

Vanity...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), September 2, 1934

A French-language newspaper, one of the cabinet's own papers, published this morning, claimed that the Egyptian people are content and at ease, that they complain of nothing and chafe against nothing, and that they wish for nothing from God or from man except that this present state should last forever — this state in which they enjoy security and calm, prosperity and ease.

This newspaper further claimed that the Egyptian people have grown entirely weary of politics, have come to feel the strongest aversion toward it, and have left the wading into it, the amusing themselves with it, and the quarreling over it, to the people of Cairo and Alexandria, and a city or two among the other great cities. For the people of these cities, it claims, are a group corrupted by the newspapers, diverted by mere talk from actual work, distracted from serious matters by trivial ones — and these people amount to no more than ten percent of Egypt's population; they are, then, a small minority, an insignificant group, divided up among the political parties, toyed with by their own passions, driven by idleness, or something resembling idleness, toward nothing of any worth.

As for the people who labor and toil, who work and hope, for whose sake governments exist, for whom they labor, whom they attend to, and over whose interests they keep watch — this people, it claims, is content in every respect, at ease in the fullest measure, and most eager of all to preserve this happy life it leads under the shadow of this happy cabinet.

This pro-government French newspaper did not say all this out of ignorance, but said it, rather, out of knowledge — for it had sent a correspondent to visit the provinces, who resided there, prolonging his residence, and mixed with their people, prolonging his contact with them, spoke to them, listened to them, and came to know the truth of what they think, what they feel, and what they hope for; then he returned and reported to his newspaper this gratifying conclusion of his thorough and lengthy investigation — namely, that the people want nothing but for things to remain exactly as they are, so that the economic crisis might resolve itself, while politics concerns them not in the slightest.

And so the ministers ought to be reassured: the people are content with them, love them, and are devoted to them. And those who support

the ministers ought to be reassured too: the people desire them, and are utterly enamored of them. And the English, in particular, ought not to listen to what the government's opponents and critics say — that the people's affairs are in turmoil, their spirits anxious, their lives further from contentment, calm, and stability than could possibly be imagined.

And so all this talk of possible or desirable change is idle chatter, a gamble with the people's own interests, an ignorance of their true will, a listening to the small minority of Cairo and Alexandria and a turning away from the vast majority of the provinces. God Almighty grants reason to whomever He wills, and withholds it from whomever He wills; God Almighty permits sound judgment to some and forbids it to others; God Almighty allows some to speak, and people listen to them, understand them, and place their trust in them, while He decrees that others should speak, and no one listens to them, no one understands them, and no one places any trust in them at all.

We should very much like to know who this clever, discerning man might be, whom that French newspaper sent out to the provinces, and who came to know the people there so intimately, and returned bearing news of them, presenting their hopes and their wishes in this delightful article.

Indeed, we should like to know whether this newspaper truly sent a man to the provinces at all, or simply asked him to claim that he had gone there, and to sit instead in his own office, giving his imagination free rein for an hour, or the better part of an hour, and then write down whatever this imagination dictated to him.

We should like to know, regarding this man who supposedly visited the provinces to some degree, whether he is Egyptian or foreign, Eastern or European; whether he speaks well the language of the people he visited and spoke with, or is entirely ignorant of it, or has only the slightest acquaintance with it. Does he feel as Egyptians feel, sense as Egyptians sense — or does he feel nothing but what certain foreigners residing in Egypt feel: namely, the need for a soft and luxurious life, whatever its sources, and however much the circumstances around it may deteriorate?

We should like to know all of this about the man that newspaper sent, so that we might then know whether he writes from knowledge or from ignorance, whether he writes in good faith or from some corrupt intention and some tainted heart. But what is strange is that this

newspaper and its writer should know everything they claim to know about the Egyptian people's contentment and their ease with this era, while the ministers themselves remain ignorant of it. For one would presume the ministers to be the people best informed of the true state of affairs in Egypt — otherwise, they would be the least fit of all people to carry out the very tasks they undertake. For those who are ignorant of the people's affairs are unfit to oversee them. And the plain truth, beyond any doubt, is that the ministers know something quite different about Egypt and her people than what this newspaper and its writer claim to know. They are quite certain that the people are neither content nor at ease, and their entire political life is consumed with irritation at this discontented people, and braced to take that people by force and violence, so as to conceal its discontent.

It is for this very reason that they forbid this people any assembly whatsoever, and refuse to let its leaders make contact with it or approach it, just as they refuse to let the people make contact with its leaders or approach them. And whenever circumstances fail to assist them in what they want, they muster whatever police and troops they can muster, prepare for war and combat, and distinguish themselves in the effort in a manner that can only be described as laughable — comic relief for troubled minds.

All of this is, of course, proof positive that the ministers are quite reassured of the people's contentment with them, their love for them, and their eagerness to see them remain in power until the end of time!

And the English, we believe, know a great deal more about this people than this newspaper knows, and more than the ministers themselves know. If they knew the people to be content, why, then, do they find themselves in such turmoil, their affairs thrown into such confusion? It is certain that no one twisted their arm to replace one High Commissioner and send another in his place, just as no one twisted their arm to send a senior official from the Foreign Office to act on behalf of their new High Commissioner whenever he travels, whether to negotiate or simply to rest.

For whom, then, is such nonsense written, and to whom is such drivel addressed? What minds is this deception meant to deceive? As for the Egyptian people, they already know what they know, and they do not read this newspaper, or others like it, nor have they ever heard of it. As for the ministers and the English, they know the truth of the situation far

too well to be taken in by such raving. This kind of talk is written only for a small handful of foreigners residing in Cairo or Alexandria, in whose minds the various things they hear about change and transformation strike differently — and this newspaper, and others like it, wish to preserve their goodwill toward the cabinet, their confidence in it, and their trust that it will remain in power. And who knows — perhaps this newspaper writes, in the end, only for itself: not to deceive itself, nor to delude itself away from a truth it knows perfectly well, but simply in order to live. For how much hardship and folly, even unto the annulment of their own minds, the pursuit of a livelihood imposes upon some people! Earning one's bread in these days is a difficult enough business that people may well permit themselves things they would never permit themselves in days of ease and prosperity...