

Incitement...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), August 6, 1933

A report has reached us, told by various tellers and written to us by various correspondents — a report which, if true, is truly grave, and worthy of the deepest care and reflection; and it seems most likely, in our estimation, to be true. For those who have told it to us, and those who have written of it to us, are a scattered and disparate group, unknown to one another, who could not possibly have met and conspired together, plotting some scheme by night or by day. I set down this report here so that readers may see it laid before them, and so that those charged with overseeing the affairs of Egypt — those whose business it should be to answer for the protection of security and order — may know of it too. It happened last Friday, in one of the mosques of the Muslims — the Rifa'i Mosque — upon one of the pulpits of the Muslims — the pulpit of that very mosque — and it came from the tongue of one of the preachers of the Muslims, one of the imams who lead them in prayer: this same man who delivered the sermon to the people and led them in prayer, in that mosque, on that day.

This preacher stood up to admonish the people, to remind them of the days of God, to speak to them of God's blessings upon them and the goodness of His trial of them, and to warn them of the torment God has prepared for sinners. But he did none of this. Instead, he attacked a certain book, and a certain author — and we will name neither this author nor that writer, for their case may well be too slight to merit public attention, and it is not to name them that we write. We proceed, rather, simply to relate the report as it was told to us by those who told it, and written to us by those who wrote it. This preacher, then, set about disparaging the book and its author, lying about the book and its author, attributing to the book what is not in it, and to the author of the book what he never said. It is said that Ziyad once observed: "A lie told from the pulpit is taken as an established truth" — and we believe, and perhaps the Sheikh of Al-Azhar would agree with us, that pulpits were not raised up to be a source of lies, and a means of spreading sin against the innocent.

But let us proceed with the report as it was told by those who told it, and written by those who wrote it. The preacher went on disparaging the book and its author until he claimed to the people that the book was a

plot against Islam, and that its author was acting under the influence of some hidden hand that paid him money to corrupt the religion of the Muslims. Nor did the preacher stop even there — though had he stopped there, he would already have sinned against his own religion, for he spoke of what he did not know, and broadcast from the pulpit of the Muslims something other than the truth, and called men to sedition, when pulpits were never raised up to call men to sedition. He went further still, and claimed to the people that whoever wrote such a book, and pursued such an aim, deserved to be killed — and then cited to the people, in proof of this, a verse of the Qur'an which none of those who wrote to us have reported to us.

Before anything else, we should like to know whether this report is true or not true. We have already said that we consider its truth the more likely, since those who told it to us, and those who wrote of it to us, are a disparate group unknown to one another, and safe from any suspicion of having conspired together in falsehood. It is said that the Rifa'i Mosque belongs to the private religious endowments, and so we should like to know the opinion of His Excellency Zaki al-Abrashi Pasha regarding these preachers he selects — men meant to call the people to good and turn them away from evil, to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong — that one of them should feel no scruple in indulging so freely in wrongdoing and sedition, and in calling openly to sin and to wrong.

We should further like to know the opinion of His Honor the Public Prosecutor regarding a man who stands on one of the pulpits of the Muslims, in one of the mosques of the Muslims, before a congregation of Muslims, on one of the great and well-attended days of the Muslims, and there incites to murder, urges it, and paints it for the people as an act bringing them closer to God. Is such a man fit to be questioned, or not? Is he more deserving of being questioned and investigated than the newspaper writers who take issue with the government over matters God has expressly permitted them to take issue with it over? Since when has it been the right of mosque imams and preachers to speak to the assembled masses of killing, and to permit whole communities, or individual men, to take religion into their own hands and exact its penalties themselves — even against those against whom clear and conclusive evidence shows only that they have done some disservice to religion? What role is left for the sovereign authority in an orderly country, what role for the office of the prosecution and the courts, if people are to be permitted to hold sinners to account for their sins and

punish them for their transgressions without ever resorting to the prosecution or the courts?

We should then like to know the opinion of His Excellency the Minister of the Interior, said to be so watchful over security, said to be the most adroit and the most skillful of all men at protecting that security, said to be the most capable and the most zealous of all men in protecting it. What is his opinion of mosque preachers who turn the pulpits of the Muslims into instruments for inciting murder and stirring up breaches of the peace? And which of these two things poses the greater danger to peace and order in this country: that the leader of the Wafd should tour some of the provinces, speaking to the people about the affairs of their own homeland, discussing with them the rights owed to that homeland, calling them to no sin, tempting them to no sedition, inciting them to no corruption — or that a mosque preacher, salaried by the state to call men to God, should instead fail to call them to Him; salaried by the state to enjoin right conduct, should instead enjoin wrong; salaried by the state to turn people away from crime, should instead throw open to them the very doors of crime.

Finally, we should like to know the opinion of His Eminence, our great master the Sheikh of Al-Azhar and head of the Council of Senior Scholars, regarding a man of religion who calls openly to what religion itself forbids, and persists openly and deliberately in what God, His Messenger, and righteous believers all abhor. Is such a man fit to remain among the ranks of the scholars, to be honored by his association with religion, and indeed to earn his living by that same association — or is he fit, rather, to be struck entirely from the ranks of the scholars and cast out entirely from the community of men of religion, since God's religion is too dear to God, too pure in the hearts of Muslims, and held too high even by men of religion themselves, for a man who follows such a path to be associated with it and to live off it? We believe that His Excellency Zaki al-Abrashi Pasha, His Excellency Mahmoud al-Qaisi Pasha, His Honor Labib Attia Bey, and His Eminence Sheikh al-Zawahiri would all agree with us, without much difficulty, that this report requires investigation; that the man behind this story, if it proves true, requires discipline; that the mosques of the Muslims need to be protected from this kind of corruption; and that the hearts of Egyptians need to be safeguarded against this kind of incitement.