

Homage

There is no doubt that the Minister of Traditions is a hero among the heroes of the modern Egyptian generation! A singular figure among the singular figures of this age in which we live, a pillar among the pillars of this era whose bounty we enjoy, whose beneficence rains down upon us, and whose munificence envelops us!! And there is no doubt that every history written to portray Egyptian life in these days will be unable to omit the name of the Minister of Traditions, or to forget his magnificent and masterly efforts in depicting the mentality that certain parties wish to impose by force upon the Egyptians, and the mould into which they wish to pour the souls of the Egyptians. It is certain that two — and only two — of the ministers of this blessed era will have their names preserved in the history of Egypt for no short time: the Prime Minister and the Minister of Traditions.

This does not mean that their colleagues have produced nothing worthy of mention, deserving of thought and record. History will not forget the Interior Minister's skill in maintaining order, his dexterity in establishing security, and his excellence in protecting the state from the leader of the Wafd and his associates when they launch their raids upon the neighbourhoods of Cairo, or upon the towns and villages and provinces. People will remember, with boundless admiration, the snatching of the Wafd leader and his companion from Qena; they will remember, with awe and reverence, the arming of soldiers to besiege Samannoud, the cancellation of officers' leave, and the confinement of district governors to their provinces during the feast days; and people will remember — with profuse praise and beautiful gratitude — the digging of trenches and the erecting of barriers, the lining up of cars and carriages around Zifta on the day the Wafd leader and his companion visited it. Yet all these things, for all their gravity and high import, and for all that they have built for Egypt an enduring glory and won for the state a resounding victory, are neither novel nor original — they are imitation, or something resembling imitation, of what the Prime Minister himself used to do when he presided over the Interior Ministry in his earlier and later tenures. The credit for these great deeds belongs more to him than to our current Interior Minister. And if God grants the Cabinet a long lease of life and extended means of survival, the Interior Minister may yet produce works that place him alongside his two great colleagues.

The Minister of Agriculture has made speeches and has his discourses, his sallies and his campaigns — but for all that, he is still new to the ministry, his personality not yet prominent enough to compel the people's admiration unless the year runs its full course and some new development occurs in our agricultural life comparable to the political and educational events. We once had a Minister of Justice who nearly imposed his personality by sheer force and would have compelled the Union Party to erect for him — not mere

tribute banquets, we say, but monuments and statues — had this personality not been overtaken by weakness midway along the road, until he grew weary of the Badari affair and the Badari affair grew weary of him, and the Badari case brought down this minister and two of his associates.

The rest of the ministers of this era passed through their portfolios like fleeting apparitions, leaving neither traces nor great events in their wake — so much so that the British said that Sidqi Pasha's Cabinet was in reality a one-man government. Now events are correcting the British view and proving it to be a two-man government: our Prime Minister, who rests in Versailles, and the Minister of Traditions, who toils in Cairo and will toil tomorrow in Alexandria.

It is no wonder, then, that tribute banquets are held for our two great ministers — they are without doubt deserving of tribute, and of more than tribute. What is strange is that these banquets are held only from time to time, twice or a few times a year. Were Egyptians truly grateful to those who deserve gratitude, and were they truly able to appreciate fine conduct from those who govern them with goodness and touch them with benevolence, then tribute banquets for the two illustrious ministers would be unceasing — they would be honoured at morning and honoured at evening and honoured through the night. And this would be the least that Egypt owes them in gratitude, and the smallest of the tributes Egypt could render them.

For this reason we did not understand the bewilderment that appeared plain and evident in the speech of the Minister of Agriculture when he sought to speak in the name of the ministers and in the name of the People's Party at the tribute ceremony for the great leader of the Union Party. The Minister of Agriculture was genuinely bewildered, casting about for reasons and causes for this tribute that had appeared suddenly and arrived unexpectedly, and attempting to set matters right by attributing some of the Minister of Traditions' merit to the Prime Minister, and some of the Union Party's success to the support and favour shown it by the People's Party. We did not understand this bewilderment on the part of a man who, when he speaks in an assembly, graces it, and when he opens his mouth, releases from his tongue a flow of honey, and when eloquence is summoned, it answers him in submission and compliance. For the merit of the Minister of Traditions is too manifest to deny, and the importance of the Minister of Traditions too luminous to doubt. Had it not been that entertaining certain suspicions is itself sinful, we would have feared for the Minister of Agriculture that he had taken fright at this sudden tribute, and imagined it to have causes unknown to the people and secrets accessible only to those firmly grounded in knowledge. But the matter is simpler than that — the achievements of the Minister of Traditions are plain to all who have a heart, or who lend an ear as an attentive witness. The first of the

Minister of Traditions' achievements is that he has single-handedly borne the representation of the Union Party within the Cabinet since a time long past — since Maher Pasha was removed from it, and since the Foreign Minister fell ill. He stood alone among his colleagues, yet bore the trust in all its weight, discharged the duty in the proper manner, and kept the Party's banner raised and its standard unfurled and flying. Is not that alone sufficient for the Union Party to hold tribute banquets for him at the break of dawn, at the approach of evening, and in the darkness of night?

Indeed — and how much more so when the Minister of Traditions has achievements that have extended beyond the Union Party, not only to the Egyptian nation alone, I say, nor only to the Arab East alone, but to the entire civilised world. For it is the Minister of Traditions who established the Language Academy. It does not concern us whether the Academy has come into being or not, whether it has functioned or not — that is something that ought to rank second or third in consideration. What matters is that the Academy was enacted by decree, mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, written about in the newspapers, communicated to the states of East and West, and a mission was prepared for it, and it will without doubt be constituted one of these days. You know that this Academy is not confined to Egyptians, nor to Easterners — it encompasses East and West alike. It is no wonder, then, that the Egyptians of the Union Party should rise to honour the Minister of Traditions, and no wonder that decorations should pour in upon the Minister of Traditions from East and West alike.

If to this achievement is added another achievement from which foreigners benefit at length throughout each winter season — namely, the achievement of dancing and theatrical performance and singing at the Opera, and the pains the Minister of Traditions took to compel Parliament to allocate thousands of pounds for it despite the economic crisis, and despite the Minister of Traditions — then we have no doubt that foreigners are falling short in not joining with Egyptians in honouring our great minister. The foreigners' shortcoming becomes all the more reprehensible when one recalls those lecturers whom the Minister of Traditions invited from the lands of the English and the French, spending hundreds of pounds upon them to educate foreigners and enlighten them in their own literatures. Do you not see that it is incumbent upon foreigners — if they know how to be properly grateful to those who deserve gratitude — to hold at least one tribute banquet for the Minister of Traditions? And the Minister of Traditions has yet further achievements that however much we recount, and however much we write, we shall never do justice to in their portrayal: it is he who clipped the University's wings and expelled its independence from Egypt; it is he who narrowed the boundaries of higher education and subjected it to restrictions of which the least that can be said is that they are incompatible with Egypt's aspirations, its needs, and its dignity.

Beware, above all else, of viewing these acts as harm done to Egypt or as a corruption of her affairs — for no one has served Egypt as the Minister of Traditions has served her with his diabolical policy. For he has compelled the Egyptians to value educational matters, and he has compelled the opposing political parties to place the question of education at the very forefront of their political programmes, in order to repair what this era has ruined. Had God not blessed Egypt with the Minister of Traditions, educational matters would have remained neglected, deprived of reform, proceeding without system or consistency. As it is now, Egypt has become confident that the edifice of her education will be resumed anew and built upon its proper foundations on the day her true freedom is restored to her. Were this the Minister of Traditions' only merit, he would be deserving of tribute several times each day — not merely each year.

Two men — and two alone — will have their names preserved by modern history as among the greatest benefactors of Egypt: the Prime Minister, because he awakened the Egyptian people to their duty in political reform in the finest possible way; and the Minister of Traditions, because he awakened the people to their duty in educational reform in the finest possible way. This Cabinet will resign one day, and the Prime Minister and the Minister of Traditions will find that the opponents who contest them today will hold for them tribute banquets more beautiful, more magnificent, and more splendid than any banquets now being held for them in the People's Party or the Union Party.

Kawkab al-Sharq, 30 June 1933.