Precaution

The leader of the Wafd and his companion were in Cairo yesterday, had not left it and had not thought of departing before their hour of travel arrived — and between them and that hour lay a full night and many long hours. They were no doubt conversing about matters other than travel, thinking about things other than Alexandria, and occupying themselves with what those resident in Cairo occupy themselves with — yet the Cabinet was thinking about them, preparing for them, and readying itself for the assault it would face when this evening arrived.

Were this story told in any country other than Egypt, people would laugh at it and claim that the writer wished to jest and amuse his readers. But this story is told in Egypt, and so it must be believed, and people must accept it with equanimity. For Egypt possesses two phenomena found nowhere else on earth: Egypt has a dangerous Wafd, and Egypt has a cautious Cabinet. When the danger of the Wafd stirs, the vigilance of the Cabinet awakens; and when the leader of the Wafd or any of its members makes a move, the Interior Minister springs into action, and his aides and functionaries in the capital and the provinces break into a run!

And so it was that no sooner had the Ministry of the Interior learned that the leader of the Wafd and his companion intended to travel to Alexandria on Sunday afternoon than it took precautions, braced itself for danger, and equipped itself for battle. On Saturday it hastened to a number of Alexandria's inhabitants, spread its authority over them, sheltered them beneath its merciful wing, and cast them into the depths of prison — to protect them from the leader of the Wafd and from the companion of the leader of the Wafd. For the Ministry of the Interior loves these people and tends to them, and singles them out for affection and kindness! It takes pity on their throats against the strain of cheering, and on their hands against the wear of clapping! It considers it better to confine them in prison, to keep them from their families and friends, and to deprive them of their livelihoods and their pursuits — for that is better for them and more preserving of them than to exhaust their throats with cheering and chafe their palms with clapping, and to go seeking a meeting with these two men who had no right, it seems, to spend the summer as other people spend it, nor to move about as other people move about, nor to have supporters and partisans as political figures have supporters and partisans, nor to be loved by the people as peoples have been accustomed to love their leaders and guides.

Yes — and the Ministry of the Interior does not merely take pity on these particular people; it takes pity on all of Alexandria, and if it has singled out these people for its love and its prison, it may well single out all the inhabitants of Alexandria for love and prison alike. For they all love the leader of the Wafd and his companion; they all wish to hasten to receive the leader of the Wafd and his companion; and they all are eager to greet the leader of the Wafd and his companion with cheering and clapping. The throats and hands of Alexandria's inhabitants are no less deserving of the minister's solicitude than the throats and hands of those people for whom the doors of mercy swung open in yesterday's prisons in Alexandria.

The most distinguishing quality of governments is their preference for justice, their even-handedness in governance, and their equality among people in severity and leniency, in hardship and favour. It would be beneath the dignity of the government, and unworthy of its solicitude for Alexandria's inhabitants, to single out one group among them for prison and pass over another, to

favour one portion of them with detention and leave another untouched. The most likely explanation is that the Government has withheld prison from the inhabitants of Alexandria only because its prisons in that city are too cramped to hold them all — and the most likely outcome is that it will make the entire city a prison from this day forward, stationing soldiers around it, deploying banners about it, doubling the police by day and the night watchmen by night. This will, in all likelihood, satisfy the Alexandrians' need for justice and their desire for fairness and equality. Indeed it will, in all likelihood, satisfy a great many Egyptians who will travel to Alexandria for their summer sojourn or to attend to their affairs — for these Egyptians, every time they visit or reside in that fortunate city, will savour the sweetness of prison and the pleasantness of dwelling therein!!

What is strange is that the leader of the Wafd and his associates take no lesson from events and draw no profit from experience, and persist in thinking that they are like other people and have the right to flee the heat of Cairo for the open air and gentle breezes of Alexandria. Is it not possible that the leader of the Wafd and his associates actually find pleasure in the life of prisons! And find it a blessing to have soldiers keeping watch over them and over the people?! Is it not possible that the leader of the Wafd and his associates have been carried by their selflessness to its furthest limit and ultimate extent — that they do not wish the people of Cairo alone to enjoy the Government's constriction of them whenever they seek to make contact with them or go to meet them, but rather wish comfort to be diffused and beneficence to spread, and the Government's kindness and goodness to encompass the people of the second capital in summer, just as the Government's kindness and goodness encompass the people of the first capital, the people of Cairo, in the other seasons of the year?!!

Is it not possible that God Almighty has united the Wafd and the Cabinet — for all the distance between them — in their love for Egyptians, their benevolence toward them, their solicitude for them, and their training of them in the life of prisons from time to time, so that the qualities of resolution, determination, capacity for resistance, and steadfastness in adversity may be perfected in them? Is it not possible that there exists a secret agreement between the Wafd and the Cabinet to subject Egyptians to these varieties of delightful and fruitful exercise — which produce the finest results in the life of nations and leave the most beautiful marks upon their advancement — and that the essence of this agreement is that the Wafd moves and the Government springs into action, the Wafd travels and the soldiers are mobilised, and the leader of the Wafd alights nowhere without prison descending upon him and upon the people with him?

All of this is possible — and what strange thing does not occur in these days? If it is true that we live in an era of broad and absolute freedom, and that we nevertheless do not move from place to place except under police surveillance, do not speak except when permitted to speak, and do not write except when what we write happens to accord with the inclinations of our masters and those who hold power over us — if all of this is true, then what prevents it from also being true that the Wafd loves prison for itself and for the people? And what prevents the Wafd from having concluded a secret agreement with the Government that it should cause the Wafd and the people alongside it to taste that sweet and pleasant life — the life of prisons!

Everything is possible in these days, because everything is jumbled together in these days. Be as clever as your cleverness allows, and as sharp as your sharpness permits — you will never be

able to explain to non-Egyptians this life that Egyptians live, in which contradictions are knotted together: between breadth and narrowness, between ease and misery, between freedom and the constriction of people, between the constitution and the violation of the constitution, between the law and the breaking of the law, between the Wafd's opposition to the Cabinet and the Wafd's agreement with the Cabinet to subject people to the life of prisons.

You will never be able to make this clear to non-Egyptians, for a simple reason: that Egyptian life has detached itself from the life of all other peoples, so that Egyptians alone have become distinguished, while all other human nations share in those contemptible qualities they call freedom, fraternity, and equality. And because the Egyptian mind has set itself apart from the minds of all other peoples, so that Egyptians alone have become rational, while other peoples have become mad. The proof of this — and does this even require proof? — is that the whole world is in turmoil, subject to every variety of crisis, tribulation, and affliction, while Egypt alone — Egypt, among all the peoples — is calm and serene, content and comfortable, with everything flowing through it in the finest possible manner.

The Cabinet was entirely well-advised when it took precautions yesterday, and when it takes precautions today, against the travel of the leader of the Wafd and his companion to Alexandria — opening the doors of prisons and deploying police and soldiers. And the leader of the Wafd and his companion were entirely well-advised when they did not allow these precautions to deter them from proceeding with their resolve to travel and going to that city which is to become a prison from this day forward. For the Wafd and its leader are too resolute and too clear-headed to allow the Government's actions to come to nothing — and since the Government's efforts have made the city of Alexandria a prison from this day forward, the leader of the Wafd and his companion must go to it. For are prisons of this kind erected for anyone other than the Wafd and the Wafdists?

Kawkab al-Sharq, 24 July 1933.