

The Ministers' Oath . . .

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), November 16, 1934

They swore it yesterday before His Majesty the King — a candid oath, issuing from candid hearts, pure hearts, issuing from pure consciences; a sincere, warm oath, issuing from souls that love nothing but truth, want nothing but righteousness, and have grown accustomed to nothing but integrity and devotion.

They swore it plain and straight, with no crookedness in it, no obscurity. It is an oath every Egyptian would swear, whatever his political persuasion, whatever his view on the conduct of affairs. It is an oath that betrays no leaning toward passion, no drift toward party, no yielding to appetite, no bias toward one faction of Egyptians over another — an oath that rises above passions and advantage, above inclinations and tendencies, above disputes and every variety of disagreement; an oath sworn by sincere Egyptians that they will attend to this country's interests as an honorable man ought to attend to them, without bias, without harshness, without self-interest, without favoritism, without partiality.

It is an oath befitting the station of His Majesty the King, before whom it was administered, and befitting the dignity of the homeland whose service it inaugurates — for His Majesty the King stands above all parties, and must stand above all passions, and the homeland stands above parties, above passions, above persons, being purer and more enduring than passions, parties, and persons. The ministers swore their oath, and by it rose above all this; they covenanted with God for nothing but to be true to the King and sincere in the service of the homeland. They swear, then, an oath they are not exposed to breaking. Whoever breaks it is a traitor — and how far these ministers stand from treason to King and country! They swear the oath of the soldier, who offers his person, his effort, his ease, as a sacrifice for King and country — not the oath of the politician, who dodges as the fox dodges, who burdens himself with what he can and cannot bear, who says with his tongue what is not in his heart, who declares to the people what he wants and what he does not want — and perhaps declares to them what he does not want more often than what he does want. He swears knowing he is liable to break his oath; he promises knowing he may fail to keep it; perhaps he promises knowing full well he will not keep it, because he has no wish to keep it,

but only schemes and deceives, since he sees politics itself as scheming and deceit. Yes, they swore the soldier's oath, not the politician's — and the soldier is capable, in circumstances such as these, of being a politician too, if he understands politics rightly, and receives it sincerely, faithfully, with a pure heart and conscience, and believes that politics is neither lying nor treachery, neither scheming nor deceit, but sincere service to the homeland, sincere devotion to the homeland's interests, a father's guarding of the homeland's dignity, and striving in all this with whatever a man is capable of striving — followed by withdrawal from office the moment he senses himself incapable of bearing the burdens he has taken up.

They swore the soldier's oath, which every Egyptian is capable of swearing alongside them — indeed, which every Egyptian ought to swear alongside them, for every Egyptian is true to King and country. But this candid, plain oath, simple and easy in its formula, carries a momentous significance, which the ministers must know all Egyptians have understood and appreciated. For all Egyptians have learned, with delight, that their ministers did not swear the oath of fidelity to the constitution the tyrants had contrived — since they neither can nor wish to preserve this constitution, let alone be faithful to it and bound by it. And all Egyptians have learned that they did not swear the oath of fidelity to the laws, since among these laws are things they do not want, and cannot, before their own consciences and their country's interests, allow to stand, let alone remain faithful to. They swear, then, the oath they feel, before their own consciences and the consciences of their countrymen, capable of keeping — and thereby they bear witness, to the homeland and all its sons, that they are like the homeland and like all its sons: they do not believe in the tyrants' system, nor in the innovations it introduced, nor in the law imposed upon the people; they are, then, free like the Egyptian people, and they labor, then, in the vanguard of the people to erase injustice, abolish oppression, restore justice to its rightful place, and rescue the homeland from the calamities that befell it and the tribulations loosed upon it. They are the very image of the people's inclination, the very image of the people's and the homeland's sincerity. They did not swear yesterday for themselves alone, but swore for themselves and for all their countrymen together. And they have, in effect, abolished the new constitution since yesterday, by refusing to swear an oath of fidelity to it; and they have, in effect, abolished the unjust laws since yesterday, by refusing to swear an oath of fidelity to them. Nothing remains but to take the formal measures that satisfy appearances and forms — for the

substance, they have already achieved; for conscience, they have already satisfied it. They released themselves from obedience to the new constitution, and thereby released the people from obedience to it. The constitution, then, has been abolished since yesterday; the Egyptians, then, have been free since yesterday; and tyranny, then, has been at an end since yesterday — and all this was accomplished the moment the ministers finished administering their oath before the King.

Let those who quarrel with the ministers say, after this, whatever they wish to say — nothing they say will avail them, nothing they say will be taken into account. The ministers have refused to swear the oath of fidelity to the bygone system. This refusal was accepted from them, and the people as a whole pressed them not to swear it, so that agreement was reached, since yesterday, among the people, the King, and the ministers, that this system is void, deserving of no one's fidelity, no one's regard — and this is the first, fortunate step toward reform among the steps of the cabinet of Providence.

Some of the English residing in Egypt, and those who write about it, say that the cabinet does not represent the strength that was expected of it. What strength do they mean? If they mean the strength of the people, the cabinet has, since yesterday, taken to representing that strength faithfully, and has begun to feel it powerfully, and will remain a true representative of that strength, confident of that support, so long as it continues along the path it charted for itself yesterday, when it refused to swear the oath of fidelity to the bygone system and the laws it introduced. And if they mean the strength of intelligence and competence, these ministers have thus far shown an intelligence beyond denial, a competence beyond reproach; and it is not fitting that men who have shouldered the heaviest burdens in the most exacting matters of art and administration should prove unable to shoulder the heaviest burdens in matters of politics, so long as fidelity, sincerity, and faithfulness to King and country, and reliance upon God and the people, remain their program.

And if they mean the strength that comes to them from abroad, this strength has not yet appeared; their own conduct will reveal what share of it they receive. And here they are already, thanks to the efforts of English officials and private individuals alike speaking to Al-Ahram's London offices, saying that England has no wish to tamper with Egypt's independence, nor to interfere in Egypt's affairs beyond the bounds of the reservations. The Egyptians know that Nessim and his colleagues will

know how to guard Egypt's independence, how to stand as its defense, protecting it from every interference and aggression; and if good faith is truly forthcoming from the English, the Egyptians are the best people to meet a sincere intention with a sincere intention of their own. Nessim and his colleagues will not be, as the good-natured man and his colleagues were, weak men affecting strength, simple men affecting cunning, plain men affecting skill and cleverness.

No — Nessim and his colleagues will be nothing but ministers loyal to their country and their King, sincere in their policy toward the English and non-English alike, favoring candor and rectitude, rejecting obscurity and evasion. They swore to this yesterday, and they are the best of men to be true to an oath once sworn; there will be no perjury among them, no readiness for perjury among them — for they hold themselves too dear to break their oath, and because they know full well that their people are noble, and ought not to be served by traitors.

These ministers have the people's complete trust, the people's complete support; they have become so through this oath they swore yesterday, and which the Egyptians swear alongside them, without reservation, without qualification.

Go forward, then — for the people await your deeds; praise comes only after the trial, as al-Ahnaf ibn Qais said.

Taha Hussein

Al-Wadi, November 16, 1934.