

Quarrel

Kawkab al-Sharq (Hadith al-Massa), 31 March 1934.

A truly heavy and sickly quarrel is this one filling certain newspapers connected to the Ministry, in which argument and counter-argument abound between two factions of men from this happy era — factions the Egyptian people have come to know how to value, and how far to trust in anything issuing from them, whether word or deed.

As for one of these two factions, they are masked men who show no faces, declare no names, and dare not bear the consequences, yet for all that they send revelations, and send revelations, and go to excess in dispatching revelation, calling themselves at times "well-informed sources," at other times "knowledgeable circles" — and they are, without doubt, men of the state, whether ministers or senior officials.

As for the other faction, it is Sidqi Pasha, and these two officials who were retired on pension at the last Cabinet session before the holiday. The former broadcast accusations and stir up suspicion, filling the air with doubt, turmoil, and ill opinion; the latter defend themselves, and repel the disgraceful things raised around them, then themselves hint and allude, and give warning, thereby adding corruption to corruption in the air, and turmoil to turmoil — and the Egyptians read the revelation of the one side and the reply of the other, and ask themselves where the truth lies; for they are certain that the whole truth cannot possibly lie in what the one side reveals, nor in what the other side answers; and they are certain, too, that integrity, cleanliness of hand and tongue and conscience, and sincerity in the service of the state are all left uncertain, wavering, bewildered, between what the revealers reveal and what the defenders answer. They ask where the truth lies amid this long, abundant, confused, disjointed talk, brought down by revelation from the "well-informed sources," or carried by telephone wires from Sidqi Pasha — from Alexandria at times, from his house in Cairo at other times — or carried by telephone wires concerning the Undersecretary of Finance, who says for his part that he did nothing but issue the order and carry out what Sidqi Pasha wished him to carry out — or carried by statements, brief at times, lengthy at other times, which these two former officials send to the morning papers and to the evening papers.

And people read all this talk, and neither understand its surface nor grasp its depths, nor uncover its secrets, nor verify what it aims at; but

they are certain that there are painful truths that break the Egyptian heart, that shame the Egyptian soul, and that bring a blush of shame to the Egyptian face — namely, that government in this happy era has not attained the integrity, trustworthiness, clarity, and purity it ought to have attained, but has rather been disfigured, with corruption working within it until its evil outweighs its good, and until it has become utterly removed from being compatible with morality and rectitude, or with what this wretched people demands in the way of realizing its hopes and preserving its dignity, and persuading foreigners that it is a free and noble people, fit to enjoy honor and independence.

These are the bitter, painful, shameful truths that Egyptians extract from all this abundant, lengthy talk — revealed by certain officials, and answered by these officials' adversaries. And you will agree with me that God did not create governments to be a source of bitterness in the people's life, and you will agree with me that God did not create governments to make the people feel, through what they do and say, that its affairs are bad to the utmost degree of badness, turbulent and corrupt to the utmost degree of turbulence and corruption. These gentlemen who quarrel, whether they appear or stay hidden, remind us of Metternich's stance with Napoleon's son, when he held out to him a mirror to show him that he is utterly unlike his great father, and utterly like his mother and his mother's family — and so he ought not to covet any throne, nor hope for release from captivity, nor aspire to any great deed. These gentlemen who quarrel, whether they appear or stay hidden, have made of their own deeds and words a bad, corrupt, and muddled mirror, of rotten substance; they hold it up to the people every day, wishing to show the people that it is utterly unlike the free, independent peoples, and so ought not to covet freedom or independence — indeed, they hold up this abominable mirror every day to foreigners too, so that they may see in it a wretched, disfigured image, unfit for freedom or independence, and so that foreigners may then judge this wretched people, through these gentlemen who appear and hide, as unfit for freedom or for independence.

This story, which Metternich enacts with Napoleon's son in a play by Edmond Rostand, is painful, tearing at hearts and filling them with anguish and grief; and this story, which these gentlemen of ours enact with the Egyptian people and with foreigners in these days, is painful, tearing at hearts and filling them with anguish and grief. But Metternich served his homeland, Austria; as for these gentlemen, we should like to

know what homeland they serve. They serve their own persons, they defend themselves, they do harm to their nation in order to enjoy their posts, or to enjoy a good reputation — and how trifling are their own persons! How negligible they are, compared to these victims they impose upon the people by force!

What do these "well-informed sources" want from all these evils they broadcast? Do they wish to show that they have come forward to purify the air of government from the corruption that was in it?! And to restore it pure and clear, as it was before matters grew corrupt, before Sidqi Pasha leapt to power? For purifying the air is not done by spreading rumors and stirring up suspicions, but rather by displaying the whole truth plainly and clearly, however hideous and abominable it may be, and by referring the corrupt to the courts, which know how to impose punishment upon them. As for this wavering, disgraceful revelation, this revelation that corrupts people's opinion of everything and everyone, it resembles nothing so much as scheming that mends nothing, but only corrupts everything further.

What do these "well-informed sources" want with this exchange that fills the newspapers every day? Do they wish to prove that Sidqi Pasha's rule was corruption upon corruption? The people know this with certain knowledge, and the people do not doubt it or dispute it, and the people insist that Sidqi Pasha be called to account for everything he has done, and the people wish that this standing Ministry and Parliament bring Sidqi Pasha to trial, or to questioning, before whatever authority holds the power to try him or question him.

Governments were not established to be a tribunal of accusation, taking the newspapers alone as a tool of slander and vilification; rather, they were established to set justice in its proper place, and to bring wrongdoers before the authorities empowered to seize them for the evils they have committed. What is this strange, hidden, concealed office that has been set up, or has sprung up, to broadcast in the newspapers, from time to time, sins and evils that corrupt opinion, while those responsible for them meet no punishment at all — and these other gentlemen, who defend themselves with long, convoluted speech devoid of clarity or transparency, yet filled with insinuation and warning? Why do they not speak plainly and declare themselves openly? Why do they adhere to this position that is not free of suspicion? If they are truly strong, let them show their strength — and their strength is shown only by displaying the truth as it is; and if they are weak, let them fall silent, let them settle, and

let them forget this story, that they may perhaps be fortunate enough to have the people forget them in turn.

In any case, those concerned with the affairs of government and politics in this country ought to read, ought to reflect, and ought to appreciate that broadcasting corruption into the air, from time to time, in this manner, can only end in corrupting people's opinion of public life, and in making people doubt justice and order — and this raises an abominable danger, deserving reflection and careful guarding against, a guarding that can only be achieved by truly purifying the air; and the air is not purified by rumors, but by truth that admits no doubt, and the air is not purified by suspicion, but by candor and clarity. And those overseeing government in this era have shown that they cannot bear candor and clarity, and do not dare to face the truth as it ought to be faced; how fitting it would be, then, for them to rest! And how fitting it would be for them to leave these heavy burdens to other men, more capable of bearing them, bolder in rising to them, men who can act, and can speak, and can bear the consequences of what they say and do, and who hold themselves and their nation too dear for such absurd quarreling as we now witness among men who appear and men who hide.