

CHAPTER 10

Clarion 5

November 1, 1860

Countrymen,

The worst thing under the firmament is war, and the most horrendous among them are civil wars, which break out between the commoners of a single country and which are often triggered by trivial causes and for ignoble aims. Civil wars are not only the negation of justice and a transgression against the rights of those in command. They show no respect for the most generous feelings and most noble rights of man. These include national fraternity, harmony, gratitude, and kindness toward neighbours and those compatriots who possess chivalry and humanity. The war that erupted this year was one of the most horrendous civil wars. Its flames have wrought enormous damage onto our religious, moral, and civil interests and public welfare. As a result, the country and the world have lost so much and at great costs and risks.

Countrymen,

How can we excuse the sons of our homeland in the eyes of foreigners? How else but to point to their stupidity, their lack of civility, and the triumph of their carnal appetites over their

rational faculties? Perhaps the magnanimous will excuse them, given the extraordinary circumstances they acted under. For what does one expect from a land whose inhabitants are bands of many tribes divided by character traits, moods, prejudice, and self-interest, a land where few care about public welfare and many do not feel this country is theirs.¹

Syria lies between two countries, Egypt and the Ottoman empire, which have often pulled it in different directions. Within a single generation, it has tilted at times to one side and at other times to the other.² In both instances, Syria has unfortunately found itself in the peripheries of each empire. It was far removed from the center of government, that is to say, from the capital of both empires. Its tutelage was thus left to the mercy of the same people who were responsible for Syria's demise, as history and our forefathers have taught us.

Syria is also the birthplace and stage of many conflicting civil and religious prejudices whose organization and origins are at odds with each other. We know of no other country whose fate has endured such tribulations as Syria and yet remained inhabited and home to a people that, despite all, have kept their morals, honor, chivalry, and enthusiasm. These characteristics give us hope for Syria's advancement and civilization, as long as the people who uphold them are supported by a modern system of governance that works both for the welfare of the country and for the comfort of its subjects. Is it possible then for someone who considers what we said without bias and prejudice not to excuse these people, given what he sees of mutual schisms, estrangement, and shortcomings? Is it possible not to protest against all the delusions and difficulties he sees in their politics and the way they run things?

Countrymen,

When we inspect this land's historical record to search for lessons of what the future might hold, we regret to say that this history is full of wars and catastrophes. We also find that your prejudice has, like an ugly black spot, shamelessly replaced patriotism at the center of each page of our history. Even in the best of times, when the land was basking in ease, prosperity, fertility, and peace, this wicked carnal principle has often raised its head and frothed wildly. Inherited from barbarians, prejudice left behind destruction and peril and squandered the land's wealth and its families.

During the days of Cairo's rule over Syria, a group of patriots assembled to contain this form of partisanship and tried to weaken or destroy it.³ But shortly afterward, the shrewd workings of time and the events of those days let partisanship escape again. As it rose up with great might, its wicked effects began to take hold. It is too bad they did not put a millstone around its neck and throw it into the bottomless depths of the sea!

This wicked concept takes different colors at every stage. It once took the form of notable rivalries such as the one between the Qaysi and Yamani factions, and then between the Jumblats and the Yazbakis.⁴ One of its ugliest forms has appeared in these last few years. It took on names sacred to its people—names like Christian and Druze, and then Muslim and Christian. These sacred names had long been buried under the previous ones of the Qaysi/Yamani and Jumblat/Yazbak splits, but the concept has appropriated these sacred and old names, realizing the magical and formidable force that they hold when used in the context of what the people of our country call “the source of attachment”—that is, kinship.⁵ As such, this wicked concept served the machinations of the most powerful leaders of

prejudices with the result that its power multiplied and its effects became far-reaching.

On a pitch-dark night, we observed from this city a series of terrifying blazes ascending from the Matn. It was as if we saw the fire of partisanship go up along with the burning houses.⁶ Should partisanship die out as we had envisioned, you shall rejoice in prosperity, comfort, and security. We send you our condolences and ask that you do not regret its demise despite the frequently invoked saying “He who has no partisanship has no religion.” For such a saying has been passed down generations from barbaric peoples whose religion is founded on prejudice. But what is the benefit of a religion if it is based on prejudice?

Countrymen,

We have often heard you say that this was the third bout of ruinous events in the span of less than twenty years. Now that you have tried civil wars time and again and have weighed its gains and losses, we ask you: What have you won? Have any of you become a king, a marshal, or a minister? Have you attained a higher rank and status, or increased your wealth or fame? What have you achieved other than the bereavement of widows and orphaned children, moral depravation, poverty, and destruction—in both this life and the hereafter—as well as humiliation and belittlement in the eyes of wise men and foreigners? What has come about other than decimating the number of able hands upon whose hard work the reconstruction of the country and the comfort of its people depend? What has come about other than depriving the country of its richest, wisest, smartest, and most able men?

Now, is it not better for your own sake to replace blind prejudices—which is merely a euphemism for excessive self-love—with patriotism, affection, concord, and unity, all of which are

prerequisites for the country's success? Is it not in your interest to shun the cursed devil, extend the carpet of hospitality, remember the harmony of olden times, and roll up your sleeves for the sake of alleviating these catastrophes and making up for this destruction? Are you not aware that you are your brother's keeper, not his enemy? Should not this be the voice of the wise among you and the opinion of those who have your best interest at heart and do not wish to leave your affairs to chance? If so, then the guilty among you should gladly and voluntarily pay their dues. And those who have been victims of injustice should pursue their rights kindly and patiently under the aegis of those in charge, for their authority is bestowed by God, and they did not carry the sword in vain. Countrymen, this is for your own benefit.

Countrymen,

It had occurred to us frequently—before the recent events—to sound this clarion in order to alert you to the vicious effects of civil wars. But having observed the condition of the people and that they were bent on playing out the scenario in their head, we and other wise people figured that the sweet sound of the patriot's clarion would have been drowned out by the crude drum-beat of prejudices and ill intent. So we held our breath.

Now that we have seen with our own eyes the burning fire of partisanship, we decided to speak out where regrettably we have been silent before. We consider this belated call a modest service to our homeland in the hope that it will be well received despite its shortcomings. Our duty is to write and to remind you. Your duty is to read and reflect. And what ultimately comes to pass is in the hands of God, the facilitator. May He preserve you.

From a patriot