

Stones

All Egyptians — across every class and station, despite the divergence of their opinions and inclinations, and the divisions between their factions and parties — are, every last one of them, stones in the estimation of the "Ministry's Newspaper" which appeared this morning. Among them are ministers and would-be ministers, commanders and would-be commanders, the leaders of the present order and the adherents of the old.

These people are stones, but stones differ: some are hard and misshapen, and some are precious and rare. It is abundantly clear, pellucidly evident, and beyond all dispute that the ministers and would-be ministers, the supporters of the ministers and the leaders of those supporters, are not of those hard and misshapen stones — they are, rather, gems of the highest distinction, untouched by deficiency and unspoiled by corruption, immune to the change and alteration that afflicts base stones, and spared the contempt and disdain to which those base stones are subjected. The ministers and would-be ministers, the supporters of the Cabinet and the leaders of those supporters, are precious, rare, costly, and prized gems — some fashioned from emerald, some created from diamond, some formed from coral, as the "Ministry's Newspaper" tells us.

You may enumerate all the precious jewels there are — whether those drawn from the sea or hewn from the mountain or sought in any place you choose. You yourself may enumerate these costly jewels and match them to the masters of today, distributing the jewels among the men or the men among the jewels, and you will find among them pearl and nacre, peridot and carnelian, just as the "Ministry's Newspaper" found among them emerald and diamond and coral.

I am prepared to believe that today's masters — the ministers and would-be ministers and the supporters of ministers — are precious and rare gems. But the question that calls for thought and careful consideration is this: what does Egypt urgently and imperatively need in these days? Does Egypt need precious stones, the kind one uses for adornment and beautification? Or does Egypt need hard and solid stones — the kind used for building and construction, which neither pickaxe nor hatchet can work through, which neither events nor misfortunes can wear away, which endure through the ages as the Pyramids endure, and as those immortal monuments resembling the Pyramids endure?

I am content for the adversaries of the Cabinet to be such stones, and I would be displeased for the adversaries of the Cabinet to be ornamental and decorative stones, mere showpieces. For Egypt needs a mighty and formidable edifice of glory and dignity to be raised for her — and when that edifice is complete, its strength and impregnability assured, its power and solidity confirmed, and when it is established that it is, as the "Ministry's Newspaper" says, or as it quotes from the ancients: more enduring than time itself — only then may Egypt turn to the thought of adorning and embellishing this edifice, of studding and beautifying it, of decking it with precious stones and rare jewels.

It is a curious thing that the "Ministry's Newspaper" is rarely successful in the thinking it sets out to do, nor in the comparisons it ventures into. But this time — or rather, in this particular passage — it has thought and thought well, and has drawn a comparison and drawn it aptly. I do not believe people have forgotten its comparison of the ministers of state, at the start of this year, to

aged wine and vintage liquor. On this occasion, however, good fortune did not elude it — it was as though it had been driven to it by compulsion. For our present Cabinet is, without doubt, an ornament for Egypt; it represents none of Egypt's needs, and embodies none of her necessities. Were it not a passing ornament that can be dispensed with and its weight shed, Egypt's affairs would not be running as they presently run.

The Prime Minister has been ill for many long months — ill in a way that prevents him from working and incapacitates him from thinking about work. He resides in Egypt and rests; he travels to Europe and rests; and Egypt's affairs proceed as best they can. Our Prime Minister is a jewel of diamond, or of whatever gem is more precious than diamond — but a jewel he remains, in any case. We may wear him when we wish to flaunt ourselves before the nations and announce to them that we have a Prime Minister as they have their prime ministers, and that our Prime Minister is of finer and nobler stuff than theirs — for he is of the diamond with which we adorn and deck ourselves.

He is not of those hard and misshapen stones whose absence would cause a building to collapse. And it is beyond doubt that MacDonald, and Mussolini, and Hitler, and Daladier, and their like among foreign prime ministers are not regarded by their countries as precious gems kept for adornment and decoration — they are regarded, rather, as hard and solid stones used for building and the raising of glory. But once we are done with our boasting and showing-off, our rivalry and competition, we may allow the Prime Minister to rest and leave him in his home or his summer retreat to recover and replenish his precious health. Our ministers, too, are without doubt an ornament — we can show them off to the nations with pride. We have a Minister of Ceremonies just as they have their ministers of ceremonies — but their ministers of ceremonies are hard and solid stones who neither travel nor rest unless driven to it by pressing necessity, and even then they summon others capable of doing the work without any need for travel, or for leisurely sojourns in capitals and resort towns.

More telling than all of this, in demonstrating that our ministers are ornament and adornment and a display of beauty above all else, is that Egypt has not been in the habit of advertising herself, nor has she been seized by a mania for boasting and showing off, for displaying a grandeur ill-suited to her needs and her means, nor for the inviting of foreigners to her shores and the dispatching of her sons to foreigners — not to the extent that her conduct reveals in these days. For these conferences, convened with and without calculation, are convened in all likelihood so that their participants may behold our ministers and take pleasure in looking upon them and conversing with them, and delight in the receptions they host and the generousities they lavish. And these visitors and experts, invited when we need them and when we do not, are invited to witness the ornaments we possess and the splendid jewels with which we provoke the envy of other nations — so that when they return to their countries and reach their homelands, they may speak of the wealth and riches that fill our hands, and of the precious stones that grace our heads and chests, and thus enchant the nations of the West with such talk, until Egypt has become in these days a byword for wealth and affluence, for ease and plenty.

Yet between our ministers and those precious and rare gems to which they are compared in the "Ministry's Newspaper," there is a difference that weakens the comparison, corrupts it, and renders it at the very least incomplete and unsound. For precious stones are not merely ornament

— they are also a reserve, and a form of enduring wealth that proves useful when crisis strikes, affairs grow dire, and hardship becomes severe. It is plain that currency fluctuates and changes, rising at times until it drives people to poverty and destitution. Those who possess precious stones are in such circumstances fortunate and secure against hunger and penury, for they can sell some of these stones and realise from the sale a considerable sum. Our ministers, however — God be thanked — cannot serve as a substitute for such stones when crisis sharpens and affairs grow narrow, and hunger threatens to destroy people and ruin everything for them. They are ornament and nothing more, whereas precious stones are both ornament and reserve.

What does the "Ministry's Newspaper" say to the fact that Egypt has begun in these days to need food more than it needs ornament?! And what good does it do Egypt now to have a Cabinet of emerald and diamond and coral, when many of its people cannot find bread and salt, or the means to buy bread and salt?!

But the felicity of this newspaper's comparison is not confined to the aspect that touches its masters and patrons — it is complete and comprehensive when measured against its opponents and adversaries. For they are of those hard stones, and what better proof of their hardness is there than that the "Cabinet of Ornament" has been in place for more than three years, and has done all it can to shatter even a single one of these stones — and has achieved nothing, and accomplished nothing. These stones remain exactly as they were on the day the Cabinet of Emerald and Diamond and Coral came to power. Nor has it worked alone in attempting to shatter these hard stones and straighten these crooked ones — others have worked alongside it, people who are not of emerald or diamond or coral, but of iron and copper and whatever metals and non-metals you choose. These are of those fierce and dangerous substances capable of shattering everything and straightening every crookedness — except the shattering of hard stones, for their hardness is an image of love of the homeland and faith in its strength and continuity and its eternal right to strength and continuity; and except the straightening of crooked stones, for their crookedness is an image of resolute determination, fierce defiance, refusal of humiliation, and insistent demands for rights — even should every precious stone and every noble metal conspire against them.

I do not know whether the Cabinet is grateful to its newspaper for this comparison that has cast it as emerald and diamond and coral — or whether it resents it and repudiates it. As for us, we accept the comparison that makes us hard stones, beyond all shattering, and crooked stones, beyond all straightening. And we affirm that this hardness — which has confounded all who have sought to wear it down — shall remain so until the end of time. Centuries have broken against it, and more centuries shall break against it still. But we return once more to suggest to the Cabinet, as we have suggested more than once before, that it charge the Ministry of Education with teaching its writers and supporters the art of eloquence, the craft of fine writing, and the skill of apt comparison — for they are in sore need of such instruction.