

CHAPTER 8

Clarion 3

October 15, 1860

Countrymen,

What has become of your country that it is dressed in mourning? Why are your mountains and hilltops desolate and your valleys and plains looking so forlorn? Why is there tension in your towns and villages? Why are your strongmen broken, your women wailing, your virgins crying, and your widows and orphans in such a sorry state of deep humiliation and wretchedness? Why is Damascus, the jewel in the crown of Syria and one of the greatest and most famous of ancient cities, set amid forests and ponds under willow trees lining the Barada River, now draped in black, weeping for its young men and women, and mourning the loss of its wealth, riches, markets, and resources.

What has befallen you now? You hear voices wailing over a lost loved one, or a fugitive friend, or an imprisoned husband, or an only son in captivity, or an abducted daughter. Hither you hear sighs from inconsolable hearts overcome with sorrow and grief, broken hearts that have been filled with chalices of despair and depression. And thither is a deep, uninterrupted moan from

a heart whose troubles are mixed with incurable maladies and unbearable pains.

What has befallen us, now that we see over there a man hiding in a cave, and another who has taken shelter in the thick woods among wild animals, and yet another who, like the brother-slayer Cain, is a fugitive who has lost his way with no one calling him in?

What has befallen us now that we see in this city of Beirut multitudes of privileged and common people alike, queuing up to ask for charity, when most used to be alms givers themselves?

These scenes are undoubtedly terrifying and saddening. How could this happen? Who are those who appeased the devil and inflicted this much natural and moral destruction? The answer to all of this can be culled from what we have written previously. Time does not permit further elaboration. Nor is it of any use to look back at the recent past. Rather we must turn our attention to the future in order to alleviate impending calamities and to stop their negative effects and wicked consequences.

Countrymen,

Summer, the season of comfort and few needs, has elapsed. It was a season in which many of you may have been satisfied with just the foot of a mountain for a bed, a tree or the sky's dome for a cover, and the stars as guardians. Now the trees that have offered you shade are starting to shed their leaves in preparation for another season. I sense menacing clouds rising from the west to do battle with the current climate, to block off those guardian stars, and to alert us to the looming winter—the season of meager means and many needs—which is charging toward us with its storms, snow, and bitter cold.

Countrymen,

Ant colonies have finished stocking up for winter and have dug holes in the ground to protect themselves from winter's harshness. Swarms of bees have brought in their harvests and built sturdy honeycombs stacked with their precious supply to settle in a hive of comfort and protection. By contrast, many of our brothers, sons of Adam, and our compatriots barely have enough means to sustain them for the day, and—even worse—have no houses for shelter, no clothes to protect them from the severe cold, no furniture to accommodate them, and no storage for provisions. This is what makes caring for their future so very vital, yet so precarious.

Countrymen,

Westerners say, "Time is gold," but for our poor brothers "time is life," because every passing day costs the homeland the life of many of its sons. Therefore, as we pointed out before, it is the duty of the oppressed to be patient, as it is the religious, moral, and civic duty of the treacherous oppressors and those who are in positions of responsibility to use effective means to achieve the necessary security immediately and, if possible, to offer food, shelter, clothes, and other outstanding needs to the oppressed. It is also the duty of those with pride, conscience, and pity, whoever they might be, to exert their efforts and dedicate their energy toward helping the oppressed rather than sacrificing them at the altar of personal pleasures, gains, interests, or whatever they may be.

Countrymen,

It seems that security was hatched only recently through the hard labor of those in charge of this country. Now it lies

swaddled—as per Eastern custom—in the cradle, susceptible to numerous and varying afflictions. Were it to be surrounded by strong guards and the most capable and wise physicians from East and West, with all their surgical tools and all sorts of medicinal drugs, we trust that this nascent security would be shielded from the vagaries of time. We also hope that their expertise would provide effective means for the country to grow quickly and reach the age of maturity in a reasonable amount of time.

Countrymen,

We like to draw your attention to the fact that it is preferable to live by the labor of your hands and the sweat on your forehead than to knock on doors and rely on charity, whose wells are neither inexhaustible nor ever lasting. We also warn you against the harm that unemployment does to your body, mind, and soul. And especially to the stricken among you, we say: rely on God, caretaker of the orphaned and the widowed who does not ignore the sighs of the wretched poor.

Countrymen,

This has been a lengthy address, but we will not conclude without saying the following: True religion will promote virtue and prevent vice. And every religion that does not have this characteristic does not deserve to be called religion. One of the virtues of Christianity, compared to other religions, is that it asks to love even one's enemies. It is undoubtedly one of the most difficult commands to fulfill. However, this difficulty does not exempt Christians in general from striving for it at all times, in all places, and in all situations. While Christianity commands its followers to turn their right cheek to those who hit them on the left and to meet evil with good, it does not forbid its adherents

from demanding their rights. Rather it permits them to defend themselves and seek their rights, but not through the spirit of revenge or the love of reprisal. For there is nothing Christian about insisting on hate and spitefulness and maintaining the spirit of revenge and reprisal. In closing, I ask God to guide you toward understanding this truism and to give you the strength to follow through this path. May He preserve you.

From a patriot