,
 his motive revolves but around Joseph,
 a carpenter was he ...
Ana Nagar ... "I am a carpenter."
 His ideal, the known, his hammer.
 This the message of the boy ... *Ana Nagar, ya Sitti*,
 the announcement to God and the world:
 my power unknown, pushed down within me,
 made to fit a hammer.
 "I am a carpenter." I am a hammer.
 What else I am I shall not know,
 the apricots bloom, untasted.
 At the lean age of twelve, they gave me a hammer,
 bullied my hand to accept it,
 woke me early,
 sent me out on the rutted dung road,
 when the mist had not yet risen.
 A child can but accept or die,
 will yet ungrown,
 a child can but accept or die,
 the apricots bloom, the short time of possibility,
 still unknown ...
 on the road to Sawagi.
 Tattered back, olive-drab wool, unwarmed legs,
 chill, all a chill,
 harbinger of a nameless tomorrow,
 stumbling the road,

all the world licking his back,
 years tumbled into a day, no time for the growing,
 move on says the wind,
 grudging even the thin *gallabiyya* from his frame.
 It's time for work! Time for the hammer!
 Small hands knotted, a timeless stump
 of tangled tree,
 years older, their mould.
 Pick up, put down, the hammer,
 and for a dream think ye of Joseph,
 of the only Book you're ever to 'know'.
 Joseph, the carpenter immortalized,
 and did the Book say of Joseph
 when he was twelve,
 did it say of life compressed into a hammer,
 synthesized into a day
 opening at 6.00 a.m. on the road to Luxor,
 closing at 6.00 p.m. on the same road back
 of dung and ruts?
 or was Joseph, 'Joseph',
 more than a backdrop to a play?
 Was he more than this child-man's existence?
 A thing made to carry others
 whose lives they would live and be,
 bent the back at twelve,
 fashioned the better to carry,
 its burden of history.
Ana Nagar, "I am a carpenter!",
 a carpenter am I ever to be,
 the hammer of the carpenter, my dimension,
 its function my definition,
 its mould my existence,
 what I am formed to Be.
 The mist has not yet risen,
 the apricots bloom unnoticed by me,

who was never made to Be,
who was made to be a carpenter ...
a hammer.

13

COPTIC CHRISTIANS

Seven a.m. – Coptic Mass, chants from the past and from Pharaoh before it. Coptic Egypt that in the 5th century burst into Pharaoh's Egypt of the 'Book of the Dead', defacing as it went, to be for centuries and to suffer defacement. Here centuries before Christ were built the granaries for the seven lean years of which Pharaoh dreamt and Joseph interpreted, Joseph sold to caravanners, Joseph of Potiphar's wife's attempted seduction; the wall of prediction and realization still visible. It is to this ancient Egyptian land that Mary and Joseph fled, seeking sanctuary for seven years. Further down the Nile, across from Aswan and into the mountain-like desert, Saint Stephen¹⁶ built his monastery, Coptic Christian art still faintly traceable beneath the Qur'an's 'Arabic, the later and stronger impression.

Two million Copts of Egypt, a priesthood now decadent. Christmas 1955: soldiers patrol the churches with their guns, inspectors move to the altar and back, a revolt is expected; the Pope had said: the churches will not open in protest; the Government had said: let the churches be open. A young Coptic group has initiated a power struggle against the hierarchy's luxurious encampment; the institution of *waqf* that administers accumulated land and wealth left by the naïve when dying,

rendering monasteries, once renunciation's retreat, a full growth of feudal power, enabling a 'rich' life (the sound of the word 'rich' befits its meaning).

Coptic clergy seminared in lovely Ma'adi, the essence of bourgeois suburbia, outside of a less genteel Cairo. Why should the priest then seek a village life of mud roads, mud houses, mud fields of planting, mud-encrusted clients?

The two priests sit before me, the cousins of Tatah, fingering their fetish (I feel like saying phallus) of black silk strands, knotted in leather at the top, tossed about as a warning to flies, caressed gently, flies an interruption to their amusement. On their heads, tall stove-pipe-like black silk hats; around their shoulders, black silk capes, an extravagance worn over warmer full-length black tunics; the well-cared for, the smooth, the ample, strifeless faces.

The taller and the fairer has a Circassian line of cheek-bone, followed by ears which rise to a point, complemented by a chin reaching down to form the other end of a harmonious diamond shape, unvirtuous in structure. He watches me in silent definite amusement. The shorter and darker possesses a wickedness, not born of a sure structured intent but the simple yielding conclusion of a mouldless weakness.

Annoyed that we have no girl servant to satisfy their various hungers, they turn to look around them for a cool drink, a cigarette, a laugh, a pat, a tussle. The half-educated school mistress of Christianity's God-teaching institution, awkward, willing, unsure, seems to sate their requirements (I dare not leave the room by too far).

The blonde muses over my white, blonde, considered naïve, self; a mocking begins to build up a tangible Shakespearian face in the air. "How do you live in this place? It offers no amenities. No, I cannot live here!"

(The last priest finally married the servant's daughter and fled this Christian-outraged village of Sawagi. They've not yet gotten over this impediment to Christianity's propagation.) "What do you think you can do with these people, they're ignorant and unwilling for advancement. A school at night, and who will their teachers be and how will they be paid? Organization of the social capital within the village? How long do you think that will last? Certainly not past your leaving!"

Samira, in the corner, looks ill, her short black hair that frames her wide, deep, hurt eyes, now pushes down making her face smaller, more crowded with its confusion. She believes, believes in the soul, believes it's important that the *fellahin*, accustomed as they are to command and threat, be treated differently; if their material lives are affected or not, it is important that they are dealt with in dignity that they may become fully 'human' and the proper descendants of an animal fused with soul and saved by Jesus' offering of himself; it is kindness that will wake the sleeping Divinity beneath the layers of mud.

Samira is of Asyut, Coptic Egypt's most proud city, the southern capital. Her father once a doctor; she now twenty-eight and divorced, charged with madness by a brother prone to racing cars, for she, and thus her share of the Doctor's wealth, now follows the Father who first delineated and documented the life of the inconsequential maker of all wealth, the *fellah*.¹⁷ When she sees Father Ayroust she is not confused, but when she is out on the Responsibles' Mission and encounters the enemy encamped within the very pulpit, her hair pushes down and smallens the believing face.

Father's book calls for Samira, her family and her kind, to be Responsibles. Father clings, insists that a Responsible élite leap the chasm between the forgotten

producers and the over-embellished non-functioning, yet potentially capable, élite, for Father has an insight unclosable that injustice stalks the land and no Jesus washes the people's feet. Below the insight is the unspeakable knowledge that someone will come to wash their feet, and in the washing the *fellahin* will push up through the lid now held above them, sprinkling to the far corners of retirement and exile the non-functioning élite. Should this happen, brought about by those whose definition proscribes a God, Father will live to decide: to stay and serve, admitting the justice of a people's demand for life, or to leave and curse with his mouth, the more loudly for the guilt he carries, for he is Responsible, he has seen, felt and understood and nowhere is there to hide his knowing, no veil to blind the glare of a society's inequity.

An unaccustomed Samira hesitantly speaks; her forehead straightens and pushes back into its proper place the line of her hair: "Do you not know the people are asking for nuns and priests? They want someone living here among them, they need it! We are here today, we have initiated what they have asked, a night school, yet it is true that we will leave. Their demand is for an unyielding one to come, suffer among them and remain. Hope and the will to change brought in a suitcase which knows it is leaving falls as glibness on their tired ears. You are both in Luxor and so close, you must serve them, at least their Christian needs for baptism, catechism, mass, confession and communion. This week is the feast and already they are asking if you will come to say the midnight mass!"

"Midnight mass and how shall we find our way here at night?" (Diogenes used a lantern). "It will be halfway to morning when mass is said and how will we return home to Luxor? No, it is too difficult, and unthinkable to remain here the night ... who will see to our needs?"

Samira tires, "But you must come, I'll fetch you in a carriage with a lantern! We will make this room available for you and prepare breakfast for you in the morning. How shall the people believe if you would fail them this, their day of sanctity."

Below in the courtyard the children break from the cold dark interior of a few windows shut against winter's cold that is named the Christian Day School to warm themselves in the sun. A courtyard not of laughing playing children but of children who know not how to play. They cling to the edges of the wall, to the mud-brick walls that are known, or walk, a stumble without feeling, bellies swollen, eyes bleared with trachoma. A semblance of black uniform covers the girls, a uniform of untidy depressed black. Their hair the appearance of a wig, knotted with dirt, uncombedness and fleas. The courtyard a walled-in earthen floor of no delights.

Into this forgotten courtyard of unenchantedness the Responsibles came, suitcases jumbling with unaccountable inadequacies, odds and ends of a more distant happy life: a ball, a rope, some pads, colour pencils, iodine, penicillin salve, cotton rolls, yarn to knit. Teach them how to play, put the end of a rope in their hands and teach them how to play, skip, skip, skip, but there is not the enthusiasm to skip. Skipping no interruption to the basically uninvolved: home to lunch, what's for lunch, back to school, stumbling unhealthiness come back to school, the small years in between when life is dulled for a few hours a day by authoritarian chanting, a teacher's slap, repeat, reply, formless sounds that are words.

This day I found a map, a partial map of the Middle East; the children were in awe, a new dimension which raised the unimaginative shade from their eyes. They looked, touched, asked: they had never seen a map ...

“and is it that the earth is round?” Our simplest concepts unknown.

Science: a prediction made by less noble priests, drawn from words of manna, power in their not understoodness: “Read over my child, she is ill! Read and save my child! It is the evil eye, the evil eye. She was too beautiful that the very gods resented her comeliness. And they would have me wash her face, exposing the beauty to the light, to the passer-by who would smile and in his praise condemn my child to be God’s rival, and he would smite her for it. Read over my child, read over her and break the evil spell!” Blue turquoise stones embedded in children’s ears, dangling from necks, encircling a finger, blue stones for protection against the ever-present evil eye. The mother dirties the handsome face of her son, protecting from a god’s jealousy her only hope for tomorrow.

Science: a girl is circumcised, the clitoris cut out by a barber’s knife, lest she in her warmth bring scandal to the family. Science: last night a ghost danced through the village, recognized as the warmly-moulded girl put to death for her dishonour of knowing man. Christians, where is Christianity? Do you not know of Mary Magdalene, do you not know of Christ’s command ‘the first without sin cast a stone?’ Are you Christians? “But what can we do, if we did not kill her we would suffer our honour, suffer the jeers of men, would that Jesus would command them not to jeer, but what could we do?”

Science: when this plump awkward girl is taken in ignorance to a bed of her husband’s unrestricted appetite; after the time of masturbation and the donkey’s rectum who can hold back the violent blood of desire towards what is both available and accepted as religiously, socially, legally, rightfully his. (Some men are jealous of their donkeys, possessive lest someone else alienate the

services of an accustomed rectum.) The handkerchief is prepared waiting for the blood, no room for a feeling patience, no time for humanism. The mother of the girl, fearful lest her daughter be turned out in the night if the hymen has been broken by hard labour, prepares a chicken and a sure knife. The head shall swiftly be cut, the blood trickling down to bring back honour to the cloth. The cloth of the blood of demand and payment shall be waved to the waiting crowd; each man shall cheer and women trill the sound of women — *zaghalit*, the sound deep in the throat occasioning the pain, the sorrow, the duty, the fulfilment of her self — deep in the throat, blood of yesterday rawly taken adds its taste to the tone. Where is science ... the liberation of a nation hardly begun.

Everywhere are the stories, the quotations from the Bible, and everywhere the false pride and erroneous evaluation: 'We are Christians, in Christ we are saved, we are not the unenlightened Muslims, no two wives have we.' Superstition, ignorance, poverty, the horizontal division; vertically a difference in verbalization: from the Bible, from the Qur'an. Poor 'Isa, poor Muhammad, long since have your messages been modified to fit their containers, absorbed by a more ancient poverty and ignorance, amalgamated with chants, beliefs carried from Pharaoh. (In the cold night I read by lantern, exposing one hand, then the other, to hold the book, Silone's *Bread and Wine* of Southern Italy, and it is of Sawagi. Where are national differences; culture rests lightly, comprehended by the closed circle of the non-functioning élite; the base providing it succulence differs not one from the other, Southern Italy and Southern Egypt join hands in the evil eye.)

In Cairo, these people of the southern half of the long spreading strip of green are pejoratively designated

'Saidis' and are thought of as stubborn, aggressive and unenlightened. The language differs slightly to add a rational proof, if circumstantial, to the face-saving differential: *uli*: 'speak' of Northern Egypt becoming *guli* in Southern Egypt; but pronounced with an 'u' or with a harder 'g' the word is the same. Yet Cairo differentiates, and Christians speak of being subjected to Islam of unenlightenment. But there is a difference! In the Muslim village it is the Shaykh who is called upon to cast and break spells of the evil eye! And when the bread is laid out to bake in the sun, its edges are marked by crescents, while in Sawagi it is the cross. Differences apparent, documented by the prejudiced, while horizontally sweeps exploitation and vertically superstition speaks varyingly the words of Jesus or Muhammad.

14

NASSER, TAKE MY HAND

*t*each them how to write!
Alif, bey, tey, they learn by lantern, smeared streaks pushing through glass dirtied with accumulated oil, now unnoticed. Age speaks in a continuum, anxious, unknowing in every stage, *alif, bey, tey*, 'and is it that the earth is round?'

You watch, expecting the world, symbolized in writing now accomplished, to tumble out of unaccustomed mouths when at last they will read and you will hear one magnificent word: *Watan*: 'Nation'. They speak a word, you hear a word, another universe unknown. Dare you ask, is it possible? You ask: *Watan*: 'Nation', 'country': *Misr* – 'Egypt', blank eyes stare. You face it: "What other 'nations' 'countries' are there that speak 'Arabic as you do?" They answer: "Luxor ... Aswan ... Cairo ... Alexandria", cities foreign to themselves, outside of Sawagi, their world, their loyalty. Today Nasser blares and pounds his fist from loudspeakers. In Luxor all people stand and wait, a message directed at them, including them, demanding their participation, *Ash-Sha'b*: 'the people'; *Hizb*: 'party'; *Dustur*: 'constitution'. Constitution!

Alif, bey, tey ... *Watan*: 'nation'. His eyes are bare, meaningless consonants, aesthetic in line, vowels no

more than dashes above and below, read together forming sound, no vehicle of idea.

Ya Rais! Ya Nasser! Come to school with me! Take my hand and follow the sandalled nun climbing the windswept, white burned slopes to reach your people, off rail and road. If you would say Sawagi, Christian and unrepresentative in awareness, then another village, half and half, and we shall seek the Muslim half. I am hot on the scent, I plunge, down, lowest way down. Choose the young, the old, the in between with life on his tail. "Who is 'Nasser'?" A middling boy replies: "I saw him yesterday, he came through the village riding a bicycle!" I faint, I reel, impossible! "Who is *ar-Rais*?" Who is your — Misr's — Egypt's leader? A man old and thoughtful, a glimmer of proud history in the submerged part of his eye — back, back, behind the bleary years of today — speaks out bold with strength gained from his words: "Sa'd Zaghlul" ... "Sa'd Zaghlul"! All my heart gives way and mutters: *mafesh fida*, "it's no use", so said Sa'd Zaghlul of the 'Wafd', the 'delegation' formed to negotiate with the British; in 1924, Britain's Labour Party still committed to the anachronism of empire. Had I looked on and in, deeper into this obscurity, I might have found another dream of yesterday unrealized. Ahmad 'Arabi of the 1880s, brown, too, was he, engaged in reclaiming a nation for these then distant eyes.

Nasser, take my hand! It's no shame, those are proud days he remembers, days of baby steps, the image for your sudden, outstripping manhood. It is no shame ...

'I will protect them from vultures'; but the 'vulture' is within, strangling from within, communications grasped, imprisoned, drowned from within. Break this structure! Turn Egypt, as the mother shakes out the sheets, turns over, kneads the mattress, sweeps clean, rolls the sleeping mat, throws out the unpalatable decay-

ing remains. Nasser! Shake off the yesterdays of strange magnificent beginnings and sad defeats, a nation quelled. Go to the *baladi*, to the villager, to the people of night drawn over day, night's drowsy helplessness somnambulates through day's labour, smears all their comings and goings with unawareness.

Reach out! Not with paid servants, bureaucratic remnants, who spoke, speak, acted and act on paid-for directions. Send out the releasing word: IDEOLOGY: a blueprint for a nation, to wring its heart in belief. We suffer now, would that you would give us that worthy to be suffered for. Give us the flame; dry, parched, worn are we, nourished from sapless roots, hiding in the sugarcane from government agents implementing from above. Give us what is truly ours; Napoleonic Code of 'justice' French and foreign, outside our Egyptian value system, tied in knots deep, deepest entrails within. Plant your seed, as the architect of China of the Tao built as not to shake and shock its particular landscape. Give us a comprehensive melody, our life-pattern embodied. Foreign growth, cancerous growth, ugly goitrous growth, obscene! Give us a folk symphony. We are Egyptian, your first fact. Analyze what an Egyptian is made to be, what is our description, our stature, our mode, our way? If we moved as French, we would be French. If we moved as English, we would be English. If we moved as Americans, we would be American! Why then call us Egyptian, if Egyptian we cannot be? Oh, Nasser, come and see! See us, a totality, a totality ever to be. Know us, a totality, plan us a totality.

We are the aged man who reminisces yesterday into today, and you are Sa'd Zaghlul! We are the boy who saw you riding a bicycle, and you are a *fellah* unknown. Curse the foreigner who would allow you to know not, or knowing, be not a proud man; who would make you to

crumble, if taste, eat, digest you would this truth. To hell with the foreigner! The play has run long enough! Down the curtain! Close the comings and goings! Come, look and see! Build us a real, whole, Egyptian tomorrow. No piecemeal, patch-it-quickly that it will not meet the foreign blue eyes. Shame not us, your family! Act not the prodigal: weave not a golden blanket to cover our mud, mud still remaining in our pores, imbued through all our openings. Come, Nasser! Down into the mud! Let its recognition, its cover, be your impregnable armour, and go, do battle for our place in the green — the green — thickest green — of productivity's life. We wish to roll in the green; we wish the growing sound of industry in our ears; we wish to conquer the mud, the disease, the cheating in the night. Come, organize that we, too, may be 'virtuous'. 'Virtue', a generosity of the well-off, the generous ingenuous pretenders of Right. Property, respect their property — and they respect that we have none — will solidify into *status quo* that we have none, and they build their code, religious and civil, upon it. 'A man's castle is his home', a mud square is no castle, is no home. Nasser, come walk with me, it has been so since all eternity: 'Rich man — poor man — beggar man — thief — doctor — lawyer — Injun chief'. Rip off the cruel buttons and 'set my people free'!

Nasser, take my hand

15

'ONE NILE — ONE PEOPLE — ONE NATION'

The interminable Nile in all its river greatness, a sluggishly ploughing giant ejecting its virility into a less potent land which expands to accept it, to conceive and to yield from Nile's flow, to revert to sterility with Nile's withdrawal. Nile's flood, fertility's renewal, 5000 years of agricultural continuity. The Nile, called 'White' when it leaves Lake Victoria in Uganda, called 'Blue' when it flows out of Abyssinia (Ethiopia), joins at Khartoum in Sudan to be the one great Nile. Nile of many visions of colour, tenor, and texture, sprawls its now calm and green, now violent and mud-brown self, to ease itself in violent gushes of brownness, into a filtered blue, now green, Mediterranean Sea at Rosette in Egypt.

To prove its invincibility and superiority over all other great rivers, and edge on all lesser rivers, Nile flows northwards, flows upwards, through Uganda, Abyssinia, and the Sudan, to finally infiltrate a waiting Egypt; as the Nile flows northwards, the north is the land lower down the Nile and is called 'Lower Egypt', and southern Egypt, which first encounters Nile's impact as it vacates the Sudan, is therefore — by token of Nile's upside-downness — 'Upper Egypt'.

In 'Upper', southern Egypt, the Nile is narrowly encased within low ridges, running parallel to its sides,

with but a slice of land before the ridges ascend to benefit from Nile's plentiful silt excrement, relieved from the body each year in August, in the time of unbearable swollenness.

In Egypt of no precipitates from a heaven above, the Nile is the base of all that would live in the land; power of an annual unceasing genesis lies within it and the capacity for a fierce apocalyptic day of judgment should the river withhold, or even lessen, its seasonal flood onto the dry lifeless sand, now watered and called earth. In the recesses of the mind of Egypt is this unspeakable knowledge and a concomitant raw piercing terror, absolute and irrevocable, of dependence on the Nile, the giver of all existence, if not the definer of being; a never to be verbalized fear of the perishing of a nation should God on a rampage, or man bent on his last cruel infliction, alter its flow.

In the time of Pharaoh, the nation once a year made manifest its comprehension of infinite contingency and offered to god Nile the most fair of the maidens in the land; Nile, being the harbinger of violent eruptive energy and the sperm of life, was certainly masculine. Having amply catered to and subdued Nile's appetite, the people could rest in the knowledge that unfulfilled wants would not make Nile to walk upon the land in jealousy or unappeased hunger, ravishing all for its fulfilment, or make it to turn in defiance to other more distant lands, seeking male satisfaction.

'Civilized' Egypt finding human sacrifice repugnant, but ancient truth and terror still the underlying reality, now offers an image of a girl in the time of flood and festival, symbolically acknowledging, if in a jocular gesture, the power of the Nile for unequalled good, unaccountable abundance, and unparalleled evil, inconceivable abandon.

In the recesses of the mind, contingency brings a taste of the essence of terror; though deeply subconscious, it can be evoked to conscious awareness by but wisps of incidents, by but a thin hair of intention blown across the Egyptian brow, by but the barest, almost imperceptible of indications that one would think, even consider, to tamper with god Nile.

Stretching between this Nile Valley, in the silt-laden waters of this river, lay the focus of struggle incarnate: a northern land deemed Egypt, and a southern extension deemed the land of the 'Black' — the *Aswadu* — the Sudanese. The differentiation was bridged by Islam's brotherhood of no distinction of colour in a believer's bowing head. Reaching itself across from 'Arabiyya, spreading its One God Qur'anic conception, it spilled onto and immersed Coptic Egypt, and from this base it carried its dynamic self southward to the Sudan, there suddenly to end, leaving one-third of the Sudan's population, three million people of the deepest south, of an unmixed black purity and a non-Islamic belief.

'Arabic, the language of the 'eternal and uncreated' Qur'an, was not separable from the belief, for here it was that the concept had its non-rationally understood power, in a Book's language, whose construction, rhythm, and tone, was the essence of beauty, the incarnate 'form' of beauty known before only in a heaven high above, inconceivable to have been created, imitated by man, a work of the very God, yet outside of God, existing firm and fast, a law unto itself, a non-contingency, 'eternal' 'uncreated', beauty and truth. Translation sheds the Qur'an of its inconceivability, robs it of its power and renders it for discussion as a book amongst books (if amongst the most 'holy' of books). 'Arabic the carrier of this transcendency, the container of the 'form' of beauty, lodged itself across the Nile, holding the hands in sub-

mission to Allah¹⁸ of the Egyptian and the 'Black' — the *Aswadu* — and the Nile, a river system entity, was given a religious-ethical-cultural-linguistic and human inseparability.

The three million 'Blacks' of the south were 'protected' from further Islamic penetration with the coming of the British, but carriers of a Western Christianity proselytized, further dividing the land of the *Aswadu*.

In Abyssinia — now called Ethiopia — the Coptic Christian church remained, and Christianity involved political implications in a non-Christian Afro-Asia now pivoting itself against Western economic interests and Western culture, giving to these people, despite their geographical or interest position, a portion of themselves identified with a Europe far to the north. Haile Selassie of American alignment proves to the African the possible consequence of Christian conversion. This same Coptic Church reaches over the in-between Sudan to claim two million Copts in Egypt, a remnant still retained of Egypt's unequalled historical legacy, of a layer behind Islamic culture.

Unity of the Nile Valley, limited in hope's definition to Egypt and the Sudan, and a continuity of living a shared Islamic religion,¹⁹ of speaking through 'Arabic its language, of participating in its wide and rich Islamic-'Arabic culture, and negatively of having experienced a common imperialism of Britain which once had brought a common colonial administration, led to the reflective call:

Wahid Nail – Wahid Sha'b – Wahid Watan!
 'One Nile – One People – One Nation!'

On November 19, 1924, the British Sirdar — Commander-in-Chief — of the Egyptian Army and

Governor-General of the Sudan, Sir Lee Stack, was the choice for political murder. Lord Allenby, then His Majesty's High Commissioner, in all the fury of a woman, retaliated, as no man or God ever must, threatening a nation with its life! In a letter of the moment to the 'Egyptian' government, he demanded retribution, and pronounced that from this day forward the cotton acreage now irrigated in the Gezira district of the Sudan would no longer be confined to what was then the established maximum: the water that the Sudan would withdraw each year from the Nile would be increased; as formidable a threat as the atom bomb on Hiroshima!

The terror, lurking always in the people's lower strata, was violently made conscious and carnate. The threat of threats ... 'and on that day He shall make the rivers to run dry' ... was decreed, read, and realized. That the Labour Government of Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald had not sanctioned Allenby's reprisal, that no mention of this clause was made in the final text of the ultimatum stemming from London, was irrelevant Egypt had been so threatened.²⁰

In the neural traces of the Egyptian nation is this lesson of 1924, when the reality of their final contingency was articulated and brought to full consciousness: the real threat to their existence should any hostile power have control of the Sudan,²¹ control of Nile's waters before they reach Egypt, and consequently a latent control over their very lives.

Through the following years of negotiation and rallying for Egyptian freedom, the British reserved to themselves four powers, one of which was always the authority over the Sudan, and thus the contingency remained, lurking behind what was called 'self-government'. The Nile Valley either had a mutual freedom or Egypt lay potentially subject! This knowledge

led the Egyptian politician, struggling for actual independence, often to take positions which the uninitiated might deem 'imperialistic'.²²

It was not until the coming of the coup government in 1952 that the Sudan's equal right to self-determination was recognized. But within this recognition, yea, what allowed for this recognition, was the firm conviction that self-determination would not bring the Sudan into a further liaison with Britain, if only for considerations of political expediency. Accordingly, recognition of this principle would 'liberate' the southern half of the Nile entity from a colonialism now being pushed out of the north. There was the assured belief that in freedom the Sudan would not choose, but recognize the fact of its forming an integral part of the Nile Valley and would stand fast for union with Egypt. The contingency on water, while nevertheless existent, would not then be wielded by a hostile power as a political weapon over Egypt's now bucking head.

As the years moved onwards past 1924 the threat lay dormant until 1942 and another time of crisis. As Rommel pushed his way across North Africa heading for Cairo, he built a stature of fear which struck deep into the inners of the occupying power. Egyptians saw the 'invincible' — the white — the Britisher finally out of his self-assured control, saw the invincible of yesterday tremble and lay hasty plans for a strategic withdrawal.

To withdraw, as in Malaya and Burma, meant to render a country useless to the victor. In Burma it had meant the destruction of all vital communications: bridges, roads and rail. In Egypt, what could render it less a prize than the blowing up of the dams that held back, preserved, and allowed for Nile's controlled utilization through an elaborate irrigation system.

As told to me by a 'Second Line Free Officer': "Dynamite was in readiness, Egypt would be made a mud-field, put under water that even a Rommel's military astuteness could not have dried out!" Muhammad, the Free Officer, told of his reaction: "We in the army had to sit by and watch! In my mind was the thought of Egypt put under water!"²³ Cairo a city of mud that would not dry out! Our commanding officers would do nothing in the face of these plans should British withdrawal become necessary, and many of us, far junior officers, spoke of a *coup d'état* should it be final that the British were withdrawing!" Black sharp eyes pierced and hurt me with their intentioned fury of outraged humanity.

In the last lap of an empire's collapse, Montgomery was put in charge, plans for evacuation were destroyed, the radio was not to be listened to, anyone who mentioned Rommel's name would be charged. "The atmosphere changed, and Egypt was saved from the everlasting mud ... but who can forget that *they* planned it, would have carried out the destruction had the necessity been there! Why did we finally make a *coup d'état* ... to bring control of Egypt back to Egypt!"

In the time of Neguib, of the Sudanese mother, the slogan *Wahid Nail — Wahid Sha'b — Wahid Umma*: 'One Nile — One People — One Nation', rang as in victory: self-determination would surely recognize what was already true in the mixing of the blood, what was heard in the 'Arabic of the tongue, what was felt in the mutual bowing of the heads, what was seen in the blending of the colours ... *Wahid Sha'b!*

To Cairo, came the tall men of the large, white, wound-round turbans, and Cairo's hospitals offered them medical care. Delegations of Free Officers moved through the Sudan to preview the possibly rebellious, possibly open to instigation or provocation from outside,

south of three million non-Muslims, Islamic culture unshared.

With Union, Egypt would gain security, for it was in the Sudan where the waters could be turned off; Egypt would offer the Sudan teachers, doctors and technicians; an Egyptian population now in a density per square mile²⁴ unequalled the world over, would have space to move in; the Sudan would gain power through Union, impossible alone; and Egypt's southern flank would no longer be exposed ... *Wahid! Wahid! Wahid!*, One! One! One! ... and it seemed done.

Mena News Agency of Cairo opened a branch office in Khartoum, initially subsidized by Major Salah Salem's Ministry of National Guidance, and through Mena's channels news flowed, part for the public's consumption, part for the exclusive perusal of Salah Salem.

Major Salah Salem of dark glasses, of sensual movements, of colloquial harangues, of dancing in his shorts with Sudanese tribesmen, made *Life Magazine* with his 'unorthodox' diplomatic coup. The British in Cairo, long unphotographed at the practice of outward assimilation, objected: "It wasn't cricket!"

But this was Egypt of Neguib, of the Sudanese mother out in front! Mohammed Neguib journeyed southwards against the current of the Nile. The black Nubians, administratively shared by Egypt and the Sudan, were seen and considered after what had been a long lapse of attention; a hospital boat to visit these scattered and forgotten Nubian outposts was one tangible result of Neguib's seeing. In the Sudan, he was raised high on their heads! There in Khartoum at Gordon College, the place of former insult, was he now triumphant!²⁵

Into this unchecked blaze of unity, came February 1954, and the struggle for power, Nasser's initial victory and Neguib's losing. The Sudanese in delegation came

and bargained for Neguib's life, for the son of the Sudanese mother: 'If you don't want him, release him, and we shall make him our first President', it was said. Neguib's life was granted, released. October 1954 brought Neguib's open and final dethronement and subsequently his journey to Marg, further up the Nile, there to remain a prisoner of the house.

Two years had passed since the coming of the coup; Egypt continued to languish under an authoritarian structure, a military coup government, long broken from the people, gaining its support and therefore having rapport with sections of the military, civilians openly discounted. 'Egyptians have a short memory', it was said.

Soekarno of Indonesia came to Egypt and at a banquet given by the Free Officers in July 1955, his voice rang out, a strong echo of the Egyptian people: "I would agree with Lord Acton that the only preparation for democracy is the practice of democracy."²⁶ Bold the man who said those words in a camp which thought democracy a tool of the foreigner — a structure with spaces in between for collaboration, for bribery, for corruption — a channel for a class entrenched. In Khartoum, on the floor of the Sudan's Parliament, a Deputy stood amongst cheers and echoed Acton's words as related by Soekarno. Acton's, Soekarno's and the Sudan's condemnation was carried from Khartoum to Cairo by Mena News, not in its public bulletin but in its repressed news section, sent straight to the office of the Minister for National Guidance and 'Arab and Sudanese Affairs where it was read, if not understood, by Major Salah Salem.

Nasser had spoken of the coming to Egypt of freedom and Parliament after a three-year transitional period, but the coup government had come in 1952 and this was August 1955. Despite the proposed 'Constitution', or in lieu of the 'Constitution', Egypt

was seen as stifled by dictatorship, and in the Sudan, man had the potential to be free to seek his own formulation.²⁷

In August 1955, Salah Salem frequented his office till the wee hours, trying to contain what had burst. Egypt was to 'lose' the Sudan, and the people murmured that even the useless Farouk had not 'lost' the Sudan. Salah Salem, for himself, rather than for his 'loss', was held in a people's contempt; on this occasion he was dropped, as Nasser took Sudanese Affairs into his own, more sure, hands. Salah Salem who had 'failed', the scapegoat removed; but even the people, in all their nausea at his romping behaviour feigning to guide them, did not at all imagine that his decision on Sudanese Affairs, or his lack of decision, was autonomous from the consent, if not the initiation, of the Council of the Revolution that met on Wednesdays late into the night.

The Sudan was 'lost' ... but somehow, in Cairo's cafés the critics admitted that if they were Sudanese they would not have chosen otherwise, though some did argue that the Sudan, in all its freedom, should have merged itself with Egypt of dictatorship, the better to break it, a touch of freedom being a strong virus, while others opined that the Sudan should openly have bargained: Union for Egypt's political freedom!²⁸

In the south of Egypt, beyond Aswan where the first cataract of the Nile blocks a continuous passage, where the steamer can be boarded going south to the Sudan, is the memory of the 'underground' waterway of those escaping out to freedom in the time of repression: Muslim Ikhwanis — Communists — Socialists — Liberals — Democrats — all those who disagreed, and the black Sudanese men running the steamer knew how they would vote when self-determination finally came.

Salah Salem, brother of Wing Commander Gamal Salem, then Deputy Premier, talked of the coinciding of tragic incidents in the Sudan for which he was 'erroneously' held responsible and therefore the Sudan's vote against Union with Egypt, and thus his stepping down, for at that particular time he was noxious to the people of Khartoum. The writer then posited that assuming his reasons for stepping down as head of Sudanese Affairs were as he stated, why would he then also have stepped down or been stepped down from the Council of the Revolution and made to forfeit his right to vote on the overall internal and external policy for Egypt? He slowly smiled and drawled: "You don't accept what I say?" I answered: "No, I can't!"

The two interviews came at a time when Salah had just emerged from approximately six months of political isolation and was well into developing a new daily paper: *Ash-Sha'b*, 'The People'. Finally, if the character of Salah Salem was as it was portrayed during his period of power — "we could have killed him" vis-à-vis Neguib — it had mellowed considerably with the absence of power, for he was controlled, deliberate, and as specific as could be expected in his replies.



16

HIEROGLYPHICS AND THE HIGH DAM

*i*n Aswan, winter still persists; after a night's long chill, you rush out into the morning sun to make your blood flow warm again. Sleepy hollow Aswan, winter making the ever present Egyptian sun enjoyable. Outside of my small wrought-iron balcony of the modest Grand Hotel, the *falugas*, the small sailing-boats, assemble awaiting the tourists; the Nubian boatmen or their young sons chant melodies in a language unknown, tone and sound distinct from 'Arabic.

The first cataract unfolds, the Nile is now green, now blue, and clear as crystal; a series of black rocks of smoothed indentations, roundnesses, and corners, a modern sculpture's endless workshop, the black boulders clustered together, huddles of infinity. On a well-smoothed side, hieroglyphics of Pharaoh rise up to twenty feet out of the water; what does it say of the power of old, of the glory of these people?

Are these people, now inhabiting the wind-swept and sterile hills protruding upwards from either side of the Nile, the descendants of culture and empire before Europe left barbarism?²⁹ They would tell you so ... faces well-chiselled and unadulterated in an exquisite black.

Kitchener's Island exists in the middle of the Nile, now rounded like a lake; there is a garden, a museum,

and further along, the village of the Nubians who row the boats, or serve on the other side, or who journey north in search of work as servants or *bawwabs*, leaving their women behind them, to attend to the patch of land, if there be any, or to see to the palm, if it still yields. You will see these women along the shore, drawing lines in pure sand, carrying damp leaves, water and husks to fertilize, wet and protect a watermelon seed pushed determinedly into sand! Under constant care in later afternoon hours, this too will contribute to life!

South of Aswan, stretching about 300 miles to reach Wadi Halfa, the first city as you enter the Sudan, the lonely Nubian villages, outposts of a forgotten humanity, built into the shale ridges on either side of the river, periodically appear, and strange it is that before the protruding land and their mud houses (resembling the adobe), still within the river's wash, standing in two, three, or four feet of water, are the palm trees in silent clusters; a woman and boy row out to reach them, to ascend and bring down their yield. Settlements of waiting for the men to return once a year; barren hills of no vegetation, barren women awaiting impregnation. The male will come, empty his seed, and return to Cairo to work earning four to eight Egyptian pounds a month, of which a pound or two will be sent back each month to the woman who now carries the fertilized seed in her expanding womb, alone to wait and bear and care; yet do they persist, shadowy movements on either bank, as the Nile steamer moves south to Wadi Halfa.

The palms standing in water attest to yesterday's injustice, in the year 1902 when the British colonial authorities built the Aswan Dam — then called the 'High Dam' — its 176½-foot wall controlling Nile's flow into Egypt and pushing back high and wide the water behind it. The land of the Nubians was immersed as the silent

persistent palms still tell, standing as evidence unquestionable, should a now sovereign Egyptian government ever care to investigate the disinheritance of ninety thousand Nubian people by the former occupying power's order. In that year, a portion of the Nubians were moved to other lands to escape the man-made flood; the other lands were wet with rain and the majority of these evacuees died as they had never known rain.

The Dam brought control of the Nile, the opening of new lands to irrigation, and immeasurable good to many of the citizens of Egypt, but these Nubians, shared by the administrations of Egypt and the Sudan, ruled by Britain, caught in the Dam's backwash, still have not benefited. Had the Dam been electrified in the years of its construction, it could have supplied not only stored water, but energy to the area from which electrification and at least some light industry might have flowed, and the Nubian, having sacrificed his shale lands and palms to the rising water, could have participated in the fruits thereof. But electrification, possible years ago and requiring much less than the £E 27,500,000/- (USD 78,950,000/-) needed in the 1950s, waited or failed in ill-advised schemes, and the Nubian people rowed out to their palms, which had taken twenty years to mature, took of their fruit, and persisted.

Egypt, now a sovereign power, government now attempting betterment of its people, has initiated electrification. At night, you could drive high up to reach the Dam and there under hundreds of lights, work never ceased. Large tunnels were being drilled out of the rocks. Seven turbines, each capable of producing 46,000 kilowatts per hour, plus a fertilizer factory to produce 370,000 tons per annum, are to result. Our car drove halfway into one tunnel, the still unfinished sides oozing a dampness; it was dark, a strange underground through

which power would pass and energy be transmitted far to the north. It was still incomplete, but it was good! It smelled of the possibilities of tomorrow! Lights would spread from this place far northward, illuminating villages now drenched in unbroken night; a people accustomed to retreating into themselves and to the bodies of each other in the dark of mud houses, would soon be able to read, work or be merry, in the new-found light! The population growth could be tapered off, as new diversions from the black quiet solitude of a village at night become possible. This area, now existing on Nile trade and the sun-seeking tourists of the winter, would have power to industrialize what there is — and God knows there is little enough — here where the land paralleling the Nile becomes but a very narrow strip, held back from expansion by shaly ridges and sand beyond.

In this winter of 1956, Aswan was abuzz with the future. South of Aswan on the rising black rocks, like a low-flung mountain, white vertical lines had been firmly painted. The white painted lines, Nasser's coup government had made the focal point of Egypt's long-term development. Here in the deeper waters of the Aswan Dam's backwash, forming a naturally contained reservoir, was to be built the new High Dam — the Kalabsha Dam — which would hold back enough silt-thick water or Egypt's 'earth', now wastefully dumped into the Mediterranean Sea each year, to form a man-made lake as far as 300 miles behind it, a lake reaching down into Wadi Halfa in the Sudan.³⁰ The stored water would allow for the increased cultivation of two million acres, or a one-third increase in the land presently capable of irrigation and cultivation!

Pressing, pushing Nasser from behind was this one way out, in a land where raw materials, other than what can be grown of the Nile, are still to be discovered.³¹

Nourished solely of that land — approximately 6 million acres — is a population of 22 million, a population now having a net annual income — after the deduction of rent — of £E 25/- (about USD 71/-), with 30 per cent disguised unemployment,³² a population which will double in twenty years, and here in the blockage of waste was a potential one-third increase in cultivable land. And within Nasser's very nerve centre was the untalked about truth that as low as living standards may now be, they will go lower with each babe that screams anew; to retain the current standard of consumption of those bogged in the mud, the land cultivated or its productivity must also be doubled in twenty years! Even this High Dam, now drawn in determination as white lines on black rock, even this 'magnificent obsession' would not necessarily increase consumption, for on its completion in ten years a 50 per cent increase in population would be waiting open mouthed to use this 33 per cent increase in land, to earn less than £E 25/- per year?

The Dam must be! The Dam *shall* be, his jawline set to do battle!



'a

"Of course, the Sudan is prepared to accept a sum of money as compensation and to move us south, but what about us? How are we to be compensated? Who will pay us for our palms which take twenty years to mature and give our people a yield each and every year? We must be paid for every tree!

"But the Sudanese Government will not compensate us out of the money Egypt might agree to pay. They will take that money and use it for their own development fund! The Egyptian Government must deal directly with us."

Colonel Said Hakim, an Egyptian Intelligence Officer on visa to the Sudan, interrupted: "Egypt is a

separate sovereignty; you fall under the sovereignty of the Sudanese Government. Egypt can only deal with this sovereign Sudanese Government, it cannot deal directly with a group of people living within the boundaries of this sovereign state; that is impossible! It is the Sudan which is responsible to argue your claim; we cannot accept your representations and come to agreement directly with you."

'Ali listened, listened to this last word on what he as a schoolmaster already knew to be true, but a people's necessity was beyond the law and would be met inside or outside that law.

"You say the Sudan has sovereignty over my people. If it is a question of sovereignty, I'll tell you frankly that if this issue is forced against our will, we will as our final stand declare ourselves to be Nubians, recognizing neither the sovereignty of the Sudan nor of Egypt! Our final position is: WE ARE NUBIANS!"

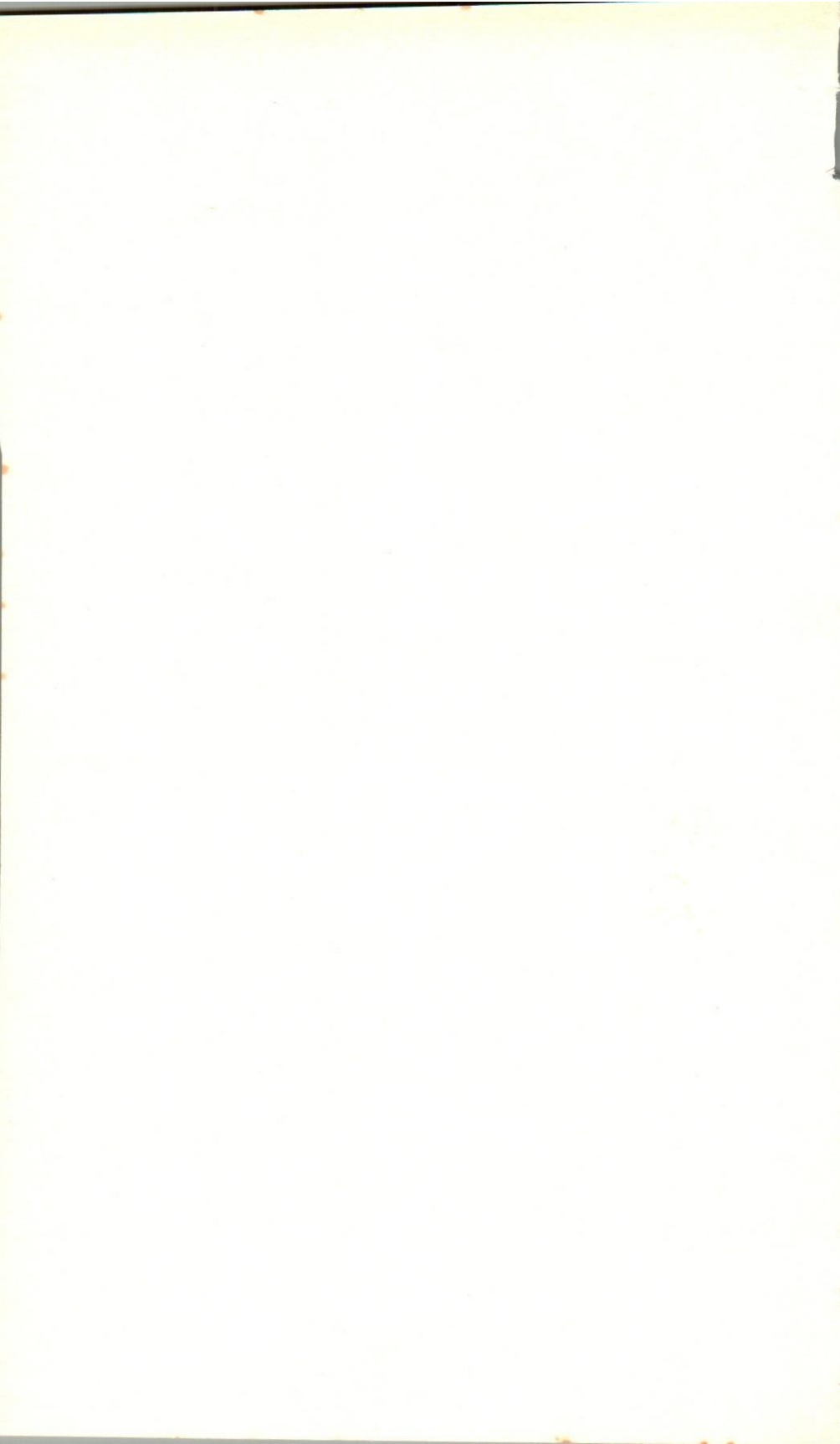
Silence followed this Nubian declaration of independence. True were their claims to life, true also the claim of more than twenty million Egyptians to a better life, to a one-third increase in their cultivable land. True that the Nubians must be compensated; true also that Egypt could not negotiate with them directly.

'Ali picked up again the thread of trained argument. "The Sudanese Government intends to move us to the south. The Egyptian Government intends to move its Nubian population to the north; in this southward and northward movement to escape the flood, my people will be finally divided! We cannot accept this!

"You may say the banks we inhabit are unproductive, but they have been the home of my people! We are a 'people', you know, ethnically separate, with our own language, a language now unwritten but written in Greek characters until the 16th century. My people

largely do not know 'Arabic, it is a foreign tongue; yes, we are a 'people' and before we will be dispersed, divided and resettled in other lands, other climates, we will declare we are Nubians! And demand self-determination!"

'Ali's mind wandered — associating nationalities — "Do you know Dr. Black? He came to see us a few months back; he is very sympathetic to our position, he gave us a book on TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority)!"³³



Morning in Cairo, winter still persists. Shakur hurries me through the train station, rattling words of certainty in my ear: "Kafir Saqr ('Place of the Vultures'), it's my village, they'll take care of you. Look for Muhammad, he'll be waiting at the station; he's tall, rather beautiful and brown; now here's the car! The conductor will tell you when you arrive."

The car was narrow and empty, the glass dirtied. Shakur possessively put me in and slid the door shut; I smiled, still uncertain. How strange it would be to see where Shakur began, where all my university friends began, in traditional villages.

Shakur is of a landlord family, a family which left Syria behind generations ago and are now Egyptians. His father, a feudal lord in his seventies, still consumed with bitter power; seven wives did he have, one succeeding the other, leaving brothers of different mothers to struggle to insure their share of the wealth, for in death, before the justice and security of Islamic law can operate providing for each his rightful inheritance, a man who is old and bitter with pure power can give away his assets.

When the coup government came to power, Shakur's father duly took his accumulated wealth from Banque Misr and placed it deep beneath the floorboards. Was it still beneath the floorboards, wondered Shakur and all of the mothers not living. Land reform reached out

and took of the father's power, leaving him 200 acres and 50 for each of two sons, but which of two sons?

Shakur threatened by a feudalist's power, understood the *fellah* and felt sympathy, he too was absolutely dependent. The father made much of his land over to various names and had them sign supposed debts through which he would retain his hold on the illicit land. Shakur knew that the father would easily do the same to the sons, and give their false receipts of money assumed to have been given as their share of the wealth, their inheritance, pieces of paper untrue.

Shakur now felt more akin to Muhammad who'd done his father's bidding for years, a member of the *petit bourgeoisie* necessary to deal in small transactions to keep all well between himself and his finances. Muhammad's father was the *Umda*, or headman of the village, by the grace of Shakur's father; the people still had not gained control, and the *umda* was the *umda* of the strongest landlord.

Muhammad would be waiting at the station! The getting on and getting off the train was the story of Egypt, modern and old, alpha to omega

19

THE HEADLESS CARTS

*i*t's night in Cairo. Across the bridge the pushing noise, the pulling noise of carts, carts and bells, small bells, a lullaby for their master as he lies asleep, a Brahms for the child slung below in burlap, his curved bottom missing the street pavement by less than a foot. The boy sleeps hung below the carriage's bottom, as all the family and its wealth trods into Cairo's streets at night.

The bells, the bells announcing reality's arrival only at night. By day the streets a prohibited area, reserved for the modern urban Egyptian, his urban business and his urban transportation, but at night Egypt's non-modern, non-urban, transportation of millenniums, floods day's prohibited streets to leave its produce, vegetables, food for the modern while they lie sleeping, and then silently steal away. On waking, Cairo's city finds all back to normal; the headless carts retreat before the full burst of dawn.

Carts, pulled deliberately, responsibly, by their *gamousas*; the water buffaloes know the way of produce and sale, supply and demand, village and city, broken cultural continuum; the animals know the way, conditioned as Pavlov's dog, and the master sleeps, now across the tied bundles on top, now sitting erect, his head wrapped in cloth from the night's chill, a figure of obscurity sitting asleep, and the bells tinkle.

Slowly, slowly, the bells are joined by more bells as a caravan builds up, stringing Cairo in an unsung, unheard, choir: food we bring, our master asleep; food we bring, it is night; food we bring, our boy hung low beneath; food we bring to forbidden streets!

Directionless, directionful carts carrying what is rich and good and healthful from the village to Cairo; all things flow to Cairo, all things are consumed or turned into wealth and accumulated in Cairo; all things flow but not the bitterness of the nights traversing the road to Cairo.

Bells, bells, toll, one day you will come by day;
Bells, bells, toll, we shall inherit the earth!
What would you say if you could speak,
You who speak not now, nor ever ... ?

Significantly, *Ash-Sha'b*'s new-found premises belonged to *El-Misri* newspaper, long since confiscated by Nasser for its support of both Neguib and a return to civil government. Salah Salem had obviously found his way back to what the western press termed a 'semi-official' position, built on a non-semi-official confiscation.

To *Ash-Sha'b* were brought others once subjected to police disdain: Abdul Rahman Sha'rawi, the quiet deliberate man who wrote one of the few and better novels of the life of the Egyptian village and its *fellah* inhabitants, his work aptly titled: *El-Ard*, 'The Earth'.

With the change in Egypt's international position: pre-Arms Agreement or before September 1955, and post-Arms Agreement or after September 1955, faces, voices, and ideological interpretations were wont to change as well. Sha'rawi's return to *Ash-Sha'b*, after his police seizure and questioning when he was Deputy Editor of *El-Tahrir*, 'The Liberation', was, in terms of ideological trends, of more significance than Salah Salem's reappearance on a 'semi-official' level.

In December 1955, another exile unceremoniously returned to Cairo: Khaled Mohieddin, the West's 'Red Major', a no-love-lost cousin of the Minister of Interior, Zakaria Mohieddin of ideas and what might be ideas

quarantined in prisons and camps. Khaled arrived at Cairo Airport unannounced, the press, itself, kept long in ignorance of his return. Rumour spread among the select, interpreting the political significance of the return: 'it was Khaled who made the Arms Agreement from his Swiss exile!'; Khaled has returned, 'Nasser's policy towards the left is changing.' A cousin of his reported 'death of Khaled's Aunt' as the reason; the same cousin told of Khaled's visit to the home of another Aunt and the unexpected presence of a man introduced simply as 'Ahmed', a member of Egyptian Intelligence whose work was never to leave Khaled's side. Rumour ran rampant! Another wag opined: 'It's due to the polio of his daughter; he returned so she could be treated by the French doctor Lauren of a wonder drug developed, to be produced commercially by the coup government and to be named July 23rd or '7/23' as another celebration of the anniversary of the *coup d'état*.' All these contradictory interpretations were authoritatively stated by slices of the supposedly well-informed élite.

Within the labyrinth of analysis some facts did appear: that on the occasion of Cairo revisited, dinners were given by the Council of the Revolution at which Khaled was present, if not the guest of honour. Wing Commander Hassan Ibrahim el-Sayed in speaking to me, cited this as proof that indeed the family was still one, and from this fact concluding that what was a *coup d'état* had proven itself a bloodless revolution, outstanding historically in that it had not eaten its children.³⁴ However, in answer to the March '54 charge upon Khaled's exile that he was a 'Red Major', a 'Communist', Hassan Ibrahim spoke more bluntly, saying that while he did not believe Khaled was a Communist, he disagreed strongly with him and knew Khaled's concept of free trade unions to be highly dangerous, ending his statement with an

attack on Khaled's insistence that labour had a 'right to strike'.³⁵

All of this despite what some wishfully saw as a fundamental change in attitude. Khaled was not reinstated in the Council of the Revolution; all that became of him was that he was given the necessary Government licence to open a newspaper: *El-Umma* — 'The People' or 'Nation' — to which he brought Muhammad Oda and others of the political left. In the parliamentary elections of July 23, '57, Khaled was given permission to run, but the essential permission was denied twenty-five others. The fundamental change ... doesn't exist! It must wait for *The Time of the Mishmish* when the world will turn and men will be free. To that glorious time did I dedicate my life and now this book.



ENDNOTES

1.

Fellah: Egyptian peasant.

2.

Gallabiyya : traditional dress of Egyptian men, loose and long to the shoes, with wide, long sleeves.

3.

Infection with flukes of the genus *Schistosoma*. The disease is a significant health problem in many parts of the world. The various species cause different forms of the disease.

Treatment includes correction of anaemia and other nutritional disorders caused by the parasites and the destruction of adult worms. Improvement in sanitation and snail control are the chief preventive measures.

4.

Gamoussa: water buffalo.

5.

On October 26, 1954, when Nasser was speaking in Alexandria, Mahmud 'Abd al-Latif, a member of the Brotherhood tried to assassinate him. In December 1954, six from the Muslim Brotherhood leadership were hanged, among them 'Abd al-Qadir 'Awda, and hundreds of militants were imprisoned, many in the vicious Tura prison, in Cairo's southern suburbs.

6.

The story of Faluja is depressing. Nasser, who was then a Captain and a battalion staff officer, characterized Egypt's attempt to frustrate the implementation of the UN Resolution partitioning Palestine and establishing the State of Israel as "a play, a satire on war". But satire or otherwise, human beings paid the price with their lives, or with their pain. While in fact the Egyptian Army was being thwarted by

the Zionists, Cairo radio was broadcasting Egyptian Army successes. Many of the Free Officers were entrapped in that 'play': Gamal Abdel Nasser; Abdel Hakim Amer; Zakaria Mohieddin; Hassan Ibrahim; Abdel Latif Baghdadi; Salah Salem; Amin Shaker, and perhaps others. This gave them a shared shame and frustration and determination that Egypt must be fundamentally changed, must be ridden of colonialism, corruption, nepotism, inefficiency, and so on. As for the rank and file soldiers drawn from the *fellahin*, they had no idea where they were nor what they were doing there. One *fellah* soldier told Nasser he thought they were on manoeuvres, safely in Egyptian territory, while at the height of the fighting, the Egyptian Royal Engineer Corps had been ordered by King Farouk to build him a villa in Gaza, and, back in Cairo, Farouk busied himself with preparing for a victory celebration!

In October 1948, within the Negev, which the UN had awarded exclusively to Israel, 15,000 Egyptian soldiers were in possession of three strips of the desert, including the ancient cities of Gaza and Beersheba. The Israelis launched Operation Ten Plagues, capturing the pivotal town of Beersheba and drove the Egyptians back to Gaza, encircling them in an area containing three 'Arab villages: Faluja, Iraq al-Manshiyya and Iraq al-Suweidan in which there were three Egyptian battalions, the First, the Fourth, and the Sixth, 4,000 men in all, Egyptians and Sudanese. The Ninth Battalion had lost the crossroads permitting the pocket to be formed: "The commander of the Ninth Battalion was on leave. The next in command was hit by a splinter and died immediately. The third in command took a car and fled in it, stopping only when he reached Isma'iliya on the Canal. The fourth in command left the battalion to go to General Headquarters."

The surrounding area came to be known as the Faluja pocket, a wasteland dotted with mud huts, less than

50 miles due south of Tel Aviv. At the start of the siege, Nasser bitterly wrote in his diary: "Air raids were launched on our positions, forcefully and numerously. Our own air force disappeared completely. We never saw any of our planes. Every artillery began throwing fire on our heads, never keeping quiet for a moment. What bothered us most was the number of casualties in our forces. The existence of the wounded in our midst was a tax on our nerves."

Israeli planes also flew over Egyptian positions to drop leaflets in 'Arabic advising them to surrender, and listing by name Egyptian officers who had fled: a general at Iraq al-Suweidan, the commander at Beersheba, the commander at Hulaikat. Later the Israelis — under the leadership of Yigael Allon — tried another approach: "While your army is being wasted in a hopeless war in Israel, your own country is being ruled by foreigners, the British. We have already succeeded in getting rid of them. Don't you think maybe it's a trick the imperialists have played on you?" Nasser was bitter with Jordan's 'Arab Legion which never came to their aid, but above all he blamed the British.

The Faluja pocket, with a perimeter of forty-eight miles, was encircled by 2,000 Israeli men and girls, compared with 4,000 Egyptians and Sudanese soldiers and 1,000 civilians inside. The Israelis did not have enough troops to spare from other frontiers to capture the pocket or wipe it out, and the Egyptians knew it, and the Israelis were aware that the Egyptians knew they knew. Nevertheless the defenders had to use their ammunition sparingly, for while hand-grenades and rifle bullets could be smuggled in, shell-smuggling was impossible.

Late in February 1949, on the Island of Rhodes, representatives of Israel and Egypt signed an armistice agreement, under the terms of which the Faluja pocket would be evacuated. Cairo newspapers, hungry for

something to write about besides the Egyptian Army's defeat, seized on the resistance of the pocket, even comparing the four-month hold-out to the defence of Stalingrad! Some of the articles mentioned the bravery of the staff officer of the Sixth Battalion, Gamal Abdel Nasser. But apparently the real hero of the Palestine campaign was General Mohammed Neguib, who between May and December had taken part in 21 engagements, on each occasion literally leading his troops into battle, which as senior officer he was not expected to do. Egyptian army soldiers and officers wear on their breast a figure that indicates the number of times they've been wounded in battle. Neguib wore the figure of 3, which increased his popularity enormously.

I go into such detail in this endnote because the 1948-9 experience at Faluja substantially contributed to the impulse for the 1952 Free Officers' *coup d'état*. For the details and quotes above, I'm indebted to Robert St. John's *The Boss* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960) 58-82.

7.

Colonel Ahmad 'Arabi (1841-1911), son of an Egyptian Shaykh, led an abortive revolt in 1882 trying to free Egypt, but only succeeded in precipitating the British Occupation. His death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and in 1901, a broken man, he was pardoned and allowed to return to Egypt on condition he kept out of politics.

8.

Plural of '*alim*, often used as the singular, i.e. an '*ulama*'; one who possesses the quality of '*ilm*, knowledge, learning, science in the widest sense and in a high degree.

9.

Foul: fava beans, the staple of the *fellah*'s diet.

10.

In General Mohammed Neguib's autobiography, *Egypt's Destiny* (London: Gollancz, 1955) 175, he alleged that 'malcontents' inside the army began to conspire with Mohammed Rashad Mehanna to overthrow the government. "Mehanna, in his capacity as Regent, had been attempting to formulate a policy of his own in direct opposition to that of the Council of the Revolution. Early in October 1952, after he had failed to heed our repeated warnings, we dismissed him from the Council of Regents and placed him under house arrest."

11.

In October 1945, Sadat began to form his secret civilian auxiliary. He prepared a list of men to be assassinated, placing former Prime Minister Nahhas Pasha at the top. On December 11, as Nahhas was driving through a crowded Cairo street, one of Sadat's men threw a bomb under his automobile. Sadat had calculated on a maximum speed of thirty miles an hour, but the car was moving at forty-five miles an hour, so the bomb exploded after Nahhas was safely away. Instead of killing Britain's proxy, it wounded a number of British soldiers in a truck that happened to be following the Nahhas car.

Humiliated by his own bungling, Sadat was determined to stage-manage a successful assassination, so he picked the second man on his list, Amin Osman Pasha, a former Minister of Finance in the Nahhas cabinet. "I selected him because I knew that whatever happened to him he would find no pity among real Egyptians. He had been raised and educated by the British. He had made a speech saying Egypt was wedded to England in a Catholic marriage; there could never be a divorce; even if England, the husband, left Egypt, we must be faithful and not think of permanent separation.

This speech wrote his fate."

Osman Pasha had formed a club called the Renaissance Organization, its aim being "eternal co-operation with England". It had second-floor quarters in a building in the centre of Cairo. On the night of the assassination, Osman arrived by taxi and had his right foot on the first of four steps leading into the building when one of Sadat's squad called out, "Osman Pasha!" Sadat ordered them to do this, "Because I never liked the idea of shooting a man in the back." Osman turned and three bullets entered his body. Sadat and his squad escaped, but after a few days, four of them were arrested and confessed. Then the entire organization he had recruited was rounded up, himself included. The soft-speaking specialist in assassination was given a long prison sentence, and without him the civilian terrorist branch of the Free Officers quickly disintegrated.

See St. John, Robert, *The Boss*, op. cit., 53-4, 55-6.

12.

Notwithstanding the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, at the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Egypt only complied half-heartedly by declaring itself a non-belligerent ally of Britain. Popular sympathy for Germany and Italy grew in Egypt and climaxed in the 1941 arrest of popular army General Aziz El-Masri, who had been caught while trying to defect to Germany.

After Rommel had conquered Libya and was soon to reach Al-Alamein, Britain had her troops surround Abdin Palace to force King Farouk, himself suspected of Axis sympathies, to ask Wafd leader Mustafa El-Nahhas to form the government, since the Wafd was the only force that could control the sentiment on the Egyptian street. After Rommel's defeat, the King was allowed to dismiss El-Nahhas, whose collaboration had destroyed his popularity. With the allied forces now victorious, Ahmed Maher, who became Prime Minister in

1945, declared war on the Axis, which led to his assassination inside Parliament in February 1945.

13.

Egypt had not yet 'lost' the Sudan, this was to come a month later. Salah Salem of dark glasses, of sensual line, of dancing in his undershorts, is still preserved in the Ministry of National Guidance. Ah, the impertinence of it all!

14.

Article 1 of the Agrarian Reform Law laid down that 'no person may own more than 200 acres of land'. Landowners may retain up to 300 acres, if they distribute 50 acres to each of two children. Land in excess was to be requisitioned by Government over a period of five years. Requisitioned land was to be distributed among small farmers and farm labourers, in holdings of not less than two acres and not more than five acres per family. Preference was to be given to those actually cultivating the land as tenants or labourers. The land was to be paid for over a period of 30 years, plus interest and costs of administration. See Warriner, Doreen, *Land Reform and Development in the Middle East* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1957) 32-3.

15.

While this was Nasser's public image and one which I believed at the time, it was not the truth. In Copeland's, *The Game of Nations*, he writes of Nasser bringing out a bottle of Scotch whisky which he kept for distinguished visitors in his apartment at the Revolutionary Command Council headquarters, just across the Nile from the British Embassy. See Copeland, Miles, *The Game of Nations: The Amoralty of Power Politics* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970) 134.

16.

The St. Stephen who is written of in the Bible was martyred in Jerusalem in AD 36, long before there were Christian monasteries, so whether this is a wrong identification or whether this was a person who was named after St. Stephen is uncertain.

17.

Jesuit Father Henri Habib Ayrout's compassionate work on the *fellahin* — the peasants — *Fellahs d'Egypte* (Cairo: du Sphynx, 1952) had been banned under King Farouk. He devoted his life to their cause. He and Dr. Ahmed Hussein, President of the Fellah Society, former Minister of Social Affairs and in 1954, Egypt's Ambassador to the United States, championed the cause of these 'wretched of the earth'.

18.

Islam: 'submission', 'total surrender' (to Allah).

19.

For the majority of both countries.

20.

I should clarify my approach: 'the facts' of the situation, however interesting to the historian, are an irrelevancy when one wishes to understand why a people 'move' the way they do. What a people 'see' as having happened is what I would record, for it is how they 'see' a situation, rather than what a situation 'is' or 'was' that will eventually 'move' them.

21.

Though technically the Sudan in that year was under the Joint Condominium of Britain and Egypt, real authority, as in Egypt since 1882 and the coming of troops, lay with the British.

ENDNOTES

22.

I refer to the late Prime Minister Nuqrashi Pasha's speech in the United Nations Security Council debate of July 1947 when he demanded the total and immediate evacuation of British troops from Egypt, including the Sudan, and the termination of British administration of the Sudan.

23.

When I spoke to responsible British officials who had been in Egypt at that time they denied that such had been the intention.

24.

In 1956, approximately 1,000 inhabitants per square mile.

25.

When, around 1913, Neguib applied for admission to Gordon College, which became the University College of Khartoum in 1952, he applied for Engineering, but the warden, M.F. Simpson, rejected his application saying: "You're an Egyptian, and you'll have to be a teacher. The engineering course is for Sudanese only." Then one of his teachers, N.R. Udal, who was later to become the warden, put the matter even more bluntly: "The purpose of Gordon College is to train Sudanese for government careers. It is not intended to be a school for Egyptians. If we allow you to study here it is only because your father is a civil servant." Cited by Mohammed Neguib in his autobiographical account of the Egyptian Revolution, *Egypt's Destiny* (London: Gollancz, 1955) 47.

26.

Soekarno subsequently recognized the national individuality of political structures.

27.

When later in March 1956 I spoke to Salah Salem about Egypt's 'loss' of the Sudan on the occasion of two interviews of two hours each, he gave other reasons. I would gladly give them full range here but all my papers have been 'lost' and this has been written from memory.

28.

But, then, perhaps nationalism must realize itself before it can admit to joining any new form. Unity of Egypt and the Sudan had considered only the similarities of the two; in the choice of independence we may find (as well as the other factors enumerated), the assertion of difference of culture retained in what is still unadulterated Black; this was the interpretation given by an African nationalist leader.

29.

At its height, Nubia extended from the First Cataract of the Nile, near Aswan, Egypt, to Khartoum, in the Sudan. It came early under the influence of the Pharaohs, whose power sometimes reached to Argo, near Dongola, in the Sudan. Egypt, itself, was ruled briefly by conquering Nubians, who established the XXV dynasty. Some time after their expulsion from Egypt by the Assyrians, 7th century BC, the Nubian capital was moved from Napata to Merowe in the Sudan. Napata was destroyed by the Romans in 23 BC. Merowe fell to Ethiopians c. 350 and was abandoned. Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian, a 'Negro' tribe, the Nobatae, were settled in Nubia. They mixed with the indigenous stock and formed a powerful kingdom with its capital in Dongola. The kingdom was converted to Christianity in the 6th century. Joined with the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, it long resisted Muslim encroachment, but in 1366 it finally collapsed. Nubia then broke up into many petty states. Mohammed 'Ali of Egypt conquered it (1820-2), and in the late 19th century much of the area was held by supporters of

the Mahdi. See Budes, Sir Ernest, *History of Ethiopia, Nubia, and Abyssinia* (1928). Excerpted from *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, eds. Bridgewater, William, and Sherwood, Elizabeth J., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950) 1421.

30.

Largely overlooked by archaeologists until the 1960s, ancient Nubia was rediscovered when Egypt's plans to build the Aswan High Dam — the Kalabsha Dam — threatened to flood forever nearly 300 miles of the Nubian Nile Valley and all traces of ancient settlements that lay within it. The more than 40 teams of archaeologists who raced to explore this region recorded thousands of prehistoric sites and rock drawings and excavated hundreds of cemeteries and early towns. They discovered the traces of a brilliant, literate civilization that over millennia traded with Egypt, was conquered and ruled by Egypt (c. 1500-1100 BC) and even conquered and ruled Egypt, itself (c. 720-660 BC).

31.

Iron ore was to be mined at Aswan, proven reserves 168,000,000 tons, and prospecting for other raw materials had begun. Oil exploration had had some success in the Red Sea area of Sinai.

32.

See Warriner, Doreen, *op. cit.*, 22.

33.

Upon the completion of the Aswan High Dam — the Kalabsha Dam — in 1971, the main area of Nubian concentration, between Aswan in Egypt and the 4th cataract in Sudan, was flooded by Lake Nasser. The Nubians were displaced and relocated in other areas in both Sudan and Egypt. With the inundation of the lowest part of lower Nubia

(from Faras in the north and just north of Akasha in the south), the inhabitants of several villages were forced to relocate far into the eastern region of Sudan, while part insisted to remain to challenge the inundation. Both groups have persistently clung to their identity. The majority are dispersed in more than one location in Sudan: in the New Half Settlements for relocated Nubians, the New Nubia Settlements (Wadi Halfa) built by the Nubians who remained near to their inundated towns and villages, while several thousand settled in Khartoum and other Sudanese towns.

Although they were quite aware of the risks, those who insisted to remain in their homes have shown a great deal of tolerance and self-dependence. Their legendary persistence is something to be recorded. When their villages were inundated by the waters of the Aswan Dam, they shifted to the nearby dry land and built new settlements. Several times they had to shift and rebuild. This continued for almost two decades until they finally settled. Nowadays, only 12 or so miles away from the inundated villages and towns of lower Nubia, new Nubia has emerged.

Nubians in Egypt have been subjected to a great deal of insecurity from the periodical inundations of their land going back to 1903 — the construction of the first Aswan Dam — through the 1912, 1930 raising of the Aswan Dam, and finally from the 1960s construction of the Kalabsha or the Aswan High Dam. They sought shelter in the chain of Nubian mountains along the Nile whenever their villages were inundated. Every time they built new settlements, they were inundated again and again, until they were relocated in Koum Ombo, north of Aswan and their traditional area by about 31 miles. Their survival skills are comparable to that of their Sudanese Nubian brothers and sisters (Source: <http://www.thenubian.net/nubtoday.html>).

The tactic of the Egyptian Government was to compare their *coup d'état* with the French Revolution and thus to force the

conclusion that though the coup government hanged the leadership of the *Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, their coup, now officially designated 'Revolution', was hardly as bloody.

35.

As early as August 1952, the coup government had put two textile workers to death for leading a peaceful strike. Then at dawn on January 1, 1959, the Communists, including hundreds of intellectuals and workers, were rounded up in what the Communists were to call "The Journey", a 5-year incarceration which was extremely brutal.

IN GRATITUDE

This book should have come out a half-century ago. It's now published by myself with gratitude for the assistance of Philip Zachariah, who typed the manuscript, Kay Lyons, who had the kindness to proof-read, and my dear former colleague Shakib Gunn who designed the unique cover and the internal layout; I would also thank Fatimah Haron, Lia Syed and Noor Khairiyati for multiple readings of the proofs.

May they find it worthy of their endeavours.

All the photographs in the book were taken by the author, with the exception of the three in which the author appears; 'Aish Gamal', probably an official photograph; President Neguib, taken from his book *Egypt's Destiny*; and the photograph of Salah Salem, reproduced in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue 490, 13-19 July 2000, which is to the credit of Salah Hilal, one of Egypt's illustrious newspapermen.

Alijah Gordon,
Kuala Lumpur,
June 2002



Alijah Gordon's haunting narrative, *In the Time of the Mishmish*, is set in Egypt during the tumultuous period when the star of the legendary Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser was on the rise. It tells the story of a complex nation desperately longing for answers and looking to the future.

But the Egypt of the Mishmish was also surrounded by enemies within and without. Her people turned to Gamal Abdel Nasser, the 'brown faced ruler with Egyptian integrity re-established in his blood', who plied their hearts with pledges only to be broken. Three years after the Free Officers' coup of 1952, the people were still waiting for freedom and the Parliament they were promised.

Alijah Gordon's narrative recounts her own personal impressions of the land and its people: from the persecuted Islamic Brotherhood whose longing was to return to the asylum of a fabled past; to the bureaucrats and pen-pushers who could only carry out their paid-for directions; from the nameless peasants whose subaltern voices went unrecorded; to the great leader Nasser himself, who believed that he and he alone was the one who revolutionized his country. In this work, the entire country comes to life leaving the reader with a vivid impression of the mood of the times.

It is also a story of phenomenal successes and disastrous failures, of betrayals and compromises. While the Egyptian people were asking for a meaningful ideology that was their own, their lives and fate were being sold short by politicians and foreign powers conspiring to retain their stranglehold on a country that was not theirs, and on a culture they could never hope to understand. It is a story of a nation in waiting, of a people longing for the time of the mishmish, the time of the apricots that may yet come, 'for a new world that but hesitantly filters through the slats.'

FARISHA NOOR

The writer is a political scientist and historian whose focus has been the development of political Islam in the Malay world and beyond.

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