

Strife

Kawkab al-Sharq, 18 June 1933

It was not good that it should be provoked, and none of the Egyptians provoked it; rather it was provoked by a people among those whom self-interest lures to wrongdoing, and in whom fanaticism corrupts everything, so that they do not scruple to commit crimes, nor hesitate to perpetrate sins, so long as they find in that the fulfilment of some interest, the satisfaction of some need, or the healing of some rancour. These are the people who came to this country as guests, yet respected no sanctity of it and kept no covenant with it, but rather assailed all its people alike, Muslims and non-Muslims together, seducing them from their religion and turning them away from it by every hue of enticement and every kind of compulsion.

These are the ones who stirred up this strife, and they have stirred it up again and again. The Egyptians stood firm against them and bore with them, and asked their government to set the matter right and to return these people to where they ought to be — under the protection of the law and in submission to order. The Egyptian press, then as now, would broach this subject only with caution, and would speak of it only with reserve, for it judged, then as now, that stirring religious sentiment was a danger requiring caution and reserve. But these people went on with what they had set out to do, and persisted in the corruption they had undertaken, while the government fell short, or proved powerless, in rising to its duty, failing to protect the religion of the Egyptians, their dignity, or their national honour — until the evil reached its utmost extent and the aggression of these people reached its furthest point: boys were converted openly, and turned from their religion in broad daylight; judicial rulings went unenforced, the government powerless to carry them out; government orders were disregarded, the government powerless to compel these people's respect for them; and every manner of scheming against the Egyptians multiplied and spread until it touched everything — young girls had love turned loose upon them, so that once entangled in it, it drove them to apostasy, and gave those who were not Muslim dominion over them. When matters came at last to this outrage, and people grew loud with indignation at its evil, the government roused itself to a measure of firmness, but did not carry it far enough: here is another missionary woman in Port Said who left, only to be on the point of returning; and here is another missionary woman in Port Said who

defies the government, refusing to hand over to it the Muslim girls in her charge. And here is a judicial ruling separating a Muslim woman from a Christian man, which the government finds no way to enforce. News of all this is published in the papers at length and in detail; every day people uncover some new evil, and expose some new secret; and letters reach the papers, many, continual, urgent, rousing the spirit, stirring the emotions, making light of the effort the papers expend, and reproaching the silence of the silent papers and the lukewarmness of the lukewarm ones. All this we meet with patience and reserve — excessive patience, excessive reserve — for we still hold that this matter is a strife that ought never to have been stirred up, and that this strife, once stirred, must be quelled, and its evil turned away from the people.

For this reason we do not cease to press the government to seek out another measure of courage besides the measure it displayed last week, for it has become clear that last week's courage does not suffice, and that last week's firmness is too feeble to meet the need and to extend the government's authority — I do not say over the missionaries, but rather over these Egyptian girls whom the missionaries violate.

The government must seek out a new measure of courage and firmness, that God may perhaps grant it success thereby, so that these missionaries may feel that they dwell in a civilized country, in which a state stands established; and that this state has institutions that must be respected, sanctities that must be honoured, and a power that must be obeyed. Whoever oversteps the bounds of these institutions, these sanctities, and this power, this state is capable of seizing him for it, rightfully, and with a firm hand.

Among the things that admit neither doubt nor dispute is that Egypt has a constitution, and whoever denies it, the law punishes him; that this constitution has established a parliament in Egypt, and whoever denies it, the public prosecution brings him before the courts; and that in this parliament are senators and deputies whom God has endowed with strength and vigour, granted a breadth of learning and of body, given tongues that speak and multiply speech, and hands that do not refrain from motion, nor hesitate, at times, to reach out in violence. And among the certainties that admit neither doubt nor dispute is that this parliament has more than once shown zeal for religion and anger on behalf of Islam, and has more than once called upon the government to protect this religion and to defend Islam. And among the truths beyond doubt is that among the members of this parliament there is one who

rose up and seethed, who settled and then whirled about, who quieted and then took flight, who was extravagant in his warnings and admonitions, and who did not scruple to accuse Muslims wrongfully, to stir up resentment against them, and to incite the common people against them — and he pressed his fellow deputies until an interpellation was held, in which speech grew abundant, contention grew fierce, and Islam triumphed; and the Prime Minister became its patron, and its protector its guardian, and the earth trembled for it and shook with its tremor. All this is certain, beyond doubt, and all this lays upon parliament today obligations which, should it fall short of them or shirk them, would prove that it was sincere neither to God nor to religion on the day it rose in that uprising, and on the day it surged and swelled and stirred up that tumult.

And it is certain that in this parliament there is a shaykh whom the people call Shaykh al-Islam, though Islam has no such shaykh. And it is certain that this Shaykh al-Islam has shown anger on the nation's behalf where there was no need for such anger; he has accused Muslims of unbelief, and incited the state's authority against them; he has assailed the books of earlier Muslim scholars and asked the state to confiscate them, and the state complied and confiscated them for a time. Let this shaykh, then, who grows angry where anger is out of place, and rises up where there is no cause for rising, and who now displays his zeal for religion, his defence of it, and his standing guard over it, demand of the parliament of which he is a member that it take, in this matter, a stand firmer than the government's own — lest it be said that he was not angry for Islam on the day he grew angry, but angry for politics and its immediate advantages; and that he did not rise for Islam on the day he rose, but rose for office and salary.

Be that as it may, the conduct of the missionaries has shown that the Minister of the Interior's declaration accomplished nothing, nor restrained them from their wrongdoing — indeed it emboldened them and made it dearer to them. The Minister of the Interior must therefore find some other means for himself, one that will make his declaration decisive, convincing, and effective upon the missionaries. Parliament, if it is truly zealous for knowledge, must let it be known — and let the Muslims know, from where they may learn it — that this missionary woman who defies the government in Port Said has submitted to the government and handed over the girls to it, and that the judicial ruling has been carried out. And it is imperative that this sum which the ministry wishes to allocate for shelters and schools become a settled

matter, and that the law providing for it be issued before the parliamentary session ends. We assure the ministry and parliament that the matter of these schools and shelters is more useful to the nation and more beneficial to it than these projects which the government has rushed through, allocating to them millions, and hundreds of thousands, and tens of thousands. And we assure them that the session may well end without this appropriation having become a reality beyond all doubt or evasion. And if we could be confident that parliament would heed the call of those who call for it, and would truly reflect the nation's desire to defend its dignity and its religion, we would ask it not to adjourn until it has issued whatever laws our life in these days requires against these missionaries, whom this strife only makes more insistent in wrongdoing and more excessive in tyranny.

If we knew that parliament would truly take care to reflect the nation's inclinations and satisfy its needs, we would hope from it for an interpellation like that interpellation raised last year over a falsehood among falsehoods, an error among errors, a piece of that political scheming which has corrupted everything in Egypt.

Yes — it is parliament's due, for its own sake, for the religion of the state, and for the honour of Islam's protector and guardian, he who now resides at Versailles, it is parliament's due that it not close this session without an interpellation in which the government shows what it means to do, and in which the government pledges itself to press earnestly for the issuing of the law that will enable it to oversee private education in its entirety.

This interpellation — should it come — will remove from parliament a stain it would not wish to bear: that it interpellates only when there is no harm to the government in being interpellated.

Let parliament put its trust in God, and let its peerless orator and its intrepid champion go to the Shaykh al-Azhar, as it is said he went last year; let him write, or have written for him, an interpellation such as the one he wrote or had written last year, as they say; and let him make his speech and excel at it, for the subject is worthy of oratory and of eloquence. This time he will have no need of anyone to invent falsehoods for him or fabricate untruths, as he needed last year; and the people will go readily to the Chamber of Deputies to hear him, obedient, not reluctant, and willing, not driven — for it used to be said, last year, that they were dragged bodily to the Chamber of Deputies, driven there by

force, to listen and then to cheer. And they did listen, and they did cheer. We assure the champion orator that this time they will not hesitate to go to the Chamber, nor hesitate to admire the Chamber and the ministry, should the two of them manage to turn away from them the evil of the missionaries.

In conclusion: we intend no jest, nor do we mean any pleasantry; we mean only to warn the ministry and parliament that the affair of the missionaries, if left as it stands, will end by bringing the country to an outrageous strife that will not strike only those who did the wrong, but will strike the guilty and the innocent alike; and that the first duty upon the ministry and parliament, both of which are concerned to establish order and secure security, is to turn away this strife's evil from the people, and to turn it away as swiftly as possible.