

Infatuation ...

Kawkab al-Sharq (Hadith al-Massa), 1 April 1934.

Yes, passion — a word you read and recoil from; for you are not accustomed to seeing it in this corner of the Kawkab, and you are not accustomed to our speaking to you of passion and its arts, of infatuation and its enchantments, of love and its madness; for this subject and its kin have other occasions better suited to speaking of them. Yet nonetheless I shall speak to you today of passion.

And there is no harm to me whether you recoil from this talk or welcome it; for I never bound myself by any pledge to speak to you only of what you wish, and perhaps I did bind myself by a pledge to speak to you only of what I myself wish — and today I wish to speak of passion, though people suppose me given to violence, and accuse me of harshness; yet I assure you I am innocent of violence and harshness. For though I am utterly determined, utterly resolved to speak to you of passion, I do not wish to impose this talk upon you by force, nor to thrust it upon you without showing you why I thrust it upon you; for I wish to win you by persuasion, not by compulsion — and you will agree with me, after a few short lines, that I did not err in choosing passion as today's subject.

For the passion I wish to speak of is no ordinary, familiar passion, but a singular passion, a passion of the very first rank, a passion to which I know of only one parallel in the whole course of human life since it began until now.

And I think you will agree with me that a passion of this rank deserves to be the subject of discussion in a weekly newspaper so attentive to politics; and if you learn, beyond this, that this modern passion, like that ancient passion, cannot be cleared of politics, nor absolved of its traces, but is itself politics entirely, you will know that I have not offered you anything so very novel after all, and that I am not — as my adversaries say — an excessive innovator, carried away by innovation, but rather a dear and devoted conservative; the proof of which is that it was the ancient passion itself that drove me to speak of the new one.

Perhaps you have grown weary of preambles, perhaps you have come to long for this passion, perhaps you wish to know what it is, and what its nature is; perhaps you are urging me to come to the subject —

and indeed I shall come to it, and I assure you I have only drawn out this preamble to whet your appetite, for the subject deserves to be longed for.

Now you must open your ears, and attend to this talk of passion: the great Führer Hitler is enamored of the great Queen Nefertiti — and I think that, having heard these two names, you will see that this passion deserves attention not from me alone, but from every writer; for when do writers on politics, literature, and art ever come upon a subject of such weight as this one, or rather, when do writers and poets ever come upon a lover like the great German Führer, and a beloved like the eternal Egyptian queen?

I told you: this passion has only one parallel in the life of man, and this parallel is found only in the Iliad — it is Paris's love for Helen. Though the resemblance between these two passions is not exact in every respect: Helen was queen of Sparta, as Nefertiti was one of the queens of Egypt, and Paris was king of Troy. As for the Führer Hitler, he is no king, nor the son of a king, and has no connection, near or far, with any royal house; rather, he is a democratic man — though he wages war on democracy, and incites against it most fiercely. He is a man of the people — though he doubts the power of the people — in any case a man of the people's own sons, a man like you and me, not descended from those exceptional elements to whom God wrote distinction, but risen from these ordinary classes who struggle upon the earth and toil to earn their living.

But he is, in any case, Germany's leader and great man, around whom all of Germany has gathered, granting him such strength and support, such trust and love — or fear — as few kings have ever attained; and in this respect he deserves to be likened to Paris, son of Priam, king of Troy.

Paris — he who loved Helen and abducted her, and sheltered her in his great, fortified city, keeping her there captive, the loveliest of captives. Paris — he who provoked all the Greeks, and all their legacy, to a terrible war that lasted year upon year, and ended in Troy's utter destruction, and set the poets speaking the loveliest words poets ever spoke.

Had there been no Paris, there would have been no Iliad; had there been no Paris, there would have been no Odyssey; had there been no Paris, there would have been none of Greek letters at all, nor anything that arose from them in ancient and modern literature. And when we remember Paris alone, we wrong him, and we go to excess in that wrong,

and we very nearly anger the ladies, who are most eager these days that man should not monopolize anything to the exclusion of them — for Paris stirred up all of this thanks to love and passion, infatuation and ardor, and the longing that filled his heart for Helen, queen of beauty and loveliness, of stature and symmetry, as the common folk say.

And it is certain that the Führer Hitler could have loved our ancient, beautiful queen, and have burned with a love for her that never dies down, without this affecting the great queen's return to her great kingdom, had he remained, as he once was, a man like you and me, enjoying neither power nor dominion; but he rose, and rose, until he became two thousand times stronger than Paris. And where does the strength of Troy stand beside the strength of Germany today?

And so the great Führer Hitler is able to say that he is enamored of this great queen with a passion that forbids him to permit her return to the resting place of her forefathers, to the homeland of her kingdom and dominion — for all his love of Egyptians, and his eagerness to please Egyptians. But organized charity requires that one begin with oneself, doing good to oneself first; and he loves, and his beloved is a captive in his keeping, and he holds fast to his captive, whether Egyptians are pleased or displeased, whether justice is pleased or displeased — for when has justice ever been able to stand firm against love and passion, infatuation and ardor, and compel the lover to give up the one he loves?

And if Paris refused to surrender Helen, and all the Trojans supported him in this wrong, and all the Trojans were exposed to that terrible war which utterly annihilated their city, utterly crushed its power, and reduced it to mere tales — how then could the great Führer agree to surrender the queen, when he knows full well that the wheel has turned, that the days have changed, that Egypt cannot be measured against the ancient Greeks, and cannot — indeed does not even think, does not even dream of preparing to rescue the great Egyptian queen as the Greeks prepared to rescue their beautiful Greek queen, and rescued her?

So the great Führer rests assured that he will keep his beloved, whether Egyptians are pleased or displeased, whether justice is pleased or displeased. But the question deserving of reflection is the opinion of the great queen herself: does she meet love with love, passion with passion, infatuation with infatuation?

For it used to be said that Helen loved Paris, and preferred to remain with him in Troy — did Queen Nefertiti, then, love the great Führer of Germany? And did she prefer to remain with him in great Germany? Or does this dear captive yearn for her homeland, which was dear in her own day, but has become abject in these days? A question there is no way to answer; for our great, ancient, captive, wretched queen can neither hear, nor answer, nor express what she feels — and perhaps she feels nothing at all.

And when have statues ever felt, and when have statues ever been able to feel or speak? Be that as it may, the Führer of Germany is a lover of Pharaoh's daughter, and in Egypt there are fourteen million who love this daughter of Pharaoh too; but only one man is able to satisfy his passion, while these millions — fourteen or fifteen of them — are powerless to satisfy theirs, compelled to content themselves with this longing that burns their hearts, keeps their nights sleepless, and teaches them that strength is a reality, that weakness is a reality, that wakefulness is a reality, and that sleep and oblivion are a reality too.

And the most amusing thing of all is that certain newspapers approached the German Minister Plenipotentiary to learn from him whether it is true that the great Führer has been smitten with love for the great queen; and the Minister answered that this matter is the subject of diplomatic negotiations, and ought not to be discussed. Forgive me, Mr. Minister, but let this matter be the subject of diplomatic negotiations — we shall nonetheless take it as a subject for discussion.

And what do you fear from this talk, when you are confident that our dear captive will not leave your country unless you yourselves permit her to leave? The Greeks rose up for Helen, braved the sea, declared war, changed the face of the earth, recovered their queen, and returned with her in triumph — shall we, the Egyptians, not be permitted to declare our sorrow and our longing for this great queen, kept in a museum in Berlin while our noses are rubbed in the dust?

This is a great deal to ask, and it is an even greater deal to ask that we accept it, or refrain from pursuing this conversation.

Have you seen, dear reader, that I was neither jesting, nor toying, nor mistaken, when I spoke to you of this passion?