Slander

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It is not among the things one loves, or feels strongly drawn toward, to deliver lessons in morals to a people who ought to be an example of good conduct; nor indeed is it among the things one can bear, or would even wish, to draw the attention of ministers past and present to these slight duties that morals impose.

It is enough for writers to draw the attention of ministers and those engaged in public life to the political duties that the public interest imposes, and that devotion to serving the people demands.

The matter grows heavier and harder still when it touches the ministers past and present of this happy era; for they are shielded from error, cleared of fault, set apart from those failings that might disgrace people like you and me. Were they not shielded from error, were they not cleared of fault, were they not set apart from everything disgraceful, they would never have risen to ministerial office, nor taken into their hands the reins of affairs, directing them as the public interest alone requires, unswayed by the leanings and passions of parties, unmoved by the impulses and desires of individuals, never straying from the right path.

And if such is their state, then we, the community of writers, do them wrong and overstep all bounds when we claim they have fallen short in politics, or missed the path of public benefit, or neglected any right belonging to the people. They are generous to the utmost limit of generosity, forbearing to the farthest reach of forbearance; they accept our wrongful claims against them and forgive us our criticism, and rarely quarrel with us over it, and their generosity may well tempt us to excess in criticism, and their forbearance may well tempt us to excess in false claims, and still they neither grow angry nor scowl, but proceed in forgiveness and press on in kindness, sparing the prosecution the trouble of investigation, sparing the courts the trouble of judgment, sparing the police the trouble of arresting people, sparing people the violence of the police, and shielding their own bodies from the fall of whips. What then if we overstep politics and its concerns and criticize ministers past and present on matters touching their words and deeds insofar as these touch on morals? But the craft of writing, and writing for newspapers in

particular, invites a certain intrusiveness, and drives its practitioners to meddle in what is not their concern, to take up what they ought not take up, and to speak of what they ought not speak of. It is most likely that the ministers past and present among the men of this happy era will forgive writers this intrusiveness just as they forgive them that wrongful claim. And they will pardon their criticism touching morals just as they pardon their criticism touching politics. For forgiveness is one of those broad virtues that admit no limit and no restriction, that single out nothing over anything else, and pass over no sin in favor of another, but are by their very nature inclined to overlook every wrong alike.

And if the criticism of ministers past and present among the men of this happy era, on a matter touching morals, is in some respects bound up with public affairs, then their hope of the ministers' pardon grows the greater, their expectation of the ministers' forgiveness the stronger, and their trust in the ministers' forbearance the nearer to filling their hearts with security and making their souls feel reassurance and calm.

We wish now to take up a matter of morals bound up most closely with politics, one stirred by that comical affair whose scenes the People's Party has been staging these past few days. It was claimed that no sooner had peace been made between the fold and the two ministers excluded from it, than the former minister of agriculture rose and declared, in sharpness and anger, in indignation and rage, that the former minister of communications had told certain people that the incoming minister of agriculture was slandering him, accusing him of matters touching material gain at the expense of the public interest. People afterward disagreed over the truth of these matters: some claimed they touched the People's Party and the former minister's management of it — and this is what we read in the papers yesterday morning — and others claimed they touched the government and its funds, and this is what we read in one of the evening papers, which published it to the public yesterday in truly painful frankness. We have no wish to relate what that evening paper stated, for it might weigh heavily upon us, and might weigh heavily upon the people; but what we do wish to note is that the ministers past and present among the men of this happy era — shielded from error though they be, while all of us err, cleared of fault though they be, while all of us may fall into fault — their being shielded does not prevent them, nor does their being cleared exempt them, from being like other people, erring as people err, faulting as people fault, and being driven, as people are driven, to things that are unbecoming. Here is a minister in office

accusing a minister who has withdrawn from office of a lack of integrity; here is a former minister passing on what the incoming minister said, and it spreads and circulates until it reaches the ear of the slandered minister, and the slandered minister tries to clear himself and defend himself, and this only makes the matter spread and circulate the more. We had supposed that the immunity of the ministers past and present among the men of this happy era raised them above falling into what the un-immune among people fall into, and made them too exalted, too dignified in their own eyes, to slander one another and bring against one another accusations that, were they true, would be shameful and disgraceful. Yet some of them go about telling people what one has said of another, until the harm spreads, the disgrace circulates, and the reputation of the ministers past and present of this happy era suffers. And the slanderer and the slandered are both ministers of the People's Party, and the one who carries the slander about is a minister of the People's Party, and the one who conveys the slander to the slandered man is a member of the People's Party. Is it mere coincidence that has brought the People's Party together with this manner of accusation?

Yet the matter has another side, graver still than this. There is no doubt that everyone wishes the ministers of this happy era to be too exalted to slander one another and carry tales against one another. But people wish, in particular, that this slander should not be true, nor a picture of any of these disgraceful, hurtful realities, and people wish that anger alone was what set the sitting minister of agriculture speaking of what the former minister of communications had passed on, until it reached the resigned minister of agriculture. But how can people discern the plain truth of this matter, how can they come to know, to be certain, to be reassured, how can doubt and suspicion be erased from their souls, and how can no one among them be touched by the notion that the former minister of agriculture is marked by what the sitting minister of agriculture flung at him, if what was reported of him is true?

As for the People's Party, it will settle the matter among its members with an outward reconciliation, whether hearts grow clear through it or not, whether intentions grow sincere through it or not. The dispute between the old minister of agriculture and the new minister of agriculture will vanish, and the first will return to the fold, having left it, just as the second returned to the fold after having been forced out of it entirely. And Sidqi Pasha will be at ease over the former minister of agriculture's return to the fold, just as he was at ease over the sitting

minister of agriculture's return to it. But the matter has not remained confined to the People's Party, nor to the two disputing ministers; it goes beyond the party and all its members to the nation and to the state; there is no escaping that people must know the plain truth of this matter, no escaping that the state must ascertain the truth of these accusations, no escaping that trust must return to people's hearts that their ministers do not profit for themselves at the expense of the public interest. And we know full well that this ill-omened remark attributed to Ali al-Manzalawi Bey, if what Tawfiq Doss Pasha reported of him is true, has left a group of ministers caught between two evils, the sweeter of which is bitter: for if it is true, it establishes what ministers ought never be known for, and carries consequences that please no one and satisfy no one; and if it is not true, it establishes what ministers ought never be known for — accusing people without right and without propriety. And it is perfectly clear that establishing the truth of this matter and revealing it plainly to people cannot and should not take place within the People's Party, nor in Sidqi Pasha's hands, but must take place somewhere other than the People's Party, before someone other than Sidqi Pasha. Do you suppose such an inquiry is possible? Do you suppose it will actually take place tomorrow, or the day after? Or do you think this matter of slander will be left for the wind to carry off, for forgetting to draw a thick curtain over it? For our part, we believe there is no graver danger to people's morals, their interests, and their integrity in what they do and refrain from doing than neglecting such slander and leaving it as spoils for forgetting. For that tempts people to venture into wrongdoing, hoping for the pardon of forgetting, and it tempts people to venture into slander, hoping likewise for the pardon of forgetting. We believe that Egypt possesses a power most jealously concerned with morals, with safeguarding the public interest, and with safeguarding the reputation of ministers past and present, and we believe this power will not fall short in the inquiry it owes.