Incitement

Taha Hussein — *Kawkab al-Sharq*, 17 July 1933

Yet it rouses no one, and it will rouse no one. It will enrage no one, for its secret is plain, its scheming transparent, and its cunning too obvious to be concealed from people.

You have read — beyond any doubt — the dispatch that the Times correspondent cabled to his paper and that the newspapers published on Saturday evening. And you have seen in it — beyond any doubt — that suspicious sentence with which the Times correspondent closed his account of the Egyptian attitude toward missionary activity and missionaries. And you have understood — beyond any doubt — that the Times correspondent is neither satisfied nor pleased that the affair of the missionaries did not produce the outcome the colonialists desire, nor reach the end to which they wish it to lead: that dark and murky sedition in which everything is muddled and everything is corrupted, sins proliferate and crimes are committed, assaults on lives and property take place, division is sown between Muslims and non-Muslims, order is shaken to its uttermost extremity, foreigners flock to the residence of the High Commissioner crying for help and shelter — whereupon he hastens to their rescue, extends his protection to them, and announces to Egypt and to the world that he is compelled to act in order to protect lives and property and to preserve security and order, since the government has proven incapable of protecting lives and property and maintaining security and order.

That is what the colonialists desire; that is what they would love to achieve and to attain. And who knows? Perhaps they chafe at Egypt's tranquillity, and the mere agitation of souls is not enough for them — what they want is that vile disorder which makes it possible to seize opportunities and, as they say, to fish in troubled waters. The Times correspondent is likely displeased to see Egypt — as she is now — intensely indignant, yet calm in a way that embarrasses and infuriates. He resembles that beautiful, captivating woman who is displeased by the sea's calm and stillness and wishes the ship's captain would summon a storm, or stir the sea into some agitation, so that the vessel might be thrown into a measure of turbulence.

The Times correspondent records that the government was compelled to take stringent precautions to reduce popular anger at the missionaries and to calm public rejection of their transgressions and excesses. We would have preferred that the government had taken measures that truly calmed the people's anger, and that the

Times correspondent had been compelled to record something other than what he did record — to record, for instance, that it had closed some missionary establishments in order to curb their aggressions and thereby pacify the people, and to efface their sins and thereby satisfy the people; and to record, for instance, that it had acted upon the authorisation issued by the British Foreign Secretary to the High Commissioner to discuss with the government the organisation of supervision to be imposed on the missionaries — that it had hastened in this discussion, concluded it, and prepared a draft law enabling such supervision, and had pressed forward with enacting this law as it presses forward with other measures that require no dire necessity and impose no urgent compulsion. And to record, for instance, that the Egyptian government had understood its duty properly and risen to that duty as a wise government ought — one that knows the sanctity of the state and wishes to uphold it, that values the dignity of the state and wishes to preserve it — and had concluded that supervising missionary activity and missionaries is not sufficient to satisfy Egyptians, to protect their sanctities, or to safeguard their dignity. The path to that end is rather to ban missionary activity in Egypt outright, to forbid foreigners of whatever station from interposing themselves between people and their beliefs and religions, and to prepare a draft law prohibiting and proscribing missionary activity absolutely. And to record, for instance, that the Egyptian government had finally understood that missionary activity is only acceptable in lands of savages and barbarians, not in lands of deep-rooted civilisation and advanced culture; that Egypt knew Christianity before Europe and America knew it, sheltered Christianity before Europe and America sheltered it, and that a glorious Christian heritage arose in Egypt no less significant than the glory Christianity attained in Europe and America. Adventurers and fortune-seekers ought not therefore to swoop down upon Egypt in the name of a Christianity that was born and found honour, security, and glory in its midst. And to record that the government had understood — albeit after long delay and much waiting — that Islam is a religion of goodness and righteousness, a religion of amity and virtue, a religion of civilisation and progress, that it once saved the world from the tyranny of tyrants, the aggression of aggressors, and the injustice of oppressors, and raised the banner of knowledge and civilisation triumphant and upheld — and that today, as yesterday, it is capable of saving its own people and others from injustice, aggression, and tyranny, and of sheltering and protecting knowledge, and of sheltering and nurturing civilisation. A country in which Christianity and Islam live together in amity and harmony ought not to have its affairs corrupted by a foreigner who champions one religion over another, who assaults one religion in the name of another, who corrupts the amity and neighbourliness between the two faiths, and who stirs up those abhorrent sentiments — the sentiments of fanaticism,

spite, and hatred — in the name of creed and religion.

We would have wished the Times correspondent to record that our government had understood all of this and had spoken to the High Commissioner and to other plenipotentiary ministers about prohibiting missionary activity and extirpating it root and branch from this land. And we would have wished him to record that the Egyptian Islamic government had finally understood that Islam does not permit this manner of missionary activity — whether covert on one occasion or overt on another — and that it does not accept from a non-Muslim any religion toward which he inclines or for which he expresses a desire, by explicit Quranic text; and that the government had accordingly addressed the powers, noting that its constitution makes Islam the religion of the state, and that it cannot affirm part of the scripture while denying another part, and that it is therefore compelled to sever the causes of apostasy and to abolish the inducements and temptations by which the ignorant and the weak are driven and by which the poor and the wretched are enticed. We would have wished the Times correspondent to record all of this — but he could not record it, because our government was incapable of so much as thinking about it, let alone resolving upon it; and because the scholars of Islam in Egypt were unable — regrettably — to proclaim it aloud or to call for it. What the Times correspondent was able to record was only what the government actually did — and what the government has done up to now is nothing more than issue announcements, insist upon those announcements, and then press forward with preventing people from assembling on the pretext that their assembly would disturb order and expose security to risk. These, then, are the stringent precautions the government has taken to protect the missionaries. We would have wished the Times correspondent to record as well the stringent precautions it took to protect Egyptians of all faiths from the foreign missionaries. We would have wished him to record that our government had taken the position of precise and resolute neutrality — restraining each party from the other, repelling every aggressor from aggression and every transgressor from transgression. But our government — praise be to God for good and ill alike — did not allow the Times correspondent to record this, because our government — praise be to God for good and ill alike — knows harshness only toward Egyptians and leniency only toward foreigners.

It is certain that the Times correspondent is pleased with the government's harshness toward Egyptians, yet he is vexed at Egypt's tranquillity, her composure, her preference for well-being, and her avoidance of sedition. Look at him: he shyly announces his disappointment that the non-Wafdists are unable to rouse the common people and truly compel the government — compel it to use violence and

harshness — while the Wafd is cautious, calling neither for sedition nor inciting it. The Times correspondent will be satisfied with the Wafd only if it kindles the fire of sedition and fans its flames to burn everything; he is inciting the Wafd to do precisely that, he is goading the Wafd toward it, and he claims — in order to arrive at this incitement and goading — that the Wafd exercises restraint and avoids sedition out of regard for the Copts who support it.

God bless the one who bestowed upon the Times correspondent such intelligence and acuity as enabled him to write these words. And why not? Is this not precisely the kind of thing calculated to provoke the Wafd and urge it to exert itself to deflect the accusation of partiality toward the Copts and of falling short in the defence of Islam — and when that happens, sedition flares, its fire blazes, and the Times correspondent obtains the disorder he seeks? But God, who bestowed upon the Times correspondent this rare intelligence and consummate acuity, also bestowed upon the Wafd a little intelligence and a little acuity, and guided it to the realisation that sedition is something that benefits the English and not the Egyptians, that sedition corrupts the Egyptian national revival, that sedition is something neither Islam nor Christianity approves, that stirring up sedition is a crime against Egypt and a sin against Egypt — and so it will not respond to the Times correspondent's summons, will not fulfil his wish and the wish of his colonialist associates, and will not depart from the position it has held from the very first hour: rejection of missionary activity — not with reference to Muslims alone, but with reference to all Egyptians; not with reference to the weak and vulnerable alone, but with reference to the mature and the strong. And it will not depart from the position it has held from the very first hour, declining to content itself with the establishment of shelters and schools, but advancing beyond all of that — wanting, before all else, that the government press forward with enacting laws enabling the state to supervise all foreign education and prohibiting missionary activity in Egypt absolutely. And the Wafd will not depart from the position it has held from the very first hour, in which it declared through its press, with a clarity admitting no doubt or ambiguity, that missionary activity in a country like Egypt is a crime against civilisation, a crime against refined humanity, and that the Egyptian government ought neither to condone it nor to remain silent about it.

The Wafd said this from the very first hour, it says it now, and it will say it tomorrow. The government must listen, and the government must rise to its duty once that duty has been made clear to it. The Wafd would never — however much the Times correspondent and the colonialists dislike it — compel the government to do so through sedition. The Wafd has nothing to do with sedition and revolution.

We know that the Wafd's calm vexes some, but what do these gentlemen make of the fact that we shall hold fast to this resolute calm — and that we are not obliged to spare them the pains of their vexation.