

A Journey...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), August 1, 1934

The first stage of it was completed this morning, after Egyptians and foreigners alike had witnessed things that give both cause for long reflection. They saw a people and a cabinet at odds with one another, in a country said to be democratic and constitutional — a country in which there ought to be no such contest between people and cabinet at all, but in which the cabinet ought simply to bow to the people's will, carry out its wishes, fulfill its hopes, and safeguard its interests and its sanctities — or else resign. And yet Egyptians and foreigners alike saw a contest between people and cabinet in Port Said, a contest of many colors and many shapes, containing earnestness that makes the heart bleed and the liver break, and containing farce that traces bitter smiles upon the lips.

In this struggle between the people and the police, the wounded fall on both sides — from the people and from the police alike — for no reason except that the administration wishes to exercise arbitrary control over people and bend them to its will, when the administration was never brought into being to exercise control, still less to impose its will upon people. And so these crooked stratagems are resorted to: by the cabinet, on one side, to come between the Wafd leader and what he wants, and by the people, on the other, to obtain what they want despite the cabinet's attempts at control and obstruction. The Wafd leader wishes to visit the wounded in the hospital; the cabinet refuses him this visit; the Wafd leader insists on what he wants; and the cabinet finds itself driven to a piece of theater that can only be called bizarre — ordering the wounded hastily removed from the hospital and the place they have been taken to concealed, so that when the Wafd leader arrives at the hospital he does not find them, and when he asks after them, is told they have been moved to an unknown location! A cabinet driven to such theater, resorting to such stratagems, wants people to trust in its strength, to feel its awesome authority, to acknowledge its power and its might. But the truly strong do not play games when earnestness is called for, do not resort to cunning when candor is called for, do not resort to trickery when the facts must be faced with resolve, determination, and boldness. A cabinet genuinely strong, genuinely commanding respect, would simply let the Wafd leader visit the sick in the hospital — and what, after all, is there to fear from such a visit, what does it expect to happen when the Wafd leader enters the hospital to visit the patients within it? A cabinet genuinely strong,

genuinely commanding respect, would forbid the Wafd leader from visiting the hospital outright, if it were truly convinced that harm lay in such a visit. But this wavering and vacillation between permission and prohibition, this playing at what ought not to be played at, this scheming over what ought not to be schemed over, this snatching of patients from the hospital and hiding them in an unknown location — none of this speaks of strength, or of commanding respect, or of earnestness in the matter at hand; it speaks only of weakness, of feebleness, and of a resort to cunning as a way of fleeing one's difficulties.

The cabinet played its games with the people, and the people played their games with the cabinet in turn; the cabinet was in earnest with the people, and the people were in earnest with the cabinet in turn. We believe the cabinet has by now become quite certain that it will find in the people exactly what it itself brings: earnestness for earnestness, farce for farce. The people wished to accompany the Wafd leader to the martyrs' graves; the cabinet refused them this; so they resorted to a stratagem, staging a funeral procession and following it through to its end at the cemetery, where they achieved precisely what they had wanted — the Wafd leader's participation in paying tribute to the martyrs. And it is Al-Muqattam that reports this story, not the Wafd's own newspapers. Whoever needs to laugh at the cabinet's games, and at the people's playing along with those games, may laugh. As for us, we find this truly saddening, for it shows that the relationship between cabinet and people has become fodder for jest and mockery — and that alone is evil and shameful enough.

Be that as it may, the Wafd leader and his companions did visit Port Said, and the people of that city showed how a cabinet can be compelled to acknowledge that the Wafd leader exists, that they love him and do not love it, that they support him and do not support it, that he knows how to endure hardship and how to arrive at what he wants. The Wafd leader set out from Port Said this morning, and the case has been made — and stands made still; the proof has arisen — and stands arisen still; and the dull-witted, before ever the clever, have come to see that the Wafd's hold on Egyptian hearts is too powerful, too broad, too deep, and too firmly rooted for the covetous ever to hope to claim it for themselves. And now the Wafd leader makes his way toward Ismailia, and then to Sharqiya, and the case stands made and the proofs stand arisen here and there, that the cabinet is fearful — fear has distracted it from the earnest business at hand — and panicked, panic has turned it away from good

sense. What is this? What is this strange display of arbitrary control now on show in Zagazig, which tongues and pens alike are powerless to describe? Since when has the cabinet purchased the people of Sharqiya and taken them for its slaves, to dispose of their affairs and direct them in a manner that suits neither logic nor sound reasoning? Do the people of this city wish to erect a pavilion to receive the Wafd leader? The cabinet refuses them this, sheltering behind the law on public assembly. Do the people of this city wish to go out and receive the Wafd leader at the station? The cabinet refuses to permit this outing to anyone beyond ten out of every thousand. Do the people of this city wish to hold a private banquet for the Wafd leader? The cabinet insists on controlling the number of those who may attend the banquet, and their identities: the number must not exceed such-and-such, and no one may attend the banquet except whom the cabinet permits to attend. Do the notables and men of standing among the city's people wish to call upon the Wafd leader? The cabinet insists on knowing beforehand who intends to call upon him, so that it may grant or refuse permission for the visit. And the cabinet further insists that the people of the city specify to it, in advance, the exact route the Wafd leader will take as he moves through the city, and give their own pledge that this route will not change under any circumstances whatsoever.

Words that would delight and entertain, were we reading them in the tales of the Thousand and One Nights, and would call for reflection and moral lesson, were we reading them in some history book depicting ages of oppression and tyranny — but that sadden and provoke, when we know they depict what the cabinet is actually doing, at this very moment, in one of the provinces of Egypt, in the twentieth century, under the shadow of order and law and constitution. What more could the Minister of the Interior possibly do to the people of Sharqiya, had he simply bought them outright, bought their land along with them, and conducted himself among them and upon their land as an owner conducts himself among his own property? Is it not strange that Egypt should be called a civilized country, that this country should be said to have become a part of Europe, that it should be said to live in an age of liberty and enlightenment — and yet the Minister of the Interior exercises this kind of control over its own people, a kind of control that defies both description and comprehension?

Upon whom does the responsibility for this arbitrary control fall? Who ought to be held to account for this oppression? Is it the Egyptian

ministers alone? We do not believe they could manage it, or even a part of it, were it not for some power they lean upon and draw strength from. Is it the English officials, the English occupiers? We do not believe they could manage it, or even a part of it, either, were it not for Egyptian collaborators who complete what they begin, and carry out what they devise. The ones truly to be held accountable for this arbitrary control over a free people, for this humiliation of a dear people, are these collaborators in solidarity with one another: Egyptians who show no regard for their own country's will, no respect for their own people's wishes; and Englishmen who scarcely leave their own country for a distant post before they leave behind, along with it, every respect for right, every reverence for justice, every acknowledgment of a people's rightful claim to live free in their own land. How fitting it would be for Egyptians to reflect on all of this, and to see it clearly — for such reflection might well serve them, and such thinking might well teach them something.