

CHAPTER II

Clarion 6

November 8, 1860

Losses and Gains of the Homeland

Countrymen,

The homeland's losses and damages due to the recent unrest have been so costly that it is difficult to imagine their extent.¹ The precise calculation of such losses requires the skills of a talented accountant. They are divided into material losses, which is our focus now, and moral ones, which—God willing—we will elaborate on later. Material losses include the country's houses, seasonal staples, revenues, harvests, belongings, cattle and the like that have been damaged by fire, destruction, vandalism, and theft. Losses also include what has been siphoned out of the country through bribery, treachery, and extortion, or by other means. As for what remains in the hands of local usurpers, they do not count as losses since they simply changed hands within our homeland.

If we add the value of the approximately thirty thousand burnt-down houses to the value of the buildings and harvests that have been destroyed all over the country, the total will

amount to 367 million piasters (around 367 million francs), which comes close to three and a half times the value of Syria's annual revenue of silk (estimated at two thousand qantars per year). This is an approximate balance sheet put together from reliable sources. We would rather not go over it in any detail lest we leave the door open to arguments and objections. The actual value of the damages is likely to be even higher than our estimates because, except in rare cases, the value of possessions in the eyes of their owners is always higher than the real value or the one decided by an impartial outsider. Moreover, some people who fear that their claims will be devalued or slightly reduced may exaggerate their estimated losses so that final compensation is at least close to what they honestly thought they deserved. This means that those who provide honest estimates clearly risk incurring losses.

If only everyone were to agree to present accurate estimates, even if they incur a loss! For loss—no matter how great it is—is preferable, more acceptable, and more honorable when borne with honesty than any dishonorable gain regardless how exorbitant it is. If only there was among us a rational and intelligent person who can propose a solution to this problem while balancing between conscience and coffer. Whatever solution he may present will not work unless there is mutual trust between the people and the government, and unless the perpetrators pay for these extensive damages according to the law, customs, religion, and the political process.

Countrymen,

No matter how vast and devastating the aforementioned losses were, eventually the might of kings or the hard work of ordinary people can, with God's blessing, compensate all or some of them. But there are losses, not even a tiny fraction of

which all the kings of the Earth together could compensate, even if they mustered all their men and money, expertise and will power. For who could return a father to an orphan, a husband to a widow, an only son to an impotent elder, or a dear daughter to a bereaved old woman? God alone is the father of the orphan, lord of the widow, the aid of the impotent, the crutch of the despairing. He alone has the power to cool the passions of the heart of these poor ones, give solace, mend the broken hearts, and balm their incurable, open wounds.

You realize that losses of this kind are not minor. It is estimated that twenty thousand people died in the unrest. These include those who were ravaged by the blade of the sword, and those who were killed by accident or in revenge, and those who died from fear and anxiety, and from dreadful living conditions and sheer fatigue. They also include martyred children who were sacrificed at the altar of savage barbarity. We had seen in them the next generation who should surpass us with their civility, knowledge, and culture. At every sunset the numbers of the dead increase and at every sunrise many more are transferred from the books of the living to the registers of the dead. If we were to pay reparations for them, they would reach at least six hundred million piasters. But it is far from us to attach a price to the creatures of God who are more precious than the entire material world.

If only the destruction and losses of this catastrophe would end so that we stop counting more numbers. The prospects for the future are obscure. Yes, very bleak and unknown to us. How much we wish that new paths be opened for us so that we can plead for better turns! So far we do not know when the time will come for the sun of hope and comfort to rise over Syria and never to set again. We ask God to look with kindness and mercy on this ill-fated country.

Countrymen,

One of the material losses was that so much of the land lay fallow this year because of the lack of cattle and seeds. This has multiplied the tribulations and pushed many of the people into beggary. But who guarantees us that the gates of charity will remain open and will not be blocked by an iron bolt and brass lock before the end of the impending winter? What is the state of this impoverished multitude that has been thrown onto the shoulders of the giving by the ordeals of the age?

Fifty thousand active men have been rendered unemployed. Work has now been suspended for six months, and we do not know when this state of affairs will end. Shops are closed, livelihood and manufacture suspended. What pen can calculate such losses? The Syria we knew six months ago, with its distinguished character among the Ottoman empire's lands, its opulence, comfort, and wonderful progress in the field of architecture, has fallen. In a way it was different from the rest of the empire. Yes, it has fallen indeed! And it is unlikely to recover from this devastating demise for many years to come, save by miracle or some extraordinary feat.

Whoever inspects the financial books of the imperial powers will notice that vast funds have been allocated to solving the Syrian Question, and will see that the account has not been closed yet. New accounts of material losses inflicted on Syria continue to be registered. It is thus fair to judge that all that it possesses is not enough to settle the account even if it sold itself, unless it is agreed that the debt be paid by what the Ottoman Treasury owes Syria. Only then may Syria rise above this crippling debt while remaining, as long as it exists, morally beholden to the countries that aided it.

The tally of debts owed to foreign states based on the losses to foreign residents due to looting of their properties, damages,

waste of time, closure of their shops, and so on is enormous. Obviously, Syria cannot even hope to pay back all these foreign claims from its own treasury.

Countrymen,

We should not conclude this discussion without mentioning some of Syria's elusive gains. One of them is national charity. Since this remained within the country, it counts toward both liabilities and assets and as such does not feature in the accounting books. Although these donations hold enormous value, most of them were allotted in silence. Taken each separately, they are barely discernable, even through a magnifying glass. Most ordinary people who made donations to alleviate this calamity have given more than they can afford while many of the wealthy have yet to participate in this blessed act of charity. The latter collect money and do not know for whom they collect; what they have kept from the mouths of the needy despite all their wealth they will end up paying all at once to those who may not even return the favor with merciful prayers.

As for state aid, it amounts to around fifty thousand purses.² If these purses are to be considered a loan, charity, or goodwill gesture on behalf of the perpetrators, then, for obvious reasons, we need to list them under both liabilities and assets in the country's accounts. In all civilized countries, the wealth and poverty of the government treasury are equated with the wealth of its subjects and vice versa. As for American and European charitable donations, they, too, are estimated at around fifty thousand purses. We have to offer unconditional gratitude because without them many would have died out of hunger and miserable living conditions. Since the value of such generosity is always double that of the donation, what is owed must be listed as twice what was donated. Our hope is that the people of our

country do not turn away from the noble motto “Blessed are those who give more than they take.” May they strive to be the spring of largesse as they have been its recipients.

Some are under the illusion, or wish to pretend they are, that these charitable acts are due to the magnanimity of kings or the generosity of states. In fact, they are the sacrifices and offerings of subjects as ordinary as those receiving them. They are the fruits of the hard work of widows and orphans. They come from the altruism of small children and the sweat on the foreheads of workers and professionals. The heart of aid recipients who care to examine this truth will surely bleed when they make use of the assistance. One expects them not to take lightly donations borne out of morsels of food earned with pain and money earned through hard, tiresome work.

Given this reality, a clear conscience is required that monitors the distribution and acceptance of these charities in order to make sure that they are received with gratitude and honesty. As for the claim that the Syrian unrest is the start of a worldwide war causing total destruction, we believe it is baseless. Our limited insight tells us that the desired goal of bringing peace and prosperity back to Syria can be achieved through extensive means. Otherwise, we are left to conclude that the world has gone old and mad or to agree with some of the astrologers who, guided by their visions and observations, have ordained that the Day of Judgment has arrived at our gates. If this were really the case, we would not need to feel sorry that it is too late or too early; we would need to worry about neither past nor future losses and destructions.

Countrymen,

This unrest has certainly affected your feelings deeply. But if it has turned your hearts into stone, encouraged you to sin and

be disobedient or to ignore religious, moral, and civic duties, then rest assured that the aforementioned losses were grossly underestimated. God's hand will strike harder and spiritual devastation will be added to the temporal one.

If this unrest led you to repent to God, steer away from sins, hatred, and enmities, mend your errant ways, and uphold religious scriptures and principles, then we overestimated our loss. In that case, the homeland would gain tremendously. Though caused by the evil of sin and corruption of the hearts, this blow could, in fact, become an epiphany for you, your children, and your country to seek self-improvement. As the Lord said: "if you obey me and keep to my commandments, you will reap the fruits of the Earth, and if you don't obey me you will be struck down by the blade of the sword."

Countrymen,

Heed what hath been said. Do not say that now is not the time to be religious, that it is all falling on deaf ears, that it is like flogging a dead horse. These and other clichés like them are just obsessions perpetuated by the enemies of our common good who roar like lions ready to devour us. Those who are forewarned must listen and those who are the spiritual guides must pay attention; the well-being of the soul ought not be sacrificed on the altar of the comfort of the body. For this is the right time, and this is the time for salvation.

Awake! Awake! Oh Shepherds of Israel and leaders of the people, why are you asleep and feigning ignorance? Behold the ferocious lions who come to devour flock and shepherd alike.³

From a patriot