

Criminality . . .

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

It appears that the shedding of Egyptian blood has not become permissible only to the Englishmen the government employs in what it calls the preservation of order, the suppression of demonstrations, and the dispersal of gatherings — it has, it seems, become permissible also to certain other Englishmen who have no connection whatsoever to the government, and whom the state has not tasked with preserving any order, suppressing any demonstration, dispersing any gathering, or securing any peace, but who are simply soldiers of the occupying army, nothing more. It appears, too, that the property of Egyptians has not become fair game only for criminal thieves, who assault it and plunder it in broad daylight or under cover of night — after which the police search for them, and either catch them or fail to — but thieves and criminals all the same. It has, it seems, become fair game also for certain Englishmen who make no pretense of thievery and live by no such assault, but who simply serve in the occupying army. And it appears, too, that the sanctity of Egyptians — their safety in their own bodies, their shops, and whatever lies within their own hands — has not become fair game only for those who break the law, quarrel with order, and wage war upon the community, nor only for those who, meaning to protect order, go to such excess in that protection that they trespass upon order itself in the ugliest fashion — it has, it seems, become fair game also for certain Englishmen who wage no war in this country upon its people or its government, who hold no doctrine or opinion in favor of breaking Egyptian law or violating the sanctity of Egyptian order, but who simply serve in the occupying army, nothing more.

You are most likely reading these words in astonishment, and perhaps in disbelief, and perhaps asking yourself why we write them and what we intend by them. But you have surely read in the newspapers, more than once, reports that no one has yet contradicted: that a group of British soldiers assaulted a group of Egyptian laborers under cover of darkness, seizing what they carried and subjecting them to grave and heavy-handed mistreatment; and that another group of British soldiers grew so drunk that intoxication stripped them of all restraint, and then, craving watermelon, stormed certain shops in certain nationalist quarters, trying to force their way in to find what they desired, and were dissuaded only with great difficulty by the police.

You have surely read, too, the report of certain English soldiers who seized a young boy and dangled him by their hands from the window of a moving tram, while the boy cried out for help, until he struck a pole and fell, whereupon the train ran him over and cut his small body to pieces.

You have surely read all of this already, and you are still waiting, as we too are waiting, to learn the position of the two authorities — Egyptian and English — on the matter, and the stance the two governments will take toward it. But I think you will agree with us that the blood, the bodies, the property, and the sanctity of Egyptians have, it seems, been declared fair game for certain soldiers of the army of occupation, who lay their hands upon them freely, and subject them to sin, transgression, and aggression that ought never to be inflicted upon anyone.

I do not know whether you reject this, or accept it calmly. I do not know whether your conscience rises up against it, or takes no notice of it at all. It may well be that consciences are asleep in these days, and sleeping so deeply that this sleep stands between them and any awareness of events and crises, let alone any being moved by them or repulsed by them, let alone that noble sense of national indignation that ought to rise up whenever Egyptian blood is attacked, or the sanctity of Egyptians violated.

I do not know whether your own conscience rises up against this aggression or takes no notice of it. But I do know that there exist certain consciences that must never sleep, must never grow numb or indifferent — for those who bear them are charged with remaining perpetually awake, and are paid a wage for that very wakefulness; they are charged with staying awake precisely so that the rest of us may sleep, should we wish to sleep. These are the ministers. We would very much like to know how the ministers received this news, and to what degree their consciences were stirred by the death of this Egyptian boy at the hands of the English soldiers who cast him beneath the wheels of the tram.

We would like to know to what degree the ministers' anger has been roused on behalf of Egyptian blood, Egyptian dignity, and the sanctity of the Egyptian homeland. We would like to know the text of that sharply worded memorandum which the Egyptian Foreign Minister must surely have written and sent to the residence of the High Commissioner, making it clear that the blood of children is not water to be spilled from train windows, that the bodies of Egyptians are not discarded baggage to be

thrown to the ground — not merely to be trampled underfoot, but to be crushed to pieces by the tram itself — that Egyptian dignity stands in need of satisfaction, that this boy's family stands in need of compensation, and that the British state, whose soldiers committed this sin, is duty-bound to satisfy Egyptian dignity, and duty-bound to compensate this wretched family for the loss of their son, killed wantonly, as sport, at the hands of men who care nothing for life unless it is a European life — and duty-bound, too, to demonstrate to Egyptians, and to civilized peoples the world over, that British civilization, like every other civilization, punishes those who spill blood, extinguish lives, and toy carelessly with the lives of children.

We would like to see this memorandum the Foreign Minister must surely have written — for we have no doubt that he wrote it, because he is Egyptian, because he is a minister, because he is the head of the Council of Ministers, and because he is duty-bound to write such a memorandum, and duty-bound to accept nothing less than the British government's full compliance with what it demands, and duty-bound to resign should he prove unable to protect the blood, property, and sanctity of Egyptians from the aggression of English soldiers.

Yes — and we would also like to know the opinion of the foreign Europeans who grow outraged, and who have every right to grow outraged, whenever one of their own is assaulted in the provinces or in the capital, and who demand — though they have no actual right to demand it — that the government take special measures to protect European life and European blood from the aggression of Egyptian criminals. We have told these foreigners before that we share with them the hardships they suffer from any breakdown in security, without sharing in the luxury and comfort they otherwise enjoy. We would like to know, then, their opinion now of this innocent Egyptian blood, spilled openly, in plain sight of Egyptians and foreigners alike, at the hands of men whose very profession is not to spill blood — the soldiers of the English army.

And finally, we would like to know the opinion of the English themselves regarding this ongoing chain of sins committed by English soldiers: do they consider it befitting civilization, or utterly contrary to it? Do the English still believe, and still declare, that they occupied Egypt more than half a century ago in order to civilize her, on the grounds that she was uncivilized, and to teach her how to respect blood, life, and property, and how to recoil from aggression and the violation of

sanctities? Do the English still believe that their presence in this country resembles that of teachers who call others to goodness, and guide them toward mercy and righteousness? Do the English still believe that this steady stream of sins committed by English soldiers, even in times of peace and security, achieves what they claim to want — or claim to be pursuing — namely, the winning of Egyptian friendship?