

Firmness

Kawkab al-Sharq, 16 June 1933

Before the Minister of the Interior spoke in the Chamber of Deputies about the government's position on the missionaries, the cabinet's newspaper was cringing and thoroughly flustered — making excuses for the cabinet and pressing those excuses insistently, and laying the responsibility for missionary activity and the coercive and harmful methods the missionaries employ at the door of this wretched people: because it sends its sons and daughters to those schools and shelters, and because it does not establish Islamic schools and shelters to educate the poor and house the destitute and thereby keep them away from these institutions, which are fraught with peril for religion and morality.

Nor did the cabinet's newspaper scruple to attack the cabinet's opponents in their religion, their morality, and their dignity, relying for this purpose on the fabrications of certain liars among the Azhar sheikhs and the inventions of certain fabricators from outside the Azhar — claiming that we are the last people who should speak about the missionaries or defend religion, because one or more hired agents and men of grudge, who feel no compunction at selling their consciences for a post or some amount of money, large or small, had cobbled together a collection of lies and manufactured a collection of calumnies, assisted in this by the wholesome, pious Islamic government then in power — from which faith drips and piety flows whenever it speaks, moves, or acts — so that these lies and calumnies were being broadcast under the very eyes of a government that defends religion, stands guard over morality, and wills nothing but truth and sincerity in all it does and says. But we did not wait for the opinion of the Defender of Islam and his patron, and the Minister of Traditions, and those who work for them among those who make God's religion a trade and a path to this fleeting prosperity in this fleeting life. We did not wait for the opinion of these upright, virtuous, and pure gentlemen to defend truth and stand guard over religion, to acquit ourselves in the one and take up the defence of the other — a service we would have wished some part of had been rendered by the Sheikh of Al-Azhar and those of his pure and wholesome companions. And God knows we mention this not to boast or to take pride in it, for we

never in anything we have done sought either praise or pride, nor did we in anything we have done seek to defend ourselves or to exact revenge. Had we desired any of that, we would have found among the scholars of religion who lie in religion's name, and among those who trade in piety, a posture or postures to make them shrink with the utmost shrinking and flee with the utmost flight, wishing — even at the price of having their noses cut and their ears cropped — that the harm be warded from them and the wrong averted; but God knows what they have done with their consciences. Yet that is for God's reckoning and the judgement of the people.

But let us set aside the inanity of this newspaper and those who supply it with lies and calumnies in what concerns us, and pause instead at its accounts of the cabinet and its dealings with the missionaries. Before the Minister of the Interior donned the garment of firmness that he put on in the Chamber of Deputies the day before yesterday, the cabinet's newspaper was trembling and shifty, defending the cabinet in helpless, palm-outward gestures, seeking excuses on its behalf, and accusing its opponents of exaggeration, extravagance, malice, and wishful thinking. But after the Minister of the Interior asserted himself like a lion and proclaimed at the top of his voice in the Chamber of Deputies that he had expelled a female missionary from Egyptian soil, that he would rescue Muslim girls from the Port Said school, and that the cabinet had prepared a sum of money for the establishment of schools and shelters for the poor and the destitute — he breathed new life into his newspaper, set it pulsing with activity, filled it with restless energy, and loosened its tongue in praise and commendation and in pride and self-congratulation. The newspaper proceeded to describe the cabinet's firmness and its fine conduct in the defence of religion. And why not? Had not the cabinet dared to expel a foreigner from Egyptian soil? And why not? Had not the cabinet shown generosity by sheltering the poor and the destitute? And why not? Had not the cabinet gone to the extreme of generosity in allocating funds for the establishment of shelters and schools to receive the poor and the destitute? However, the cabinet's newspaper evidently needs the people to know the true nature of this affair, so that they may understand that the cabinet deserves the least conceivable praise for what it has done and what it has promised — for it

has done nothing and promised nothing, and had it been left to its own devices it would have remained inert, silent, and motionless, neither acting nor speaking.

The Muslims of Port Said were well-advised when they had no faith in the cabinet and did not appeal to it, after they had once sought its help and cried out to it and found nothing from it — neither benefit nor effective action. The Muslims of Port Said were well-advised when they turned away from the cabinet this time and took refuge with His Majesty the King — seeking his intercession, sheltering under his protection, and asking him to command his government to ward off this affliction from them and deliver them from this tribulation.

There the Muslims of Port Said found in His Majesty the King one who listened to them, was compassionate towards them, was gentle with them, and was determined to ward off this harm from them. And indeed we too were well-advised when we turned away from the cabinet, sought nothing from it, and asked nothing of its help — but rather hoped that His Majesty would be gracious enough to command it to obey, and breathe into it something of his national spirit so that it might find some courage with which to discharge its duty, after conclusive evidence had established that when left to its own devices it does nothing.

His Majesty the King, then, is the one who was gracious enough to command the cabinet to set aside from the Muslims' funds what would protect the poor Muslims from the missionaries' depredations. And we are fully confident that had the cabinet carried out His Majesty's command as he intended it and as he had issued it to them, its firmness would have been greater and its efforts far more closely approaching success.

But it carried out His Majesty the King's command as best it could and as far as its courage stretched, so its effort came out diminished and its work fell wide of the mark. Indeed, had the cabinet carried out His Majesty's command as it ought, it would not have been content merely with expelling a female missionary from Egyptian soil; it would also have closed down this school entirely, and cut off every path to the missionaries for playing with the religion of the children in Port Said.

Evidence of this is that al-Sha'b itself mentions His Majesty's command to the cabinet, His Majesty's compassion for the people, and His Majesty's defence of religion — and mentions these not as inferences, deductions, or imaginings, but as things it recalls with certainty, from an account communicated to it by a source that trusts what it says. Further evidence is that al-Sha'b informs us that the cabinet had wanted to allocate a large sum of money but His Majesty the King was not satisfied with this sum and was gracious enough to command that it be raised until it reached seventy thousand pounds — and God knows what sum the cabinet had wished to allocate for this purpose, though in all likelihood it was considerable by the standards of al-Sha'b's newspaper and paltry in reality. Yesterday we feared that the cabinet's promise to allocate this sum might be nothing more than words and a pious wish. But now that it has emerged that it was His Majesty who caused the cabinet to utter this promise, and who raised the sum to where it stands, we are confident that the fulfilment of this promise will not be delayed, and that the wait for it to be honoured will not be long — for we know full well that His Majesty the King will leave no path open to procrastination and breach of faith. Our thanks are therefore entirely for His Majesty the King and not upon the cabinet, and the people knows how to receive His Majesty's compassion with its pure love, its loyal devotion, and its steadfast fidelity.

As for the cabinet — it shies away from what we have asked of it in the way of the correct remedy for the missionary question and the correct defence of religion, national identity, and morality. It shies away from the rigorous supervision which we insist the state must impose on free schools, both Egyptian and foreign. It shies away from this because it shies away from the Capitulations, and because it fears that if it proceeds to impose supervision on foreign schools the foreigners will disown it and turn against it — and it is eager for the foreigners' favour, dependent on the foreigners' goodwill, and desirous of the foreigners' affection. It shies away from this, and were it not for this shying away the law would not have been lulled to sleep after it had been drafted, announced, and submitted to public opinion. And it shies away, and its newspaper portrays this shying away in a manner disgraceful, befitting neither dignity nor honour, nor befitting a cabinet of independence — that cabinet whose head silenced the British Prime Minister with his

celebrated historical reply, which no one doubts was drafted without the knowledge of the British, written without the approval of the High Commissioner, sent without the satisfaction of the British Foreign Office, and which no one doubts that Mr. MacDonald had barely finished reading before he was seized with dizziness and became convinced that the Egyptian cabinet knew how to send the great powers back to their humble positions, and how to repel aggressors when they meddled in Egypt's own affairs, forcing them to capitulate and apologise.

Yes — this shying away from imposing supervision on free schools is portrayed by the cabinet's newspaper in a manner that does not reflect credit on the cabinet. It claims that we are asking for this supervision only to render the cabinet incapable, to challenge it, and to burden it with what it cannot bear. God forgive us — when has it been permissible for anyone to believe that this noble, free cabinet — this glorious, independent cabinet — this cabinet that silenced MacDonald — is incapable of supervising education on Egyptian soil? Who is it that supposes this cabinet, which cares for nothing but Egypt, which is eager for nothing but Egypt, which is compassionate towards nothing but Egypt, is incapable of telling the foreigners that Egypt is an independent country and that it will not permit its sons to receive any education save what befits their needs, their interests, and their dignity? Who is it that supposes this cabinet incapable of enjoying even the most elementary rights of sovereignty — or even of striving to enjoy the most elementary rights of sovereignty?

They invoke the Capitulations, claiming that Egypt operates under a system requiring the government to seek the agreement of the Mixed Courts Commission for certain laws it wishes to apply to foreigners — and they claim that Egypt has sought and continues to obtain agreement to many of these laws. Why then did the cabinet not seek this Commission's agreement to this particular law, as it was advised to do when it was active in issuing it? Can the cabinet explain to the people this strange posture of theirs? It threw itself into promoting this law to such a degree that people came to think it might be issued during Parliament's absence, then threw itself into neglecting this law to such a degree that people came to believe it had died before ever seeing the light. Where is

the devil that strangled this law before it could see the light? Was he a foreigner or an Egyptian? And what was the purpose of all that excessive attention? The explanation is simple: the cabinet had wanted to use this law as a political tool for exerting influence over the free Egyptian schools, after it had become clear to it that a policy of grants — whether generously dispensed, withheld, or doled out sparingly — was insufficient for spreading propaganda.

Allow us to say to the cabinet and its newspaper, without hesitation, that the government needs some courage to rouse this law from its sleep or resurrect it from its death, and to press among the foreign powers for its enforcement against all free schools. Indeed, had the cabinet been left to its own devices it would not have given this law a second thought. Yet it alone is worthy of protecting Egyptian morality from the depredations of the corrupters, and it alone is worthy of protecting Islam from the aggression of the missionaries.

May we be permitted to abandon the cabinet — having despaired of it in striking the hand of the missionaries — and to take refuge once again with His Majesty the King, and to ask His Majesty to be gracious enough to command his cabinet to bring forth this law and press urgently for its enforcement upon Egyptians and foreigners alike? May we be permitted to lay before His Majesty the King that Egyptian morality stands in need of protection, that Egyptian national identity stands in need of nurturing, that the official religion of the state stands in need of safeguarding, and that the path to all of this is nothing other than the state's rigorous, faithful, and impartial supervision of free education — whether Egyptian or foreign? May we be permitted to await His Majesty the King's gracious inclusion of this dimension of Egyptian life within the compass of his exalted solicitude?