

Enticement . . .

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), September 26, 1934

It appears that our Egyptian people love the government with an overwhelming love, believe in it with boundless faith, grant it a trust no government has ever before been granted, and extend to it a confidence extended to no one before. If the government tells the people to do something, they do not hesitate for a moment in obedience and compliance; if the government tells them not to do something, they do not hesitate for a moment in restraint and abstention. Indeed, the people carry their love for the government, their admiration of it, their faith in it, far beyond even this point — to a point the government itself never expected or hoped for, a point no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, and no human heart has ever imagined. For the people sense the government's very intentions, and labor, with great effort and difficulty, to discern in advance what it will want in the near or distant future, so as to carry out its will before it is even asked, and what it will refuse in the near or distant future, so as to hasten to refrain and abstain, thereby sparing it the trouble of commanding and forbidding, lifting from it the weight of action and the burden of responsibility, and granting it leave to rest easy. The government need only think of what it loves, and the people are found already loving it too — indeed, racing ahead of it into that love; and whatever it dislikes, the people are found disliking it too — indeed, racing ahead of it into that dislike. This, in our view, is the very greatest height a government could ever reach in the trust and support of its people, in their approval and their faith. We know of no government that has ever won such love from its people since governments first existed and history first recorded them. Nor do we imagine any government, in any country, will ever win such love again, until God inherits the earth and all who dwell upon it. And the source of this marvelous love, unmatched by anything that has been, is, or ever will be, lies most probably in this: that all our ministers, every one of them, are good men, whose hearts harbor nothing toward the people but love and sincere counsel, affection and devotion, and who, whenever they undertake something or refrain from something, intend nothing but the full realization of the people's will, the raising high of the people's head, and the safeguarding of the people's dignity, undiminished. The people came to know this of them once, and again, and yet again, until they placed their faith in them, found peace in them, handed over to them the

reins of leadership, and said to them: lead us wherever you wish, for we shall follow; do with us as you please, for we submit; command us as you see fit, for we hear and obey.

Perhaps you are among those who deny self-evident truths, doubt first principles, and refuse to believe what all mankind believes — who will not even credit that the sun has risen, though its light dazzles the eyes and its heat scorches the body, but insist on demanding proof for what needs no proof, and asking for evidence of what requires no evidence. Perhaps you are one of those Wafdists who still imagine that the people do not love the government, do not trust it, do not answer its call, do not heed its word. If you are indeed one of these, then perhaps you can bring yourself to listen to this astonishing piece of news, to take it as a lesson, and to convince yourself that the days of the Wafdists have passed, that their star has set, and that they can no longer harbor any hope whatsoever of political survival.

The head of the Wafd and his companions, the members of the Wafd, claimed it was their right to call for a national congress, to be convened next month, and announced this intention of theirs — whereupon no one paid them any mind, no one turned to look at them, and no one came forward to join this congress they wished to convene, save for the merest handful, not even enough to count on two hands: ten thousand of them, or rather, they were ten thousand a week ago. Had the Wafd's word still carried the weight it once carried, people would have rushed to its congress in a flood, and those responding to its call would never have dwindled to this meager, paltry number — a number that amounts to nothing, signifies nothing, and cannot even be counted in the tens, nor the hundreds, but only, at best, in the thousands. And the source of this turning away from the Wafd, this disowning of it, is that the people have learned the government does not love the Wafd, and so they have utterly erased their love for the Wafd from their hearts; and the people have heard that the government does not love the congress the Wafd is calling for, and so they have thoroughly renounced this congress, sending it no more than ten thousand names.

Perhaps this evidence does not convince you; here, then, is another proof, more eloquent still, and more capable of persuasion. For government newspapers have reported that the government is considering preventing the congress from assembling — out of distaste for it, and out of concern for it, naturally, for the sake of public security. No sooner had the people grasped this position of the government's, no

sooner had they heard that the government might wish to prevent the congress from meeting, than they raced to fulfill its wish and answer its call, redoubling their rejection of the congress and their refusal to attend it — and the Wafd's secretary received, in a single day, two thousand applications to join the congress and take part in it. Yes: two thousand applications in a single day, after it was rumored and reported that the government would never permit the congress to convene. What clearer proof of the Wafd's failure could there be than this? What more brilliant evidence of the government's triumph? Had the Wafd still been carrying the day as it once did, its secretary would have received, in a single day, two applications, or perhaps twenty, or perhaps two hundred — but the Wafd is defeated, thoroughly and utterly defeated, so that no sooner do rumors inform the people of the government's distaste for the Wafd's congress than the people grow sluggish toward this congress, and no longer two, nor twenty, nor two hundred come forward to it in a single day, but rather two thousand . . .

And the rumor will go on being spread, of the government's distaste for the congress, and the people will go on racing to fulfill the government's wish and to hold back from the congress, and the eminent Mr. Makram Ebeid, the Wafd's secretary, will go on receiving, every single day, applications numbered not in single units, nor tens, nor hundreds, but only in the thousands, and the Wafd will find itself at a loss over what to do with all these participants — where to gather them, how to find a place large enough to hold them all — and the head of the Wafd will come, in the end, to believe what he can no longer help but believe: that the people have grown weary of him, have scattered from around him, and have turned instead to the Prime Minister, rallying about him — so that the leadership of the head of the Wafd has become mere talk, a piece of old news, while the leadership of the good-natured Prime Minister has become an established fact beyond doubt or dispute, believed in by the English even before it is believed in by the Egyptians.

Would you like still further proof of the Wafd's defeat, and of the passing of al-Nahhas's leadership? Al-Nahhas himself has admitted as much, has recorded his own defeat with his own hand — for he told us that he was once at the Casino San Stefano, and that the Prime Minister happened to be there too, and that people were celebrating some charitable feast day. Al-Nahhas looked, and the people looked, and lo: the crowd gathered around al-Nahhas — because they detest him so thoroughly, and reject his leadership so completely . . . while the police,

the police alone, gathered around the Prime Minister — for the Prime Minister is the one and only leader, the exalted chief!!

The following day al-Nahhas was once again at the casino, and the people were once again celebrating that same feast day, and the crowd made as if to gather around al-Nahhas to show him their hatred, to declare to him that they had utterly rejected his leadership — but the good-natured man's government, being just as good-natured as he, took pity on al-Nahhas and spared him this humiliation, felt for him in the face of the people's hatred, and scattered the crowd from around him entirely.

How badly a certain company of Egyptians needs some small measure of shame, some slight sense of what is fitting to say and what is not.

Do you not see, as I do, that whenever the government commands something, its command drives the people away from it, and whenever it forbids something, its prohibition entices the people toward it? Do you not see, as I do, that the report of the government's supposed scheme against the congress has enticed the people toward this very congress, and driven the people to join it in droves? What, then, would happen were the government to declare open, all-out war upon this congress?

The very best war the government could wage against its opponents — and against the Wafd especially, among its opponents — would be to wage no war at all: not to scheme against them, not to show them the slightest hatred. For the people have sworn to themselves, in their hearts and their consciences, to turn right the moment the good-natured man and his government turn left, and to turn left the moment the good-natured man and his government turn right . . .