

Duties

Kawkab al-Sharq, 29-26, 1933

This is what His Eminence Sheikh al-Maraghi has set down in his letter to the Deputy Prime Minister, on behalf of the Society for the Defence of Islam, demanding that the government repel, on behalf of all Egyptians, the aggression of these foreign bodies that pursue missionary activity. It is beyond doubt that the eminent Sheikh has succeeded admirably in his letter, setting each thing in its proper place, restoring matters to their rightful measure, and employing a frankness that leaves no path to ambiguity and no road to equivocation, together with a firmness that cannot be charged with weakness or faintness of resolve. The Sheikh speaks not for himself alone, but for himself and for the society that chose him as its head. And he speaks on behalf of all Egyptians, however their passions and persuasions may differ, and whatever their religions and creeds may be.

The first thing for which the Sheikh deserves congratulation is that he has lifted this cause above being a sectarian matter — the concern of one party rather than another, pressed by some Egyptians and not by others — and has made it a purely Egyptian cause, one that Egypt herself takes up against the foreigner who invades her on her own soil and assails her institutions and her creeds.

For the Sheikh, and behind him the Society for the Defence of Islam, does not defend Islam alone, but defends Christianity also; indeed, he defends Egyptian liberty in its entirety. Nor could the scholars of Islam have taken any other path or spoken in any other tone, for their religion obliges them to defend freedom of opinion, and their religion obliges them to seek the truth in all that they say and do. And the truth is that Islam is the religion of the state, the religion of the majority of Egyptians, so that all Egyptians must protect it, and the government must be foremost among its protectors. And the truth is that Christianity is the religion of a community of Egyptians, and that the Coptic Church is one of the manifestations of Egypt's ancient glory, so that all Egyptians must protect it, and the government must be foremost in undertaking its protection. And the truth is that there is no compulsion in religion, so that all Egyptians must protect every religion established in Egypt from compulsion, whatever form it may take. The faiths must be protected from having people driven out of them against their will. And it must be made plain to all that compulsion is in itself a sin that religion abhors and

that the law abhors. Governments were established for no other purpose than to efface it, to put an end to it, and to punish those who commit it or call others to it.

All this the Society for the Defence of Islam affirms, and all this the Council of Senior Scholars affirms, and all this our Coptic brethren affirm. The matter, then, is not one of an assault upon Islam alone, but rather an assault upon human liberty, an assault upon civilization itself, as Sheikh al-Maraghi indicated in his letter to the Acting Prime Minister. For if missionary activity is permissible, even commendable, among savage peoples who have had no portion of refinement and no share of culture, then it becomes a hateful ugliness for missionary work to be made a means of warring against an established civilization possessed of its own glory, its own lofty share of refinement, and its own far-reaching influence in the civilizing of mankind.

Sheikh al-Maraghi has touched upon all of this in his letter, and he deserves to be congratulated for it; the people deserve to give ear to all that he has said in this matter; and the government deserves to answer his appeal and to take up these duties which the Sheikh's letter has enumerated with a precision, a candor, an integrity, and a rigor all at once.

How numerous these duties are, and how easy they would be, if the government truly wished to discharge its task with strength and resolve and certainty — for it was not created for itself, but was established to serve the nation it governs. There is no doubt that laws were not legislated in vain, but were legislated so that people should be bound by the rulings they contain, and that courts were established to render justice to the wronged against the wrongdoer. It is therefore the right of Sheikh al-Maraghi, and the right of all the people, to refuse to be satisfied by the government with temporary measures, and to demand that it actually refer to the courts whatever sins of the foreign missionaries come to light. Had this aggression by the missionaries been committed by Muslims against Copts, or by Copts against Muslims, the government would not have hesitated to enforce the law and bring the offenders before the courts — for these offenders would, in that case, be Egyptians whom no privileges protect, and the government would feel no scruple in dealing with them severely until justice had run its course.

Nor is there any doubt that the foreign ministries and political missions were not established to be mere ornament, but to realize sincere

and solid bonds between nations and peoples. So if foreigners in Egypt commit an offense, or perpetrate a sin, and fail in the duties of hospitality, then it is the right that the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs should use its political influence to set right this crookedness and remedy this corruption — and this is what the Society for the Defence of Islam demands.

And if foreigners exceed all bounds in their aggression, overstep the duties of hospitality, and violate the sanctities of the country in which they live, then it becomes the duty of the government, for its own dignity and the dignity of the nation, to restrain them from this and to cut off the path before them, and to close their institutes and their schools wherever it is established that these are being used as instruments of sin and crime. This is what Sheikh al-Maraghi demands, what the Society for the Defence of Islam supports, and what all Egyptians support.

And it is the right that the government should spend none of the people's money except in what benefits the people. So if it is established that the foreigners whom the government appoints with the people's money are doing the people harm and committing aggression against it, then it is a sin for the government to continue assisting them — to withhold neither the money it grants them, nor to forgo collecting what is owed from them, nor to refrain from demanding the taxes it has remitted to them. This is what Sheikh al-Maraghi demands, what the Society for the Defence of Islam supports, and what all Egyptians support.

The same may be said of this land which the government grants to foreigners without charge, or for a nominal sum, on condition that they erect upon it useful schools and institutes; if instead they erect upon it institutes and schools that harm rather than benefit, that do ill rather than good, then this land must be reclaimed from them.

The same may be said, too, of these privileges granted to foreign clergy, which permit them to travel without charge: it is the government's duty to abolish these privileges if it is established that these persons do not travel to spread good and enjoin what is right, but travel to spread evil and enjoin corruption.

Nor can anyone deny that any state deserving of the name has the right to issue such laws as enable it to oversee all that occurs upon its soil, so as to guard against its harm, repel its mischief, and protect the people from its consequences. This is what Sheikh al-Maraghi demands, and what all Egyptians demand along with him. They ask for nothing

excessive, nor do they burden the government with anything difficult; they ask of it only the easiest of what governments ought to undertake. Indeed, the strange thing is that the government should wait to be asked before doing this, rather than undertaking it of its own accord, without needing anyone to remind or alert it to its duty.

The entire Egyptian people has now risen to do what it owes to itself, to its dignity, to human liberty, and to human civilization, and the entire Egyptian people has spoken, in this matter, a word of truth in which there is neither confusion nor ambiguity. May God grant the government of Egypt the grace to rise to its duty as Egypt herself has risen to hers.