

CHAPTER 14

Clarion 9

January 14, 1861¹

Moral Gains of the Homeland

Countrymen,

A reader of the title of this pamphlet might stop and wonder: Given this patriot's previous criticism and given the size of the damage and loss incurred by it, are there any benefits at all that the homeland has gained from the civil unrest?

Since in our corrupt world good and evil do not exist in their pure forms and since every matter has two sides—one dark and ugly, the other bright and pleasant—the Syrian affair, too, does have its bright side. So far, we have not exposed our publication's readers to this side except on rare occasions, in passing, or in digressions. Now, we do not want to be accused of being cock-eyed and, like perennial pessimists, of talking only about the dark side of the current affair. Rather, we would like to raise our compatriots' hopes and alleviate some of the depressing effects that the ugly scenes of past events brought about. So we decided to elaborate on what kind of positive side effects the unrest may have generated for the homeland. Potential past and future gains

occur as by-products of events rather than as intended outcomes; or—to put it better—they are the workings of Providence. So this is what we say.

One of the moral gains of the latest unrest is our compatriots' concrete realization of the horrors of civil war in their own right as well as in the results they yield. This knowledge should, of course, make them feel deep remorse and genuine regret for what has happened; it should also serve as a deterrent for committing such repulsive acts in the future. Knowledge through personal experience will reinforce these sentiments and expose how senseless such violence is. As the saying goes: "They learn through their pockets." Sooner or later, the issues that have triggered the strife and led people to act the way they did are bound to be put before an official commission and tried for all their implications and consequences. Based on this, people do well to realize that it is better for them to settle conflicts by these permissible, nay politically and religiously sanctioned, means. Allowing disagreements to go beyond the limits of moderation by seeking revenge will only unleash on them more evil destruction, the wrath of the authorities, and the contempt of the civilized world.

Another gain is that fellow countrymen may now realize that their public welfare and by extension their personal well-being require that virtuous ties of unity and concord exist between the different communities and among themselves individually. No wise man can deny that the people of Syria possess the highest quality of mind, natural alertness, and the preparedness for moral and industrial progress toward the highest degrees of civilization. Let those with nefarious intentions and those who are prejudiced against the Syrians say what they may. Syria remains one of the finest countries in terms of its natural strength and commercial centers. The country and its people would not have reached this state of deterioration, humiliation, and

backwardness were it not for the lack of unity and paucity of love among Syrians, for their indifference to the welfare of their country and compatriots, for their incredibly foolish surrender to the power of fanaticism, and for the allure of confessional, sectarian, and familial prejudices. Add to that their willingness to be led by the conspiracies and machinations of those who do not care about the welfare of current or future generations. Such people relish the proliferation of differences and enmities among factions and between individuals. In fact, they hold full sway over the hearts of allies and victims alike and make them believe that destroying is preferable to building.

We do not expect that the effects of the recent unrest will disappear in the near future. But we can reasonably hope that sons of the homeland will not forget any time soon the abominable reasons behind the unrest, so that they remain vigilant not to fall into similar predicaments in the future. Let us hope that they have come to value the welfare of their homeland over the fulfillment of harmful and perverted desires and over the lust of those who led and drove them toward that deep-seated hatred and dreadful demise.

Another gain is the growing conviction of our compatriots among others that those despicable wars and terrible atrocities were the logical consequences of irreligious and uncivilized proclivities. Without reforming their ways, they will likely fall deeper into misery, and not recover from their downfall. As long as our people do not distinguish between religion, which is necessarily an intimate matter between the believer and his Creator, and civic affairs, which govern and shape social and political relations between the human being and their fellow countrymen or between them and their government, as long as our people do not draw a sharp line to separate these two distinct concepts, they will fail to live up to what they preach or practice.

Moreover, as long as our compatriots do not open the doors of knowledge and industry and encourage their dissemination among their elites and commoners alike, they should expect neither to join civilized peoples nor to be respected in the eyes of others, or—for that matter—in the eyes of one another. Nor should they presume that the doors to high office in the Ottoman government are open to them. For even though the Arabs were leaders and office holders of the highest reputation in times past, there is no hope in their advancement to anything higher than a scribe, dragoman, council member, or anything similar if they remain in their current condition.

Were our government to adopt a system like that of the Chinese empire, for example, where government positions are restricted to those who are qualified, master the language of their country, and are experts in the laws and organizations of the empire, God knows how many office holders would keep their current positions. Any reasonable person knows how much this country and its people as a whole would gain from the establishment of a meritocratic system akin to the Chinese one. May we see such a system come to being by founding a public college, which would to facilitate the creation of a merit-based bureaucracy, so that both improved education and better government may be counted among the moral gains of the homeland.²

For we strongly hope that in the future our compatriots will give culture, morals, and industry their due consideration and expand them among not just men but also women. For the latter are the mothers of the land whose civilization is the greatest blessing and a precondition for our country's success and for the success of its people. Conversely, keeping women uncivilized is one of the greatest curses for the homeland.³

Let us also hope that in the future our compatriots will not look at themselves through the lens of sect or race but in terms of merit, virtue, and patriotic brotherhood. Such differences ought not lead to hate, envy, and alienation among our compatriot's different communities any more than differences in personal appearance, natural inclinations, clothes, and daily ways of living invoke envy and dislike among individuals. May they use this diversity, instead, as a means to awaken feelings of healthy competition, enthusiasm, conscientiousness, and kindness. Anyone who compares regions where differences exist to where they do not knows that these healthy feelings are often the outcome of such diversity. Those who have observed the matter closely recognize that when political authority was absent or weak, this diversity has often managed to sustain the cultural strength that prevented further unrest before or while it occurred.

Whoever does not consider this diversity carefully will inevitably wonder why it took so long for the current unrest to erupt rather than be surprised by it. Let us assume the impossible scenario that, *ceteris paribus*, all Syrians belong to a single group or nation, whether Muslim or Christian. Would this have been a sufficient guarantee to prevent unrest and foreign intervention? Anyone with a sound opinion and the faintest knowledge about peoples' histories and Syria's more recent history cannot help but arrive at the firm conclusion that the decline would have been worse, the destruction even more widespread and terrible, and the danger much graver and uglier.

Another gain of the unrest is that our compatriots have come to realize that they are not alone in the world. They constitute a central rather than peripheral ring in a global chain. This ring holds a highly significant political and religious meaning. Our ring both connects and separates East and West and as such

exists in difficult circumstances. Today, with advancements like the telegram and steamships, the rings of this great chain have drawn much closer to one another and become more interdependent. Therefore, unless they wish to face humiliation, defeat, and hatred, it is the duty of all those who were destined to be the intermediaries—such as the Syrians—to avoid provoking their neighbors and to be a steady and cooperative link in this worldwide chain. In this case, the loss will be theirs and no one else's.

Another gain is the realization among intelligent, honorable, and wealthy countrymen that blame, loss, and responsibility ultimately rest with them. They should realize that it is in their best interest to know their limits and to diligently keep the ignorant at bay through education. To promote peace, concord, and amicability by example and instruction will help overcome their opposites. If the wise among Syrians had accounted for the consequences of deeds and realized sooner that developments would lead to the current unrest's far-reaching effect, then they might have expelled the first obsessive whisper that the devil or those with ulterior motives instilled in their minds. They could have immediately smothered the first spark hurled into Syria's parched forests and barren slopes by an ignorant fool or a sly conniver. Even if they could not have managed to extinguish the fire, at least they would have immediately abandoned the thick of war and its foolish proponents. That way, they would have proven to the world that they had no hand in these atrocities and barbaric acts and that they did not approve of them, and that they occurred against both their disposition and their will.

What could the commoners, whose most conspicuous characteristic is ignorance, have done without someone supplying them with money, logistics, and the tools of war? What can one ask of people who are mere instruments in the hands of those in power and who are led by their notables, even against their own

interests, assuming that they know what their interests are? It follows that demanding collective punishment for all those who took part in the unrest is no better than blanket impunity. Both are extreme measures, neither religiously nor politically permissible. The former would amount to an act of barbarity, as the entire country would be cleansed of most of its men, given that very few did not participate in one way or another in these events. The latter, meanwhile, would entail the survival of those who are the virus of corruption and the roots of unrest. Setting those people free would boost the morale of evildoers and would expose the country to the perils of falling again into unrest instigated by them.

Another gain is that our fellow countrymen have become persuaded in a tangible way that governance is not only the salt but the very life of the Earth, and that laws exist to constrain evildoers and troubled souls. For lack of governance and the disrespect for the law are two of the worst evils to befall a country, whatever the degree of civilization and success the country has enjoyed. This is because governance and laws are like good health; their worth is only appreciated in their absence.

We hope that, given Syria's pivotal position in the world and the various interests of foreigners in it, Syrians have been persuaded that their transgression of the boundaries of moderation and humanity incurs the blame of the entire world and necessitates foreign intervention. Foreign political intervention may temporarily benefit some individuals, but we strongly believe that it is harmful to all countries. In a country like this one that is home to different races, rife with rooted differences and opposing views regarding foreign intervention, the latter is especially harmful given the different political and religious interests of the intervening powers. However, we maintain that, this time around, the intervention was beneficial to all groups

and absolutely necessary to put an end to the spread of unrest and destruction. Both were like an infectious disease spreading with determination and speed from one place to another. We wish that this intervention had taken place earlier or produced its desired effect before things got out of hand and the destruction became so widespread.

The entire Syrian people are indebted to these foreign hands. The latter lent support to their trusted counterparts of the Ottoman state and to the honest among its soldiers, in order to put an end to the unrest and restrain the evildoers behind it who disobeyed God and their rightful rulers. We hope that this foreign assistance, contingent on serving Syria's interest, will continue until the fundamentals of justice and security are irrevocably established and until there is no more reason to fear the aggression, betrayal, and unrest committed by the connivers and their lowly and savage allies in the population.

We also hope that those countrymen who have become civilized will not turn their faces away haughtily from their brethren and alienate themselves in their own country. That is not an act of brotherly patriotism; it bodes ill for the country and hence for our fellow countrymen, particularly for their offspring. Rather, the civilized need to work tirelessly toward the benefit of the homeland and its children, even if they do not immediately reap the fruits of their endeavors and their sacrifices.

Countrymen,

The year 1860 has passed by with all its great incidents and its mystifying turbulences that affected these lands and the rest of the world. In its stead, we welcome the arrival of a new political year and hope that it will be one of comfort, affluence, and security in Syria and for its people. Given the calamities that shook

the world last year, we cannot but hope that the fallout does not last beyond the end of this year. May the latter be a better one marked by rebuilding and peacefulness.

To fulfill these hopes, we have to remind our compatriots of two important issues. First, healing their country and fixing their lot depend on unity and personal diligence. This is because depending on others is like a hungry man who thinks his hunger will subside when his friend or his lord eats, or like an ignorant man who relies on the education of his neighbor or coreligionist to become a philosopher. For whoever cannot stand on their own cannot rely on anyone to prop them up.

Second, showing hatred toward the whole of society based on the sins that some of its members committed either consciously or carelessly is not only unfair but also harmful, as it prevents the very unity and concord upon which the success of the people and the country depends. We hardly need to remind our countrymen that regret and remorse should be met with the spirit of forgiveness. This can bring hearts closer together and help restore concord. This is what the good neighbor and the true brother seek in our homeland; without concord success is elusive for neighbors and brothers even though their personal and professional interests are so intertwined.

May God guide the leaders and decision makers toward the good of everyone and the comfort of the public, and may He grant them the will and ability to achieve that. May God preserve you.

From a patriot