

A Week...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), July 29, 1934

Its days, it appears, will be short, and its nights long — for the Wafd leader has taken to touring some of the provinces this week, and so the Minister of the Interior will spend the white of the day tethered to his telephone, and the black of the night pondering what has happened and what is yet to come. This week is made harder still by the fact that the Wafd leader has proven neither merciful nor considerate: he has chosen this moment for his journey to Port Said and to Sharqiya province, before the recent administrative campaign has receded far enough into the past for the Minister to catch his breath from that long, heavy strain which consumed him for months on end. Had the Wafd leader been merciful and considerate, he would have held off on this journey of his until the Minister could rest from the exertion of that harsh and violent campaign, recover his full strength and all his vigor, and so be free to give himself to this new journey and to whatever burdens and exertions it is about to impose on him.

But the Wafd leader will soon learn that the Minister of the Interior is not a man undone by hardship, nor worn down by exertion, nor ever caught off guard — rather, he is a man who is strong however weak he may be, energetic however listless he may be, rested however weary he may be; a man who sleeps with one eye closed while the other keeps watch over the depths of the air, the reaches of the sky, and the corners of the earth, to see from where events might come upon him, and from where misfortunes might steal toward him.

And the police, God be thanked, stand ready, and the administration, God be thanked, stands prepared, so that no sooner does the order go out than the scattered are drawn together and the dispersed reassembled, and Egypt's second port finds itself transformed into a city at war — soldiers spreading through it, policemen sprouting up on every side, an uproar and a clamor rising within it, the clatter of weapons audible throughout it, the neighing of horses unsettling its very air — so that the Egyptians may learn from all this that they are free, but only within limits; that they are in their own country, yet powerless to receive whom they love as they would wish to receive them; and so that the foreigners among its people may learn that there is no harm in mocking the Egyptians, deriding them, humiliating and exploiting them — for these

are a people who imagine themselves free, though how little freedom is truly theirs; who see themselves as men of honor, though how little honor is truly theirs; who claim to be independent, though how far they stand from independence. Were they truly free, or honored, or independent, the city would not have been seized on every side, nor would soldiers and police have encircled them as a bracelet encircles a wrist, nor would armed troops have burrowed into its very depths as sickness burrows into the depths of the sick — for no reason but that the leader of Egypt wishes to visit one of Egypt's own cities. But the Minister of the Interior is watchful, and the army keeps watch alongside him, and the police stand ready, and force stands at the ready — for it would be folly to be strong and not display one's strength, to be watchful and not display one's watchfulness, to hold power and conceal that power from the eyes that might see it.

But there is a question we would like the Minister of the Interior and the Prime Minister to answer: what would the Minister of the Interior have done — indeed, what would the entire Ministry have done — had some notable of Port Said invited the High Commissioner to visit Port Said, and taken it into his head to raise pavilions for him and muster the people to greet him with cheers and applause? Would the police have been mobilized? Would the army have been called up? Would people have been arrested by the hundred and crammed into prison cells? Would the merchants have been ordered to shutter their shops? Would people have been ordered to stay confined to their homes? Would one of the country's cities have been placed under martial law, with no legal basis and no cause whatever to justify placing it under martial law? Certainly not. Indeed, when the British High Commissioner visits some village in the provinces, the Minister plays host to him, the Governor receives him, the people are mustered to greet him in great numbers, and the ground itself is smoothed over in readiness for his airplane. Oh, the mockery of these days!...

The Egyptians used to believe that the land of Egypt belonged to them, that they could come and go upon it as they pleased, and that the air of Egypt belonged to them, that they could breathe it freely; but the days have shown that the land of Egypt belongs to the Minister of the Interior, who permits whom he wishes to move about it and forbids whom he wishes, and that the air of Egypt belongs to the Minister of the Interior, who permits whom he wishes to breathe it and forbids whom he wishes. All Egyptians, it turns out, are subject to the Minister of the

Interior: he disposes of them as he pleases, and manages their affairs as he wishes; he grants them leave to receive a visitor, and they receive him; he forbids them to receive a visitor, and they comply. And should any of them fail to obey, the administration has him arrested — out of fear for him, not fear of him, for the administration fears nothing and no one; rather, it arrests Egyptians for fear that they might defy the Minister's order — that they might go out to receive someone after being forbidden to receive him, that they might cheer after being forbidden to cheer, that they might applaud after being warned against applauding, and so expose themselves, for all that, to investigation and then to trial! The Minister of the Interior is a man who takes his precautions well: he prepares for danger before it arrives — not in Port Said alone, but in Sharqiya as well, so that this province, too, must be made ready with a full show of military preparedness for the encounter that is to take place on Thursday.

The Wafd leader may visit Sharqiya, but the Wafdists may not receive him; he may call on them in their own homes if he wishes, provided the forces of government surround him to protect him from the people who do not love him and do not wish to see him! But that the Wafdists should gather to meet their own leader is a thing the Minister will not permit, nor will the Governor allow. And again we ask: what would the Minister have done, what would the Governor have done, had some notable of Sharqiya invited the High Commissioner to visit him, and wished to raise a pavilion for him and muster a crowd to receive him? Would the law on public assembly have been invoked against him? Would he have been forbidden to raise his pavilion? Would he have been forbidden to gather the people? Certainly not! Rather, the ground would have been smoothed, the pavilion raised, and the Governor himself would be found at the head of the welcoming crowd.

The Egyptians must open their eyes, for Egypt, it would seem, does not truly belong to them; the Egyptians must wake up, for it would seem they were not created to enjoy even the simplest marks of freedom in a country that claims to be free, whose affairs are supposedly governed by a constitution — but were created, rather, so that the Minister of the Interior might sit in Alexandria and direct from there what is permitted them and what is forbidden them, consulting in this only his own opinion and his own will — and, on occasion, consulting the opinion of the English, and the will of the English.

Yes, the Egyptians must wake up and open their eyes: for the Minister of the Interior is free to see whom he wishes, but the Egyptians,

too, are free to receive whom they wish, as they wish — and the law alone should be the judge between them and the Minister of the Interior in whatever dispute may arise between them.

It is the right of the leader of the Egyptians to visit the Egyptians whenever he wishes, and wherever he wishes — a right a thousand times and one greater than that of the British High Commissioner. And as for those who scatter punishment in the path of the Wafd leader, who raise barriers between him and the people, even as they smooth the ground for the High Commissioner, clear the way between him and the people, and throw open to him the doors of ministers' houses — it is only right that such men reflect, that they think it through, that they weigh the consequences, and that they consult their own conscience; for peoples are not to be governed by this kind of violence in this day and age...