Madness

Kawkab al-Sharq, 6 June 1933

It is an art, beyond all doubt. There is the calm and contented form of it, the violently agitated form, the amiable and pleasantly sociable form. There is the form that manifests in silence, and the form that manifests in speech. There is the form that manifests in calm and stability, and the form that manifests in movement and agitation. There is the form that manifests in laughter, and the form that manifests in weeping. And there are other varieties of it that you will find no way to enumerate unless you consult the physicians' textbooks, or ask those who manage the lunatics in the Abbasiyya Palace — those of them whom one of the deputies mentioned yesterday, alleging that they go out to Egypt as its masters and leaders and govern its affairs in these days.

Let it not displease readers, nor anger the deputies, nor disturb the parliamentary activity. For I swear I recalled neither madness nor thought of it, nor was I recalling or thinking of it now, had I not read in this morning's newspapers that one of the heroes of the deputies was delivering a speech at the interpellation, tightening the reckoning at every point until the matter arrived at the crisis — at what Egypt endures and what it receives in the way of its hardships and horrors. And he mentioned money changers and the money changers' affair, and mentioned the government's severity in the protection of taxes, and the peasant's submission to blows and tolerance of distress and patience with what is written — not doubting for a moment that those who subject him to these afflictions and divert him with these temptations are themselves graduates of the Abbasiyya Palace, enjoying the pardon of God Almighty and His mercy and His clemency. So I am not the one who recalled madness and its varieties. Nor am I the one who mentioned the Abbasiyya Palace and its guests — but in fairness to myself I believe that had similar speech passed over the tongues of the deputies, I ought to pause over this speech and explain its meaning and make people aware of its implications. Otherwise let the newspapers be forbidden from attending the Chamber and publishing its news and circulating its secrets, and the Chamber's minutes be made sealed and secret things that no one reads except intimates, and only those who are trusted look into them. Whatever the case, something from a deputy is —

The deputy described himself and his colleagues and the ministers and the government's auxiliaries with this description that he uttered and

disavowed — which is madness!

Whatever the deputy may be, he is caught between two things — and both are wicked, and the sweeter of the two has passed. For if he is sincere, God forbid, then Egypt's affairs were not something that ought to be conveyed to a people who should receive nothing less than the right. And he may have said something other than the right — God forbid — and if he had said something other than the right, he had turned Egypt's affairs over to a people who describe themselves as mad and say to what they would have said to them — if their adversaries had said it to them — that prison doors would open for them. As for me, I was thinking that the eloquence and magic of oratory would intensify to the point where they would destroy everything and cover everything, and that a deputy from among the deputies would descend to describe the state and its men as mad from the highest pulpit of the Chamber of Deputies!

The curious thing is that the newspapers did not depict for us the Chamber of Deputies as turbulent and seething, nor as stirred up and boiling over at this description — but rather depicted it as calm and serene, listening and as though not listening, understanding and as though not understanding, letting the speech of this deputy pass or being let past by the speech of this deputy, not pausing at it, not stopping to consider it, not turning toward it — even though it had raged and billowed and stormed and erupted and settled then resumed when another deputy some days ago mentioned the word 'rabble.' Let us then record for the Chamber of Deputies that it has come to know forbearance after anger, preferred deliberation over revolution and disturbance, and managed forgiveness and pardon in situations where it had formerly managed to exercise the love of violence and the desire for revenge. Perhaps it has listened to us and benefited from what we and others put to it in the way of exhortation, and now avoids the constriction of the soul and the embarrassment of the chest, and even endures being described as mad?! In fairness to the Chamber it should be noted that it did not maintain this patience throughout yesterday's session, for it fumed and churned and nearly erupted in genuine anger — but not out of anger on its own behalf, rather out of anger on the government's behalf, and not in defence of itself, but in defence of the government. The Chamber boiled when some of the orators mentioned that those who paid what was demanded of them in taxes had done so only to be rid of the whips that were at work on their backs — whereupon the deputies were distressed that the government should be described as tormenting people and

taking them by the whip and the stick to make them pay what it required of them in money. It is a great deal for the opposition to find an echo in the Chamber of Deputies, and a great deal for the deputies to say yesterday to the government what the opposition newspapers say of it every day, alleging that it works the whips in public and takes torture as a means of collecting taxes. And a great many deputies record this in the Chamber's minutes, and it is no surprise that the deputies should be distressed at this — but rather strange that they should not silence the orator, or remove him, or delete his speech from the minutes, and stranger still that not a single one of them should speak up and say to the speaker: be silent, and they not inform their members that the government was about to withdraw from the session in protest — unless the government accepted an apology.

None of this occurred — rather the Chamber closed its eyes to being described as mad, and the Chamber grew moderately angry on the government's behalf, and the government closed its eyes to the accusation of torture. And all of this is clear evidence that the Chamber's breast has begun to widen, the Chamber's sharpness has begun to soften — and more than all of this, the deputy who described the state and its men as mad has turned to the nation and called it to revolution, and reproached it for its calm, and rebuked it in the sharpest terms for its settling into comfort and its desire for the stability of the order amid the severity it receives and the fire it endures — whereupon the Chamber was silent for him, and the ministers were silent for him, and the deputy proceeded until he warned of the coming catastrophe, of the raging fire, of the revolution that if it broke out would leave nothing it touched without reducing it to dust. And he frightened the deputies and ministers with this looming peril and abominable evil, and with the awakening of the peasant who sleeps now but is on the verge of erupting like a volcano, and on the verge of marching until when he reached the windows of the deputies and ministers he would cry out to them as the Parisians cried out at the start of the French Revolution: 'Bread, bread!'

All of this was said yesterday, and said by a deputy, and said in the Chamber of Deputies, and the deputies and ministers heard it and were patient with it and did not stir, and it was published in this morning's newspapers, and the day will not end before the newspapers spread it through every corner of Egypt — and the peasants will read it, those who are called to calm and urged to revolution by God alone who can rouse them with this speech, and incite them to leave the order and march on

Cairo and mass under the windows of the Chamber of Deputies and demand bread — the bread they need against the hunger that burns them.

It was very good of the deputies and ministers to be angry at the deputy's severity alone, and to be patient with his describing them as mad, and to call the people to revolution and frighten them with its consequences. It was very good of the deputies and ministers to hear all of this and be patient with it and overlook it — and there was another thing better than this anger and more useful for the people, which was for the deputies and ministers to feel a true feeling that the people were in need of the government's mercy and leniency and relief — and accept the interpellation, and fulfil what the interpellators were demanding, and reduce taxes, and lift from the people some of what they endure. This was a thousand times better than anger and ignoring, and of the patience and ignoring that are truly beneficial — which is what makes people truly feel that the deputies and ministers care for their interests and mourn their pains, and want to lift from them some of the pains.

Yes, this was a thousand times better than this forbearance that the deputies and ministers displayed yesterday — for people are not fit to be grateful to them for this forbearance, nor to record it to their credit; for they dream with one another, and forgive one another, and some of them do good to others. And what does the wretched and toiling people care that the deputies should spare it, and that the deputy should spare it — it is a hungry man whose hunger torments him, wretched with misery that breaks him, sick with a sickness that may finish him.

It was a thousand times better for the people that the deputies not stage for it this forbearance as a performance, and that this interpellation not end by lessening the burdens of life for those people who are incapable of bearing life's burdens — but the deputies and ministers did not think of this, and could not do it; rather the matter between them was a verbal battle in which the true or simulated eloquence excelled, until it reached its limit — ending with the government's victory, the deputies' thanks to it, and the people remaining as they are, crushed by taxes and burdened by them, and armies of disease and hunger and deprivation advancing on them, darkening the face of life before them, and the threads of hope snapping.

So let the deputies and ministers celebrate the victory of the victor and the defeat of the vanquished, and the eloquence of the orators, and the forbearance of the forbearing. And let the wretched and toiling people console itself — and let this war not lay its weight on it, and let this war not spread its shadow over it with hope.

Let this wretched and toiling people console itself — for from it taxes will be collected this year as they were collected from it last year, and it will encounter in paying them this year double what it encountered in paying them last year, because its hardship this year is double its hardship last year.

Let this wretched and toiling people console itself — for the affliction is still closing in on it, pressing upon it, and God knows whether the whips will be used this year as they were used last year. And God knows whether the prisons will be opened this year as they were opened last year. And God knows whether anything remains in the people's capacity to enable them to endure and help them to bear…

Let this wretched and toiling people console itself, or let it relinquish consolation; let this wretched and toiling people be patient, or let it fail in patience — there is no peril for the people when it consoles itself and when it is stricken with grief, and there is no peril for the people when it is patient and when despair reaches it — as long as the deputies are orating and excelling in oratory, and arguing and surpassing in argument, and the matter ends with the government triumphing with thanks, and the government departing, and the banner of victory fluttering above the ministers' heads!!