

The Advocates of Corruption...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), December 4, 1934

The men of the hateful era hated to see all Egyptians free, and cut off, between them and freedom, every means; they employed to that end whatever methods morals disown, consciences refuse, and laws forbid. They forbade the Egyptians to assemble — and if they assembled, dispersed them by violence; they forbade the Egyptians to speak — and if they spoke, cast them into the depths of prison; they forbade the Egyptians to demonstrate — and if they demonstrated, poured bullets upon them without stint. And they claimed, all the while, to be men of justice, guardians of order, advocates of security and peace of mind. Then they hated, with the utmost hatred, and refused, with the utmost refusal, that students should be occupied with politics, or with anything resembling politics, or with anything that politics might touch, whether nearly or distantly. And they worked wonders to that end: they closed the University Club that stood in Cairo; they abolished the University Union and fashioned for the students another union in its place, over which the Minister exercised the most flagrant control, and which forbade students to have any dealing with any body whatsoever, or to join any group whatsoever, however remote from politics and its concerns, unless the Union's council gave them leave and marked out the bounds for them. Then they took to espionage, planting spies among the groups of students and pupils, and setting spies as well to watch certain individuals among these students and pupils, to discover what the students did and what they claimed, and to learn what the students kept secret and what they made known. Then these spies of theirs would lie to them about the professors and the students alike, claiming to them that this professor or that had formed this group or that with the aim of politics, and dangerous politics at that; and they listened to the spies without inquiry or caution; and they did not lie further to the ministers themselves, but burdened them, all the same, with committing injustice and becoming entangled in ugly tyranny. And when all this failed to satisfy them, they went further still, treating people with severity and punishing them on mere suspicion, and perhaps even inventing sins for them outright, and fabricating misdeeds for them from nothing. And they hated to see the students succeed, even in their own schools and institutes; indeed, they hated to see students gather outside class hours for anything but lessons — and the students sometimes wished to gather for some piece of research, or

for some lecture, and they refused to allow it, and turned them firmly away from it, for fear that it might arouse the Minister's suspicion, and that he might read into such a gathering all manner of things; and when people reproached them for this, or held some of it against them, they grew arrogant and haughty and clever with excuses, and claimed that the protection of the system was no game, and that freedom was not what people understood it to be, but rather what they themselves understood it to be. Such they were. And they were worse than that. For they would drive whole bodies of students toward a certain politics by force, content with it from them, and trying even to pay them for it; and if the students refused, they punished them for having wished to obey the laws and decrees. People have not yet forgotten that students were punished for refusing to bring politics into the Piastre Project, or to bring the Piastre Project into politics. Lessons would be suspended in the schools for days in preparation for a visit by the Minister; speeches would be prepared for this visit, and their delivery forced upon certain students, and listening to them forced upon all the students, and cheering for the Minister forced upon students and non-students alike — upon teachers, officials, and servants too.

Politics, then, was forbidden to students, not because it was politics, but because the men of the hateful era hated it; had they loved it, it would have been forced upon the students instead. And now, when the hateful era has passed, and the Ministry of Reform has arisen, to restore the matter to its proper place and give the nation's right back to the nation, the partisans of this hateful era have become, as they were before, men who show one face to the light and another to the darkness. For when they write in their newspapers, they profess to hate demonstrations, to condemn them, to warn against them, to shun them, and to caution the Ministry against their consequences; yet when left alone with themselves and their own demons, they love demonstrations, and are infatuated with them, and scheme to bring them about with careful design. They send their demons into every milieu, and scatter their agents everywhere; they plant them among the Azharis at Al-Azhar, plant them among the university men at the University, plant them among the students in the schools and institutes of every kind. They make it seem attractive to the students that the time of freedom has come, that demonstrations have become commendable, that the nation has rights that must be restored to it swiftly, and demands that must be met without delay; and that this Ministry will not be able, indeed will not even wish, to resist demonstrations, since it is a popular Ministry, and a popular

Ministry does not resist the people, nor ought it to. And they single out particular matters which they know the nation cares about, and in which the students are pressing, and claim to them that the Ministry is slow in achieving these things, so that it must be hurried along, or that the Ministry has forgotten these things, so that it must be reminded; and when the matter of the students defeats them, they go about corrupting the schools' headmasters, telephoning them and claiming to be conveying the ministers' own wishes — that the ministers see no harm in the students demonstrating, or striking, or turning away from their lessons — and thus they go about corruption in secret just as they go about corruption openly, imagining that they will create for the Ministry problems that will thoroughly spoil its affairs, and drive it into an embarrassment beyond all embarrassment, and furnish proof that Egypt cannot be governed except by their own hateful system. It is perfectly clear that the Ministry knows of this scheme, and is capable of thwarting it, and that the students know of this scheme, and are capable of turning it back upon its own authors, and that the scheming of these people is mere play, with no danger and no effect in itself. All this is plain, beyond doubt; but it is well that it be put on record, and well that all people should know it, and it may be well, too, that the matter be laid openly before the Ministry, so that the Ministry may know that people feel what it feels, and are preparing for what it is preparing for; and so that the Ministry may know, too, that it attempts a difficult thing when it wishes to reform, while the tools of corruption lie scattered through the departments and the offices, through the schools and the institutes, through the capitals, the towns, and the villages.

We have said to the Ministry, and we still say, that those who corrupted cannot themselves reform, nor be content with reform; that those who wounded cannot heal the wounds, once despaired of; that those who shed blood cannot staunch blood; that those who sold their consciences to the hateful era cannot be sincere, nor give honest counsel, to the new era; and that devils cannot transform themselves into angels. We know that the Ministry favours patience, and would rather achieve by gentleness what others achieve by violence; we know this, and wish it success in that endeavour, even as we know full well that its patience may deceive its adversaries, and that its gentleness may tempt those who scheme against it, just as we know full well that the nation, which endured every shade of torment for four and a half years, has every right to feel that its affairs, its interests, and its very life belong not to those who tormented it, but to other men altogether — men who never dipped

their hands in evil, and never sold their consciences and their hearts to the oppressors.