Anger...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), September 9, 1934

Elsewhere in this issue of Al-Wadi, readers may find a summary of the article La Bourse wrote about the cabinet's position toward the press, and whatever new restriction it is attempting, or had been attempting, to impose upon it.

There can be no doubt that our friend Monsieur de Lomois showed both candor and sincerity in the observations he raised concerning this legislation — legislation we no longer know whether to expect, because the cabinet remains determined to pursue it, or not to expect, because the cabinet has abandoned it altogether.

A writer may err, and a writer may be right; a writer may succeed in satisfying you, and may fail to do so — none of this counts against him in the least. What does count against a writer is deliberately resorting to evasion when candor is called for, and sinking into cunning when sincerity is called for. And no adversary of Monsieur de Lomois could possibly doubt that he was frank and sincere in this piece he wrote the day before yesterday. A foreigner is not to be faulted for his concern with the Capitulations; what is to be faulted is an Egyptian who accepts this concern from him, or is content to let him have what he wants — namely, the continuation of the Capitulations. For a foreigner is, after all, a human being, who seeks his own advantage and struggles for it; and the Capitulations are, without doubt, advantageous to foreigners, so there is nothing strange in their wishing to hold on to them, and to preserve them for as long as they are able. What would be strange is their surrendering them willingly, without being compelled to do so, whether by moral or material pressure — and it falls to the Egyptians alone to persuade foreigners of this, or to compel them to give up the Capitulations. What Monsieur de Lomois said about the Capitulations in this piece is entirely natural and unremarkable, no more than one would expect of any foreigner, however fond of Egypt he might be; it is, in any case, simply what foreigners have always said, and will always go on saying — there is nothing new in it worth pausing over, or disputing now.

But the pro-government newspapers — and especially that French-language morning paper which calls itself La Liberté, meaning "liberty," and which expresses, in one language or another, the principles of a party sharing in the government, namely the Union Party — took the

greatest offense at this piece, and stirred up against its author a most furious war. For no reason at all, except that the author of this piece dislikes, on his own behalf and on behalf of his foreign colleagues, and dislikes on behalf of Egyptians as well, seeing anyone deprived of freedom of criticism, and cut off from what is permitted to all people alike, in every civilized country on earth, among every cultured people.

God knows that I am among those most eager of all that foreigners should hold no advantage whatsoever over Egyptians in any matter whatsoever, most opposed of all to this advantage, most vigorous of all in warring against it and rousing others against it, most desirous — indeed, most convinced — that foreigners residing in any country ought to submit to its laws and bow to its authority, without reservation, without embarrassment, and without resistance.

And yet we cannot ask foreigners to accept injustice meekly, nor to submit to abasement willingly, nor can we tell them: annul your minds, set aside your humanity, and become a herd driven wherever we please, and answer us reluctantly when we call. We cannot ask this of foreigners, because we detest it for ourselves; we do not want foreigners to hold any advantage over us, but neither do we want them reduced to abjection — we want, rather, to place ourselves on equal footing with them, in justice and in fairness, under the shadow of sound order and laws befitting human dignity. It is neither right, nor fair, nor honorable for us to say to foreigners: ten of us wish to exercise arbitrary control over the rest of us, and to subject us to what no cultured, civilized people would ever accept — so be like us, bear the same evils we bear, and expose yourselves to the same wretchedness we are exposed to. We know perfectly well that you are capable of guarding against injustice and protecting yourselves from wretchedness, but courtesy demands that you become abject too, simply because ten of us wish to make ourselves abject... It is neither right, nor fair, nor honorable to ask this of foreigners. What is right, and fair, and honorable, is to say to our own ministers: do not wrong us, do not overstep your bounds with us — for if you do, you will have driven a wedge between your own fellow citizens and the foreigners who live among them, and shown your fellow citizens in a light unbecoming of human dignity. What is right, and fair, and honorable, is to say to the ministers: do not do this — for by virtue of being Egyptian yourselves, and by right of the trust placed in you over the people's interests and rights, you ought to be working earnestly toward the abolition of the Capitulations, and nothing could possibly help you toward abolishing the

Capitulations less than legislating unjust laws, imposing harsh judgments, or treating people in ways that civilization condemns and modern progress rejects. Such things are precisely what would make foreigners cling all the more tightly to the Capitulations and their preservation, and doubt all the more deeply Egypt's readiness for the free life which nations enjoy once they hold themselves, and their own ministers, in high regard — and thereby naturally come to be held in high regard by other nations and peoples in turn. If there is blame to be assigned here, it ought not to fall upon foreigners for refusing to be slaves, or for refusing to be instruments — and for refusing to live in a country whose own people are expected to remain silent, to hold their tongues, to annul their own minds, and to smother the voice of conscience.

Say to whichever European you please that certain people wish to shackle historians, and that they mean to bind you with that same shackle — his soul will rise up in indignation, his conscience will grow outraged, and he will tell you plainly: there is no way this can be permitted. And if you object to this in him, or reproach him for it, then you are a man who rejects culture, civilization, and progress, and are not content merely to accept abasement for yourself, but wish others to share in it with you.

What seems, in fact, to have angered the pro-government men about Monsieur de Lomois's article is not his rejection of this injustice, his denunciation of this legislation, or his opposition to its being applied to Europeans — it is, rather, his having placed on record an indisputable fact: namely, that our cabinet, if it truly wishes to govern Egypt in the manner of Hitler, arming itself with a dictator's power and imposing upon liberty whatever restrictions it pleases, must first, before anything else, be certain that the Egyptian people support it, or that the majority of the Egyptian people support it, just as the Germans support their leader, Hitler.

For Hitler consults the German people from time to time, and imposes nothing upon them until it has been shown, to everyone's satisfaction, that the Germans support him and approve of his conduct. And we believe that our cabinet, however hard it may try, however much effort it may expend, will never be able to tell the public that the Egyptian people support it, or that the majority of the people support it, or that half the people support it, or even that a single million of the people support it. It stands as far as can possibly be imagined from any of this — and so it has no business governing this people in the manner of Hitler,

or of Mussolini.

This, we believe, is what actually angered the pro-government men about La Bourse's article. But what fault is it of La Bourse's, if this is simply the truth? And if everything in Egypt indicates that the people neither support the cabinet nor come to its aid, nor approve of its policies? Do the pro-government men wish to apply this new regime to La Bourse even before it is legislated, and to compel it to lie to itself and to the public, to tell itself and everyone else that the people support the cabinet and stand behind it, when it knows perfectly well that this is not so? Would it not be wiser for the pro-government men to wait for this law now being prepared to be issued, and applied to foreigners, and only then, once that has been accomplished, to ask La Bourse, and the other newspapers besides, to say what they themselves want said — rather than what these papers themselves actually believe?

There are, in all of this, lessons and warnings for the cabinet, should it wish to draw the lesson and take heed. It would then spare itself this heavy burden, spare Egypt these endless scandals, and preserve Egyptian dignity from foreigners telling Egyptians: we pity you, and we sympathize with you over the laws imposed upon you — but we ourselves will never submit to these laws of yours, and will never accept abasement for ourselves, whether you yourselves have accepted it willingly, or been forced into it.