

# Too Much

*Kawkab al-Sharq, 1 June 1933*

Al-Siyasa has gone to a great deal of trouble, and borne a great deal of toil, and wasted a great deal of time, in replying to a single article that did not deserve all this attention, nor call for all this effort. Had there been no choice but to pursue the argument, it would have sufficed to write a chapter on it, or part of a chapter, and to devote the rest to those weightier matters that concern people these days, and on which writing might do some good. But for Al-Siyasa to write two chapters on so slight a subject, occupying two spaces with it, and speaking of it twice in a single day — we think it will grant us that this is too much, especially since one of the two chapters, the one written by my friend Haykal, was quite sufficient to broadcast whatever Al-Siyasa wished to broadcast of argument and dispute; while the second chapter, written it would seem by a writer who does not command himself as those ought to who wish to venture into political writing — and who set out, in particular, to describe the views of the Liberal Constitutionalists whom we have long known to love neither insinuation nor innuendo, and to have no taste for abuse or invective — was confined to sniping and insinuation, to shabby allusion and the sort of hinting from which I would always wish to see Al-Siyasa held above. Be that as it may, I advise my friend Haykal to teach his writer the art of political composition, in the manner of the Liberal Constitutionalists in particular, and of educated men in general, for he seems newly arrived at this craft. I should like to begin with two observations, which I shall pass over quickly, since they concern my own person more than they concern the matter in dispute.

As for the first, my friend Haykal reminds me that I once sought legal redress against two professors, ‘Abd al-Qadir Hamza and ‘Abd Allah Habib. I should like to remind my friend that these two gentlemen did not attack me in a comic paper, but in a serious one, at that time one of the Wafd's own papers. And I should like to remind my friend that I did not pursue that case to its end; rather, Professor ‘Abd Allah Habib apologized to me before the court, and I forgave him, for I disliked then, and still dislike, resorting to the courts over what people write about me.

Perhaps my friend will uncover some other case I brought against a comic paper, early or late; or perhaps he will uncover some other case I brought against a serious paper, for all the wrongs done — by the Wafd's

papers, and sometimes by the Liberal Constitutionalists' papers too — to the papers of jest and of earnest alike!!

As for the second observation, it is that my friend Haykal hints, in passing, at my standing among the students — I was their teacher, and they loved me and admired me — and Haykal fears that these students might believe what I say in the comic papers. The second writer, whom I do not know, or barely know, came nearer to plain speaking: he mentioned the great literary institute over which I presided, and denied that any opinion of mine in the comic papers could be reconciled with my supervision of that great literary institute. I should like to congratulate Al-Siyasa on having discovered in me so grave a fault — one of those faults that escape people, even the sharpest of them, even those most richly endowed with discernment. Now that it has learned of this fault, and uncovered it, and seen how it threatens the students in particular and the young in general, it would do well — being, as it is, the paper of courage in the cause of truth, and of the defence of free opinion! — to change its position toward me, and to congratulate the Minister of Traditions on the firm measure he took when he had me transferred from the University and came between me and the students and the young! And to congratulate the whole government on this same firm measure it took when it came between me and the affairs of state by decision of the Council of Ministers!!

And it is only fair that Al-Siyasa, now that we are in the month of June, should place this discovered fault on record, and set down in some memorandum that I am a danger to the young and to students, so that under no circumstances should any thread connect them to me once the summer has ripened its fruits!!

But enough of my own person — let Al-Siyasa make of it what it will — and let us turn to the matter in dispute.

I should like to reassure my friend Haykal. If he dislikes my defending the comic papers, for no reason but that they defend the Wafd with the same arguments I myself use in its defence, then I for my part dislike his portraying things with so little accuracy. I have not yet defended the comic papers at all; I have only spoken of a certain narrowness of spirit and tightness of breast, and asked those who bear the burdens of political struggle to turn away from the ignorant, and to pass over vain talk with dignity — as pure virtue itself counsels, as the noble Qur'an counsels, and as the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon

him — whose life Haykal is at this very time setting out for the people in such detail — himself did. Nor do I think the Qur'an was defending the ignorance of the ignorant when it commanded that they be turned away from; nor do I think it was defending the idle talk of idle talkers when it counselled the servants of the Merciful to pass by it with dignity. Nor do I think the Prophet approved of ignorance, idle talk, and injury, and was defending them, when he bore with them and was patient under them. Nor do I think any honest disputant, called upon to bear injury and be patient under it, would say to the one calling him to it: you are defending the man who injures me, and encouraging him to persist in injuring me, and this is strange of you, and this is a stand I cannot approve in you. For I asked no more of our statesmen, when I called them to largeness of heart, to soundness of forbearance, to a preference for pardon and for enjoining what is right, than to remind them that God — mighty and glorious — says: "and whoever bears patiently and forgives, that is indeed among the steadfast heart of things," and that He — mighty and glorious — says: "Take what is given freely, enjoin what is right, and turn away from the ignorant."

Let my friend Haykal be reassured: I am entirely content with the stand I have taken, and hold to it with all my care, and it is my urgent wish that the students understand it and the young accept it; and I shall go on calling them to it now, and tomorrow, and the day after. Whoever is anxious that my call to truth, to good, and to virtue should not reach them, let him seek a tunnel through the earth, or a ladder into the sky, or cast about for some means, open or hidden, to come between me and these students.

For my call once reached them at the University, and it reaches them still, now that I am far from the University; and I sincerely hope that this call will fall upon their hearts as something welcome, so that they turn away from the jesting of the jester, forgive the ignorance of the ignorant, and lose their taste for seeking redress in the courts.

My friend Haykal thought, when he wrote his first chapter, that I had been convinced by it and had therefore fallen silent; and when he saw me return to the subject, great astonishment seized him — God be exalted! But my friend Haykal forgets that his first reply appeared on the very day people were saying that some sinner had intended harm against the house of His Excellency, the head of the Liberal Constitutionalists; and my modest sense of taste would not allow me to continue a dialogue with Al-Siyasa on that day, and so I put it off until the morrow. Had it not

been for that, I would not have let my friend's article pass in silence for even a day; it was simply not possible to remain silent about it. And Haykal repeats to me that the comic papers speak of daughters and sons, of husbands and wives — we knew this, and had heard it; and Haykal knows that the writers of the comic papers, and that certain deputies and ministers, have spoken of my son and of my wife, and I showed them no rebuke and lifted no mask from them, though had I taken them to court they would have met with their due punishment.

I would have Haykal believe me: I disavow this today in the strongest terms, and I see in it, in truth, either a genuine misrepresentation or an entanglement in one — something I had known him, before today, to dislike and to avoid. Why? I told Al-Siyasa that political struggle is not simply innocent argument, pure devotion to truth, pure adherence to the rules of decorum and morals, alone; political struggle is this, and it is other things besides — it involves exposure to injury, it involves bearing outrageous wrong and flagrant tyranny, assault upon one's dignity and violation of one's sanctities, and patience under all of this, and forbearance toward all of this, and a turning away from it toward what befits an honourable man — and at this he was astonished and disavowed it, and endless wonder seized him. What is there in this to provoke astonishment? What is there in this that calls for disavowal? What is there in this, little or much, to provoke wonder? Did the reformers do otherwise? Did the Prophet, whose life Haykal is writing, do otherwise? He strove, calling to the way of his Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and disputing in the manner that was best. He was injured, and bore the injury; he was assaulted, and was patient under the assault.

So his struggle was at times positive, and at times negative, and his struggle was — I believe, and Haykal believes too — fruitful. It is not true, then, that negative struggle holds no good in it, especially when this struggle consists in rising above the ignorance of the ignorant, and overlooking the aggression of the aggressors. And does Haykal know that the leaders of the Liberal Constitutionalists, and that His Excellency their present leader, sought legal redress, before these very days, against the comic papers, because they had been toying with them and assaulting them? Are we, then, to remark upon the Liberal Constitutionalists' departure from what ought truly to be the tradition of statesmen? Are we to marvel that His Excellency Muhammad Mahmoud Pasha should depart from the patience, gravity, and soundness of forbearance for which he is known? Are we to resent it in our friends, that they should depart from

the true bearing of political leaders? Are we, in urging our friends to pass over idle talk with dignity, as they themselves used to do before now — is this, on our part, an offence against them, an invitation to them to accept humiliation?

Does Haykal not see that this time he is thinking in a manner the least one could call it is strange! And who can claim that I called on our statesmen to make their struggle negative and nothing more? Did I not, rather, reproach them for failing to wage a positive struggle when such a struggle would be useful, and would befit an honourable man? And who claims that I forbade our statesmen from seeking legal redress against the ministry, so far as it lay in their power? And where does the ministry come into the comic papers? And has Haykal forgotten that I myself sought legal redress against the ministry?

Is it not Haykal's own duty to himself to amend these opinions of his, and bring them back to good sense and to what is right?

There remains a question I disliked, and still dislike, to see prolonged by argument — the question of the connection between the parties and the comic papers that support them and speak for them. I think Haykal will agree with me that dwelling too deeply on this question profits no one. There is nothing whatever to the claim that the Liberal Constitutionalists have always turned away from the comic papers, or withheld their support and encouragement, when these papers were championing them and speaking for them. Nor is it true that they never sought them out, nor visited their proprietors, as the head of the Wafd — he who lately did away with them — once did visit. And if their leaders did not themselves pay visits, they were often visited in return, as others indeed were. And if their leaders did not write, they spoke, and they acted. I hope Haykal will let this subject drop — not because I am unable to set it out at length, but because I dislike setting it out at length. I still think that leaving it be is better and more useful; but if Haykal insists that we go into it at length, I may yet do as he wishes.

In conclusion, I still hold to the view I held when I began writing on this subject: that Egyptians are capable of rising above pettiness, of freeing themselves from narrowness of spirit and tightness of breast, and of bearing, in particular, the criticism of critics with patience, even when critics overreach and exceed all due measure — for this is the very nature of democratic life; and there is nothing logical whatever — since our friends the Liberal Constitutionalists are so fond of logic — in demanding

of democracy that one taste only its sweet fruits and nothing else, for democracy holds within it grapes and figs, but also bitter aloes and colocynth. Whoever wants the grapes and the figs must bear with the colocynth and the aloes. Whoever wants the honeycomb must bear with the sting of the bee. Whoever wants the rose must bear with the thorn. If reform there must be, then let reform come through forbearance and clemency, not through haste and violence; let it come through calm and gentleness, and through a sound appeal to wisdom and fair exhortation. Long ago Socrates bore patiently with Aristophanes; long ago the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, bore patiently with Abu Jahl; and long ago the Liberal Constitutionalists bore patiently with Rose al-Yousef — what is it, then, that makes them abandon this same patience today, and grow angry when they are called back to it?