

Kunafa...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), November 20, 1934

You will laugh when you read this title, and there is no harm in your laughing — indeed I may have written today for no other purpose. I know, and you know too, that in our political life just now there are grave matters, which oblige writers to concern themselves with them and write about them, and they are doing so. But I want, all the same, to leave these grave matters today to other writers — indeed I want to leave them to those who hold the power to dispose of them and settle them, for some of these writers may tell us that a settlement may come today.

I want to leave these grave matters to those who know nothing but earnestness, and love nothing else, and to pause instead over this small thing which we never mention without laughing — kunafa. And as I dictate this word, violent laughter seizes me, which I fight down in order to go on dictating, and a certain shame seizes me at making this word the title of an article in a political newspaper, and at making this variety of food the subject of a leading article in a political newspaper too — and on a day when people speak of nothing but the Constitution and its abrogation, and await the royal decree of that abrogation. But I fight down the shame as I fight down the laughter, in order to go on dictating; for write about kunafa I must — not because the month of Ramadan is fast approaching us and about to throw open the season for this kind of food, for that has nothing whatever to do with politics, but because I maintain that I am going to write about kunafa precisely because it touches on politics, and touches on it powerfully, solidly. And the one responsible for this is His Excellency Zaki al-Ibrashi Pasha, who dismisses the staff of the Privy Purse, for all their honesty and precision, because they insist on being scrupulous in their care for honesty and precision, and on haggling over the price of kunafa; and Ustaz Dr. Ahmad Mahir, because it was he who made this story of the kunafa known to the public, when he spoke yesterday of Ibrashi Pasha's mismanagement of the Royal Privy Purse.

And so long as kunafa can get officials dismissed from their posts, it is exactly like an honorary doctorate — no difference between them, small or great; it is like a greeting from a senior official to a member of the Wafd; it is like refusing to rig an election; it is likewise like refusing to sell one's conscience in electoral work; it is like refusing to submit to the

Sultan's tyranny when he wishes to impose tyranny upon the people; it is like refusing to write in the newspaper Al-Sha'b; it is like going to the Lawyers' Club when the lawyers open their club. It is like all these things, and like other things besides these, among the causes the Sultan used to rely upon to dismiss senior and junior officials alike from their posts, and to come between them and what is due of honesty, precision, and integrity, and to come between them and what is due to them of uprightness, freedom, and dignity too. It is, then, one of the causes of removal and dismissal, one of the means of controlling people's integrity and their consciences, their livelihoods and their children's livelihoods, and the life of families and all who compose them, of men and women, of sons and daughters. And it is on this ground, and on this ground alone, fit to be the subject of a political article in a political newspaper, and fit to have its laughable name serve as this article's title.

Nor is there any harm to Egypt's political history in its being recorded that an age of disgrace passed over the Egyptians, in which they bore injury for the sake of kunafa! They were dismissed from their posts and hounded whenever they sought other employment, because they had wished to haggle over the price of kunafa; their sons and daughters were exposed to hunger, misery and wretchedness were forced upon them, and kunafa itself was placed utterly beyond their reach — because their fathers had insisted on being honest in what was paid for the kunafa supplied to the Palace.

Some people claim that Ustaz Dr. Ahmad Mahir was driven by mere meddling, and spoke of what did not concern him, when he mentioned what he mentioned yesterday of this story of the kunafa — for this story touches the Royal Palace, and does not touch public affairs in any way at all. But what we do know is that those who work in the Royal Privy Purse, officials senior and junior, and servants of every rank, are Egyptians, and that they are free men whom the Privy Purse did not buy, and whom Zaki al-Ibrashi Pasha did not buy; and it is not fitting either for the Privy Purse or for Zaki al-Ibrashi Pasha to treat them after the fashion of a master with his slaves, punishing them and punishing their sons and daughters with hunger and deprivation because they wished to be honest over the price of kunafa! And what we know, too, is that were these injustices to reach His Majesty the King, he would punish Ibrashi Pasha for them most severely. For His Majesty the King has established constitutional rule, and has affirmed, by that rule, that Egyptians are free men of dignity in their own country, and that they must be treated as free men of dignity

deserve, whether that concerns the interests of the state, the interests of individuals, or the interests of free associations. And suppose that any Egyptian, among the individual Egyptians, employed a group of his fellow citizens, and then treated them as Ibrashi Pasha treats the officials of the Privy Purse — with a course of oppression and tyranny, punishment for honesty, and dismissal for scrupulousness over the price of kunafa — would it not then be the right of every Egyptian who values freedom and justice, who knows what is due to morals and to human dignity, to condemn this Egyptian's conduct, to reproach him for his injustice, and to lay his case bare before the people, even though he were no politician, and no master of the public interest? How much more so, then, when this Egyptian who oppresses Egyptians is the director of the Royal Privy Purse itself, whose administration the people rightly wish to be a model of justice and fairness, a champion of integrity and of those officials who uphold it. No — it is Dr. Ahmad Mahir's right to make this story known, to condemn the injustice it contains, and to take it as proof that Ibrashi Pasha was neither skilful nor successful, even in the administration of the Royal Privy Purse, for all that has been said of his skill and his success.

And it is our right, too, to ask of this story: is it true, or is it not? If it is true, then it is our right to grieve most bitterly, and to voice this grief to the Egyptians, that they may grieve with us that such an injustice — small in appearance, great in meaning, grave in its consequences — should be committed by the director of the Royal Privy Purse against an official of the Royal Privy Purse.

Those who take upon themselves the service of kings, and the management of their private affairs, must feel that they bear heavy burdens, unlike the burdens of other men, because kings, in this age above all, must be the highest examples for the people in every walk of life; and so their servants must be manifestations of this same moral elevation, manifestations of rising above pettiness, manifestations of innocence of injustice, manifestations of the realisation of justice, whatever the circumstances may be. If they fall short of this unknowingly, they are not fit to serve kings; and if they fall short of it knowingly, willingly, and deliberately, they are still less fit to serve kings — for by this they show that they misunderstand what the service of kings truly means, and do not hold for their kings the true loyalty which alone secures what must be secured: the making of kings into the highest examples, and the making of the administrations of their private affairs into the highest examples of administration in their devotion to justice,

fairness, integrity, and permanence.

This official who wished to be honest, and was punished for his honesty with dismissal; who then wished to work, and was hounded from every employment he sought, and had unbroken punishment forced upon him — he is an Egyptian man, and so his case concerns all Egyptians; his honesty is an Egyptian virtue, and so his case concerns all Egyptians; his endurance of harm for the sake of honesty is an Egyptian ordeal, and so this ordeal concerns all Egyptians; and this ordeal of his was brought about by a man from whom nothing but good ought ever to have come, since he administers the Royal Privy Purse — so his case must grieve all Egyptians.

Do you see how things may be, in themselves, small and slight, unworthy of concern — and yet may stir up, for all that, events so great and grave as to deserve every concern, and to raise human thought to the loftiest principles of political justice and to the loftiest principles of morals?

Do you see how the name of kunafa is laughable, and yet may bring tears — and has indeed brought tears to those connected with this official, dismissed because he wished to be honest?

Do you see how it is the smallest matters that make up the greatest, and that the life of nations and peoples is nothing but a weave of just such slight, trivial things? For my own part, I hold that Ibrashi Pasha's harm through his meddling in Egyptian politics is very grave indeed — but that his harm in this story of the kunafa is no less grave than that. And if the men of politics wish Ibrashi Pasha to be kept from public affairs, because his meddling in them corrupts them, then it is equally the right of men of morals, and of those who love justice and fairness, to wish Ibrashi Pasha kept from the affairs of the Royal Privy Purse too, because he does it harm in its reputation — for it is not fitting that people should speak ill of the Royal Privy Purse and its administration.