Aggression . . .

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), October 11, 1934

It appears the government could not bear to let Egypt's posture remain, throughout this acute crisis, one of calm, security, and peace — a posture marked by purity and clarity, even if opinions clashed within it violently and doctrines crowded thickly upon one another, even if anxiety ran high within it and disorder grew great, even if countless different rumors were set loose by every tongue. It appears the government could not bear for Egypt's posture to remain pure and unclouded throughout this acute crisis, and refused to let it pass without tinting it, if only slightly, with red — without staining it with a little blood, some of it Egyptian blood. And so came what came of this vile assault the police committed the day before yesterday, when the head of the Wafd arrived from his summer retreat to settle once more in the city of Cairo.

Perhaps the government has some excuse for this ugly sin the Egyptian police committed, for this open assault the Egyptian troops inflicted upon the Egyptian people — for the government's cleverness, sharp and forceful as it is, tactful and nimble as it is, devoted to silence and careful concealment as it is, has failed to extract it from the crisis, and has prepared for it no way out of that crisis whatsoever. And when nimble, penetrating, precise cleverness fails to find a way out, perhaps naked, open assault will do the trick instead. The government has striven, it seems, to persuade the English to keep it in power, and failed. The government has striven to persuade the English that its own views on resolving this crisis are sound and correct, and failed. The government has striven, it seems, to find itself supporters and allies among the Egyptians, and failed. The government has striven, it seems, to calm the anxiety of Egyptians with that speech the Prime Minister delivered — in which he said nothing whatsoever — and failed. The government is powerless to strike the English with clubs and whips; the government is powerless even to stop the English from turning against it or scheming behind its back; the government is powerless even to stop the Deputy High Commissioner from inspecting the barracks and stations of the police. And if the government is powerless against the English, then let it strike the Egyptians instead, and let it set clubs and whips to work upon their heads and bodies — for what, after all, could possibly stop it? The English, perhaps, are free men, owned by no Prime Minister, inherited by him from no father. The English, perhaps, are free men, owned by no

al-Qaisi Pasha either, inherited by him from no father. But Egyptians are slaves — some owned by the Prime Minister through purchase, some owned by him through inheritance; some owned by al-Qaisi Pasha, whether by purchase or by inheritance. It is therefore the government's own right to set clubs and whips to work upon their heads and their bodies — for who, after all, could possibly stop an owner from disposing of his own property exactly as he pleases, subjecting it to whatever mixture of seriousness and jest he fancies, whatever varieties of amusement and sport, whatever forms of indulgence and torment? Egyptians are the property of the Prime Minister, and the property of the Minister of the Interior, and so the government may do with them precisely as it wishes — indulge them, if it likes; torture them, if it prefers; sell them, should the thought occur to it — and none may object, except a man who is either ignorant of the law, or defies it outright. Along no other line of interpretation can anyone possibly make sense of these acts the Egyptian police committed the day before yesterday, inside and outside the railway station, without reckoning, without measure, without the slightest caution. Every Egyptian head was fair game for the Egyptian police; every Egyptian body was fair game for the Egyptian police, and Egyptians received the blows without distinction — between old and young, between educated and ignorant, between journalist and non-journalist. All of them are bondsmen; all of them are the property of al-Qaisi Pasha, some inherited, some purchased by him from one another. Some Egyptians found themselves exposed to mortal danger; others found themselves exposed to actual wounds — and the police paid no heed to any of it, took no notice of it whatsoever. For the owner of this property, the Minister of the Interior, had granted them full license to dispose of that property exactly as they saw fit.

And the owner of slaves is free to dispense with some portion of that human property, exposing it to death, or pouring torment down upon it. It is not fitting for you, nor for me, to challenge al-Qaisi Pasha on this point, or to argue with him about it — for that might be regarded as mere impertinence on our part, and al-Qaisi Pasha might well take offense at it, exposing us in turn to danger, or visiting torment upon us. And the government, it seems, has some excuse for this rash outburst it was driven to the day before yesterday, which carried it beyond all bounds and drove it to this excess of aggression — for it might be said that this very head of the Wafd, whom the public was celebrating the day before yesterday, had met with the Deputy High Commissioner and spent an hour or so in his company; and this meeting carries suspicion within it,

and this conversation carries dread within it; and this conversation, and whatever follows it, and whatever consequences may flow from it, might well result in the loss of authority for a people incapable of properly bearing the burdens of that authority — especially under these very circumstances, in which difficulty grows ever more severe and matters grow ever more tangled. And so, if relations were to resume between the Wafd and the residence of the High Commissioner, if a meeting were to begin between the head of the Wafd and the representatives of Great Britain, if conversation were to continue between the head of the Wafd and the responsible English officials — then it would be entirely reasonable for the government to lose all sound judgment regarding events, all correctness of thought, all moderation of conduct and action; and it would be entirely reasonable for the government to fly into a rage and discipline Egyptians because they love the head of the Wafd, and torture Egyptians because they seek to meet with the head of the Wafd, and expose Egyptians to danger because they turn out to welcome the head of the Wafd — with a love, a sincerity, and a loyalty of which the ministers themselves have never won so much as a tenth part, or a hundredth part, or even a thousandth part.

The government is excused for these sins the police committed, since matters, it seems, slipped entirely from its hands. But who, exactly, ever claimed that Egyptians are duty-bound to bear the consequences of whatever despair and misjudgment drive the government to such acts?

That the government was, indeed, driven the day before yesterday by despair, by grave misjudgment, and by a genuine loss of all self-command — this is not something anyone could seriously doubt. For Tuesday was one of Egypt's own national days, a day on which the state and the people together celebrate the anniversary of His Majesty the King's accession, and this day, of all days, ought to have been the very last on which blood was shed, the very last on which violence had any place at all. And yet the Egyptian police spilled the blood of certain Egyptians on this very day — and such an act could never proceed from men fully in possession of their own good sense. His Majesty the King lies ill; the affairs of state are not brought before him in these days, and the ministers do not act upon his exalted counsel in whatever they do; the sitting parliament stands dissolved, and the government neither consults it nor is guided by it — and perhaps the government fears it, and grows anxious at the thought of it. The English are, in these very days, at odds with the government, and the newspapers have reported that they took

no part, as they once customarily would have, in this assault the day before yesterday. And so the affairs of Egyptians rest in the hands of ten ministers, who dispose of them exactly as they themselves wish — not as the Egyptian people wish, and not as parliament would wish — and who grant the police license to assault Egyptians, to shatter their heads with clubs, and to tear their bodies with whips. Do the ministers even realize how repugnant is the thing they are undertaking? And do the Prime Minister and his friend al-Qaisi Pasha have any true sense of the weight of the responsibility they both now bear?