

Fear...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), August 14, 1934

The pro-government camp declares that fear fills the hearts of the opposition journalists over this new-old system which, it is said, the cabinet is preparing these days to impose upon the press before long. We, for our part, affirm with complete confidence that this fear fills the hearts of none of the journalists who take issue with the cabinet — it does not reach them, does not so much as touch them — but fills, instead, the hearts of the ministers, the partisans of the ministers, and the followers of the ministers among those journalists for whom schemes are being plotted, against whom snares are being laid in wait, before whom nets are being spread.

Yes, we affirm that the writers who take issue with the cabinet and oppose it spend not one thought on this system now being prepared for them, or that was being prepared for them before, back last summer, before Sidqi Pasha's own foot — or the foot of fate — finally slipped. When Sidqi Pasha was residing in Europe, taking the waters and resting, while circumstances were already preparing the grounds for his fall, we were told at the time, by those who told us, when Sidqi Pasha still hung suspended between remaining in power and stepping down from it, that a new system for the press had been prepared, that it was severe, that it erred on the side of severity, and that its promulgation was something eagerly desired — but circumstances did not favor its authors, and they could not push it through. And it would seem that circumstances have now come to favor its authors, for they find in its promulgation — should what Al-Muqattam is now reporting prove true — just the opportunity they were waiting for. It would seem, too, that this system has a fondness for summer, and a fondness for the air of Alexandria, and her gentle breeze, for it first appeared in Alexandria last summer, and it seems most likely that it was born of conversations exchanged among those concerned with liberty and its protection, on the one hand, and with order and its establishment, on the other. And it seems most likely that these conversations took place along the seashore, where people sit, or where they stroll, gazing at the water and the sky, taking their pleasure in the light and the air. From such conversations, it appears, this system was born last summer on the seashore — much as the gods of beauty and loveliness, of grace and moderation, were born, so the common folk say, of the foam of the sea. But then obstacles arose, and other matters

intervened, and this offspring — whether ill-fated or fortunate — was never granted the chance to see the light and enjoy life, but remained instead, for a full year, buried in a drawer belonging to the very man whose mighty head had labored to bring it forth.

But then, when this year's summer came, and today's masters returned to Alexandria, and the sea air touched them, restoring to them some measure of vigor, some surplus of life, and reconnecting threads of conversation that had been severed, they remembered that stillborn offspring, and set about thinking how they might restore it to life. They took Al-Muqattam as their channel for heralding its happy arrival — and when the opposition writers denounced it, the cabinet's newspapers imagined that they denounced it out of dread of it, out of fear of the schemes being plotted against them. Let the ministers know, then, and the friends of ministers, and those who advise ministers, and those who support ministers, that the opposition writers do not denounce this system out of fear of it, but out of fear for those who are contemplating it — and that if fear has indeed taken up residence in certain hearts, it has not taken up its residence in the hearts of the opposition, but rather in the hearts of those who scheme against liberty, plot against it, and wish to persecute free men.

These are the ones who are afraid — and were it not for that fear, they would never have schemed against liberty. These are the ones who dread — and were it not for that dread, they would never have plotted against liberty. These are the ones who panic — and were it not for that panic, they would never have contemplated persecuting free men. The opposition writers were never afraid of Sidqi Pasha's tyranny, his high-handedness, his cruelty, nor of any law he decreed or system he devised; they merely smiled at Sidqi Pasha and at the measures he devised — a smile of pity for him, and of contempt for whatever wrongs he committed. Then they fought Sidqi Pasha with all the strength their struggle could muster, and Sidqi Pasha fell, while they still stand; Sidqi Pasha bowed his head, while their heads remain held high; Sidqi Pasha's tongue was bound — whether by himself or by circumstance — while their tongues remain free; Sidqi Pasha withdrew into obscurity, and the spider spun her web over him, while they remain, still, on the field of struggle, raising the banner of liberty aloft, sheltering beneath it millions of free men, sons of this dear nation. They, then, are not afraid; they, then, do not dread — and those who stood firm against Sidqi Pasha and triumphed over him know well how to stand firm against Abd al-Fattah

Pasha, and how to triumph over him too.

Certainly not. Fear has not taken up residence in the hearts of the opposition; it has taken up residence, rather, in the hearts of those who saw that all of Sidqi Pasha's might availed him nothing, and who imagine that they themselves might fare a little better if they carry cruelty and violence further still than that poor tyrant ever carried them. So they seek ever more power; they take excessive precautions; they indulge to excess in the use of severity; they refuse to learn from the cautionary examples that came before them; they refuse to profit from the lessons the days taught Sidqi Pasha, and taught them too, back when they were his own collaborators; and they refuse to believe that excess in the war against liberty only ever makes liberty stronger, harsher, and more resolute. They refuse to believe that the light of liberty cannot be blown out by mouths, that the fire of liberty cannot be smothered by decrees and statutes, and that weakness can find no path into the hearts of free men. And so, for all this, they wish to pile severity upon severity, cruelty upon cruelty, system upon system, in the hope of binding tongues that refuse to be bound, and breaking pens that refuse to be afraid. They do not know that truth always finds its way through to the hearts of men, however many towering barriers of light are raised around it — for it is too strong ever to be trapped, too skillful ever to be confined, too precious ever to be reached by chains and fetters. Fear belongs only to the weak, those who take issue with truth and resist the very nature of things, and who therefore stand in need of fortification and precaution, in need of ever more decrees and statutes. But the strong, who desire nothing but truth, who are content with nothing but liberty, who will not permit themselves a life of abasement — these fear nothing at all, however fierce the threat against them.

I cannot help but smile as I read the excellent piece our friend Professor Azmi published this morning in Al-Jihad. I see him grieving for history, grieving for freedom of criticism, defending both history and freedom of criticism with all the force of logic and the proofs of sound reasoning. Our friend has wasted his time and his effort, and to no avail: those who scheme against history and against freedom of criticism know full well that they are scheming, know full well that they are committing injustice, and would, left alone with themselves and their own consciences, believe every word our friend has said. To try to persuade them, then, is a kind of futility, for they are already convinced that the best criticism one could offer them is simply this: encouragement to

persist further in severity, incitement to still greater cruelty, temptation to still greater excess in the war against liberty. For that alone is what will show them the truth shining, beyond all doubt, on the day they fail to achieve what they want, just as Sidqi Pasha failed to achieve what he wanted, and on the day they prove powerless to humble Egypt, just as Sidqi Pasha proved powerless to humble Egypt.

Let the opposition, then, cease blaming those who conspire against the press, and let them instead drive them onward into this very conspiracy — for the press will lose nothing by it, and they themselves will gain nothing by it, and the banner of liberty will go on flying in the skies of Egypt, sheltered by the millions of free men, sons of this dear nation whose heart knows no fear.