

Principles...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), August 22, 1934

The present cabinet fears it with the utmost fear, and is thrown into such a panic by it that the panic drives the cabinet quite beyond itself, carries it far from the patience and deliberation that ought to be its habit, and pushes it to neglect the university's own governing bodies entirely, to turn its back on the university's own councils entirely, to dismiss a professor of law with no inquiry and no investigation whatsoever, and to go to such extreme lengths in concealing this dismissal that it seems almost to dread its own announcement — so that it was made public only by accident, or through the design of a man who wished to confront the cabinet with a fait accompli. And these grave principles that frighten the cabinet to such a degree, that drive it to the strange, reckless act it has committed, are none other than the principles laid down for the society of young Egyptians founded by Professor al-Sanhuri.

Perhaps, reading these words, and seeing the government's wariness, its dread, the cabinet's alarm and its panic, you will begin to suspect that this society's principles must be something truly dangerous — the kind of thing that, once broadcast among the people, might overturn the entire political and social order, and bring about calamities in Egypt that ought never to be brought about. But wait a moment, and do not rush headlong, as the cabinet rushed headlong, into panic and terror, into fear and dread. For these principles are entirely innocent, entirely trivial — no man who respects himself ought to adopt any principle that contradicts them, or hold himself apart from them; they are, quite simply, the principles that make a man worthy of the name, principles that every human being claims for himself.

There are three such principles: the first is the improvement of character, the second the cultivation of the mind, and the third the development of the body. Tell me, then, of a man content to have a crooked character, or at ease with the thought that others might believe his character crooked? Tell me of a man possessed of even the slightest degree of civilization who does not aspire to improve his character by whatever means are available to him? Tell me of a man possessed of even the slightest degree of intelligence who does not wish others to believe his character sound and upright? What, then, does the cabinet find objectionable in a group of people who wish to improve their own

character, or in a professor who helps them achieve what they desire? What possible harm could it do the cabinet for people's characters to be upright, for young men to aspire to speak truthfully and act sincerely, to avoid weakness and lethargy, and to strive for strength and firmness of resolve? Can the cabinet possibly declare to the public that it does not wish Egyptian character to be sound and upright, that it wants Egyptians to have crooked characters, twisted conduct, listless and abject spirits, and feeble, shackled resolve? Can the cabinet possibly be at ease with people believing that it can only govern where character has been corrupted, that it can only maintain its hold on power where conduct has grown base, that it fears the good, dreads virtue, and regards righteousness as its own dangerous enemy?

Tell me, then, of an educated or civilized man who does not aspire to cultivate his mind, to increase his share of culture and his portion of learning — or rather, tell me of a civilized man who does not wish others to believe him possessed of breadth of mind, abundance of knowledge, and strength of intellect. Can the cabinet possibly declare to the public that it does not wish Egyptians breadth of mind and abundance of knowledge, but wishes for them instead ignorance, narrowness of horizon, and feebleness of intellect? Can the Minister of Education possibly declare to the public that he does not wish young men to concern themselves with education, and does not want them to seek out more learning? Can the cabinet possibly declare that it cannot govern, cannot maintain its hold on power, unless Egyptians remain shut-minded and ignorant, their minds too narrow for anything, incapable of discovering facts, or understanding them, or judging them?

Tell me, then, of a man possessed of even a measure of intelligence who does not aspire to develop his own body, to seek out through various forms of exercise whatever might strengthen it, secure for it some share of health, some capacity for vigor, some ability to bear the burdens of life?

Can the cabinet possibly declare to the public that it does not wish Egyptians strength or health, but wants them instead weak and sickly, worn down by illness, wasted by frailty — and that it cannot govern, cannot maintain its hold on power, if Egyptian bodies grow strong, if they attain full health and freedom from every ailment and infirmity?

We should like to know what exactly the cabinet found objectionable in this society founded by Professor al-Sanhuri. Could the cabinet, were it

to ascend to the seventh heaven or descend to the seventh earth, establish, or even suggest, or even so much as imagine, that these principles, or the organization of this society, contain politics, or anything resembling politics, or anything touching the machinery of government, however remotely? The whole story of political motives, then, is empty talk, a kind of foolishness, a species of slander, a prop leaned upon to excuse a dismissal for which no reasonable explanation can be found. The true cause of this dismissal, the cause that admits of no denial, is these very principles themselves. What, then, is there in these principles that frightens the cabinet, that throws it into panic, that drives it to an act such as the one it has committed? Does the cabinet feel no shame at the thought that people might harbor such suspicions of it, that some might say to others that political life these days does not wish Egyptians to become men, that the Egyptian cabinet is intent on keeping Egyptians as far as possible from the full attainment of their own manhood, and punishes with every variety of penalty anyone who calls them toward that manhood?

We happen to know that Professor al-Sanhuri went to speak with the Director of Public Security about this society of his, explaining that it concerns itself in no way with politics, and asked him to examine its aims for himself. When the director came to the matter of physical development, he declared that strengthening the body amounts to preparing an army. The Director of Public Security, then, fears the strengthening of Egyptian bodies because he fears that Egyptians might come to possess a strong army. In what age are we living? What kind of life are we leading? Is this earnest, or is it farce? We should like to believe that the Director of Public Security did not actually imagine, did not actually suppose, that Professor al-Sanhuri wished to turn his society into an army with which to resist the regular army, or to stir up trouble in this peaceable country. Our Director of Public Security is, surely, too intelligent for such notions ever to cross his mind. What, then, does the Director of Public Security fear, should Egyptian bodies grow strong? What does he fear, should their character grow sound and their minds grow broad? A question we might repeat as often as we like without ever arriving at a true answer — and so we permit ourselves to answer it this way instead: if Egyptian character were to become upright, immune to corruption and crookedness; if Egyptian minds were to advance and rise above weakness and narrowness; if Egyptian bodies were to grow strong and free of every ailment and infirmity; if Egyptians were to attain their manhood in full — they would no longer accept anything but what men

accept, would no longer venture anything but what men venture, and would no longer be content to be driven like cattle, or ruled as the weak are ruled, or to have their interests treated as playthings, or their independence made a subject for bargaining, or their freedom exposed to the arbitrary control of any minister or senior official, or their university reduced to a mere image, a mere shape of a university, or their political life reduced to hypocrisy, their social life to pretense, their intellectual life to fraud and deception. And should Egyptians ever arrive at this degree of intellectual, moral, and physical advancement, refusing injustice and resisting abasement, life along the banks of the Nile would no longer sit so pleasantly with the English colonizers. We hope that Egypt's young men will grasp this eloquent lesson, taught to them through the dismissal of Professor al-Sanhuri from his post — dismissed because he wished to found a society working toward the development of bodies, the advancement of minds, and the refinement of character.

We hope that Egypt's young men will come to know that there are those among us who resent their becoming men, and who punish whoever wishes them to become men.