

Letters . . .

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), October 14, 1934

It appears that the speech the Minister of Traditions delivered in Alexandria last month has borne fruit, and yielded a rich, delicious harvest indeed. Certain people have evidently learned from the Minister of Education precisely what they were meant to learn, so that their tongues and their pens now abstain from sin, and their souls, their hearts, and their consciences stand purified of fault and harm — transformed, in short, into noble angels defending other noble angels.

The Minister of Traditions ought never to have lost his composure in that speech, nor overstepped bounds that even an ordinary educated man — let alone a Minister of Education — ought never to overstep, in the etiquette of debate and the purity of language when speaking of one's opponents, or to them. The Minister of Traditions ought never to have overstepped all of this, nor should those associated with him, those who take refuge in him, and those who speak with his own tongue and the tongue of his party — the writers and journalists among them — have been bound to follow suit. For the Minister of Traditions has taught himself to describe his opponents as cowards, traitors, men of confusion and vacillation, and worse besides — expressions so ugly that we prefer to spare even half of them from repetition in this piece. The Minister of Traditions has taught himself to attach these very labels to his opponents, and to proclaim this description in a speech heard by his fellow ministers, broadcast by the newspapers, and marveled at by foreigners once portions of it were translated for them. It could hardly fail, then, that the lesson the Minister of Traditions delivered should prove useful and instructive, and that the very first to seize upon it and profit from it should be precisely those who claim to serve as a mirror of the Minister of Traditions and his powerful party — those who portray, every single day, for the public, the purity of hand and tongue, the cleanliness of conscience and heart, that supposedly distinguishes the minister and his party. All we now hope is that this contagion, spread from the Minister of Traditions, might stop at these writers and journalists, and not extend further still to students and pupils — for should it do so, the harm would only grow greater, the danger more severe, and the Minister of Traditions would be dragging down upon his own homeland a moral catastrophe that no Minister of Education ought ever to inflict upon it.

This French-language newspaper, which speaks for the Minister of Traditions and for the Union Party, has today set out to defend Zaki al-Ibrashi Pasha, positioning itself as his champion, shielding him from his opponents' attacks — and in doing so, has indulged in a great deal of nonsense, descending into idle talk with no value whatsoever, which we need not pause over here. But it has, we must admit, done an excellent job of imitating the Minister of Traditions, faithfully absorbing his influence, following in his footsteps, and profiting handsomely from his instructive, valuable lesson. For it describes the journalists who took issue with al-Ibrashi Pasha as cowards, sheltering behind a minor foreign journalist — the correspondent of the Times.

Yes — it describes the Egyptian journalists who took issue with the Superintendent of the Royal Household, criticizing his involvement in matters that were none of his business, as cowards — and it knows perfectly well who these journalists are. It knows them by name, knows them personally, knows their standing, knows their work, knows the harm and hardship they have endured in the cause of Egyptian independence, and knows their character well enough that, were one to search for anything comparable, or anything worth mentioning in the same breath, within the Union Party itself, one would find absolutely nothing. It is strange indeed that this very newspaper, which speaks for the Union Party, should be the one to accuse of cowardice the acknowledged leaders of Egyptian opinion in politics, in letters, and in every sphere of thought.

It is strange indeed that Ahmad Maher, Muhammad Husayn Haykal, Abbas al-Aqqad, Tawfiq Diab, and Taha Hussein should be branded cowards, and that true courage, within the Union Party, should reside instead in those recent arrivals who live off its patronage and speak with its very tongue — men I will not even call writers, nor men of letters, but simply describe as newcomers to Egyptian nationhood itself, intruders freshly arrived upon Egyptian life, forcing their way into it. It is these very men who now brand the acknowledged leaders of Egyptian opinion as cowards and weaklings, sheltering behind some minor English journalist — the correspondent of the Times.

But this is not the whole of it, for the French newspaper does not stop there, and is not content merely to brand the leaders of Egyptian opinion as cowards — it goes further still, straining to profit from the Minister of Traditions' own lesson until it actually surpasses him, reaching heights of literary elevation, nobility of character, and purity of

language that even the minister himself proved incapable of reaching. It actually demands that these very writers, these leaders of Egyptian opinion, break their pens and open dress shops "for fashion," to be frequented by ladies. Do not be astonished, reader, and do not be shocked — for we have translated for you, word for word, exactly what this newspaper belonging to the Minister of Traditions has said, in the course of defending Zaki al-Ibrashi Pasha and shielding him from his opponents' attacks.

It demands of these Egyptian writers that they abandon journalism and writing altogether, and devote their lives instead to fashion, and to adorning women with it. And it imagines it has struck them, wounded them, gotten the better of them, and satisfied that supreme journalistic ideal so cherished by the Egyptian Gazette — which has long claimed the Egyptian press has not yet attained it. Let the Egyptian Gazette take note, then: perhaps this very newspaper, this mirror of the Union Party and the Minister of Traditions, has finally attained that ideal, or perhaps even surpassed it, and set for the elite press a fresh new standard in literature, in purity of language, and in nobility of character.

There can be no doubt that the author of this article is, in the Egyptian Gazette's own estimation, a true "gentleman" — for he is a close attendant upon the Minister of Traditions, a faithful portrayer of his views, and perhaps even dined with him not long ago at the High Commissioner's own table, and so learned firsthand what it truly means for a journalist to be a "gentleman."

In any case, such a writer's defense of al-Ibrashi Pasha does al-Ibrashi Pasha no honor whatsoever, and such a writer's allegiance to the Minister of Traditions and the Union Party brings honor neither to the Minister of Traditions nor to the Union Party. Even if the only legacy the Union Party ever left behind were that such creatures as these should live in Egypt, and flourish there, and take up the pen as a mere trade, hired out at month's end to inflict harm upon literature and injury upon morals — even this alone would be enough to convince Egyptians that their country has little good to expect from the Union Party, and that it may well have something quite different from abundant good in store for them instead.

Finally, it might do Egyptian journalists well to look inward, to take stock of their own affairs, and to make clear to the public that they wish no association whatsoever with anyone who takes up the pen without any

grasp of the pen's own ethics, or who claims to serve journalism without any real sense of journalism's own duty.