

Warning

Warning Some men were engaged in idle conversation when one of them declared: "They say that whoever eats fish, drinks milk, and then enters the bathhouse emerges from it insane." Among all his companions—who were many—only one objected stubbornly to this claim. He argued so insistently that his companions grew weary of him, until at last he swore that he himself would eat fish, drink milk afterward, enter the bathhouse, and emerge perfectly sane, composed in temperament and balanced in mind.

That very afternoon people saw him wandering through the streets of the village, stopping in its cafés and gathering places entirely naked except for the pile of clothes balanced upon his head, laughing with terrifying abandon and shouting: "They say that whoever eats fish, drinks milk, and enters the bathhouse comes out mad. Well, I have done all of this! Do you see upon me any trace of madness or sign of disturbance?"

Anyone familiar with this story—which people repeat jokingly whenever fish, milk, and bathhouses are mentioned—cannot help recalling it and bursting into laughter when reading the newspapers of the government these days, especially *Al-Ittihad*, which appeared yesterday, and *Al-Sha'b*, which appeared today.

Al-Ittihad and *Al-Sha'b* are utterly calm, perfectly reassured, and wholly confident. They spend their days in the ease of complete security and their nights in the tranquil sleep of the undisturbed because the present government, they assure us, is threatened by no danger and exposed to no harm. Resignation cannot approach it from before or behind, from right or left, from heaven above or earth below. It is as stable as al-Muqattam itself, as immovable as the pyramids. Thus *Al-Ittihad* pays no attention to the ravings of the opposition, who dream of the Ministry's resignation and then foolishly imagine their dreams have become reality.

Yet although *Al-Ittihad* ignores such ravings, it devotes four entire articles to them; and although *Al-Sha'b* ignores them as well, it devotes three articles to the same subject. Both newspapers dismiss these fantasies while speaking of nothing else. If, after all this, you still claim there is no resemblance between their conduct and that of the man who ate fish, drank milk, entered the bathhouse, and then tried to prove his sanity by stripping naked and covering only his head, then perhaps you should begin anew your study of rhetoric and the proper principles of comparison.

These seven articles published in the two official organs of the Ministry vary in length and style, but nowhere within them will you find anything persuasive or convincing to prove that the government is truly stable and secure—unless, of course, the man from the old story truly succeeded in persuading people of his sanity.

You may read these articles if you wish to amuse yourself, or ignore them if your time is too valuable to waste on frivolity. Yet among them there is one article in *Al-Sha'b* that deserves attention, for it was written neither for you nor for me. It was written for the English.

And if we read it as intruders, the English are expected to read it repeatedly and study it carefully. For the English have opened upon themselves a door I do not know whether they will be able to close, and have begun walking a road I do not know whether they will be able to continue.

They transferred their High Commissioner either because they were pleased with him and wished to promote him, or because they were dissatisfied and wished to remove him from Egyptian affairs. That is their right, and no one disputes it. Yet people have begun to say that the English may be tempted—and the soul is always inclined toward evil—to use this transfer as a pretext for altering their Egyptian policy and thereby forcing the resignation of the Ministry. This is the dangerous door the English have opened, and one they would do well to shut immediately.

This is also the dangerous path they have begun to follow, and from which they should retreat quickly. For the Egyptian Ministry is not one of those weak and pliant ministries to which the English may say: “Rise,” and it rises; “Sit,” and it sits; “Ascend,” and it ascends; “Descend,” and it hastens downward. No—this is a free and independent government, strong, proud, and unyielding. Its leader knows how to keep the English within their limits and how to compel Mr. MacDonald himself into silence and stillness.

Its leader remains Sidqi Pasha, unchanged and unweakened, untouched by infirmity or decline. Tomorrow, just as yesterday, he will not hesitate to say to MacDonald: “Stay where you are. Do not take one step forward, for I shall neither permit nor allow it.”

The English would therefore do well to reflect carefully. Let them change their High Commissioner as they wish and transfer him wherever they please, but let them beware of touching Egyptian policy even from afar or hinting at the continuation or resignation of the Egyptian Ministry. That is not their affair but ours. Any foreigner who interferes in our domestic concerns should blame no one but

himself when calamities descend upon him and dangers surround him on every side.

The English are wiser than to throw themselves recklessly into destruction. They value too highly their dignity, their blood, and their power to suggest even indirectly that the Egyptian Ministry should resign. They know very well that if they demanded such a thing, they would not be obeyed. And if they insisted, Egypt possesses a strength capable of confronting theirs—and perhaps even driving them back humiliated.

There is no doubt that this article carries something of the scent of war. And who knows? Perhaps the man who wrote it lives beside the Ministry of War itself or spends much of his time there, for he seems intoxicated with visions of Egyptian strength and military power.

There is likewise no doubt that the English ought to read this article carefully before entertaining any thought of interfering in Egyptian affairs or hinting at changes in Egyptian policy.

But we Egyptians too must read and ponder it. The English are a proud people, their most obvious faults arrogance and conceit. Who knows whether this challenge issued to them by one of the government's newspapers—indeed by the newspaper of the Prime Minister himself—may provoke and anger them, driving them to accept the confrontation being offered?

Perhaps they may suggest that the Ministry resign. The Ministry may refuse. The English may insist. The Ministry may grow angry. Then war may erupt between the two countries. And war with the English is neither simple nor trivial.

The Egyptians are capable of such a struggle if the government summons them to it, but war is always something for which nations must prepare carefully. We must therefore prepare ourselves in advance to secure victory and avoid defeat.

The government, to judge by this article, appears ready and cautious, prepared for every contingency and unafraid of being caught unaware. But the nation itself has not been informed of this coming war, nor prepared for it. It must therefore begin preparing now for war's pains and crimes alike. We are confident in the courage of the nation, in its patience under suffering, and in its willingness to support and defend the government with lives and fortunes.

You see now that I did not err in summarizing this article for you and urging you to reflect upon it. The English must not alone prepare for attack while Egyptians remain ignorant and unprepared for defense.

And now that the English have read the article and Egyptians know its contents, the world stands before two possibilities. Either the English recover their good sense, choose peace, and leave the Egyptian Ministry to govern Egypt freely and independently—in which case the world remains calm and satisfied—or pride and arrogance seize them, and they intrude where they do not belong.

Then forty centuries and more will look down upon Egyptians from the summits of the pyramids, and Egyptians will not betray the expectations of those centuries. But woe to the world should such a monstrous war occur! Has the world not yet recovered from the Great War and its consequences, that it should stumble into another conflict even more terrible?

And after all this, is this truly the language of calm and reassured men, such as the government newspaper claims to represent? Or is it rather the speech of men who have lost not only their peace of mind but something else besides?

Has the government become so weak and resigned before events that it permits its writers to defend it with such nonsense and delirium? If the Ministry itself has chosen silence—and silence is indeed its wisest choice—why has it not ordered its journalists to remain silent as well? And if they absolutely must speak, why not require them to speak in a way that does not invite ridicule and mockery?

What, after all, does the Ministry fear? What harm could come to it from suffering the same fate as every other ministry? Every government must one day taste resignation. Offices, as *Al-Muqattam* wisely says, are entrusted temporarily, not granted eternally.

So long as there remains in human beings even a spark of life, there remains also a measure of hope. Let the Ministry therefore endure whatever trials may come and hope for whatever good fortune may still arise. No one—not even its opponents or supporters—has said that the English will order it to resign. When have the English ever ordered an Egyptian government to resign? They did not do so in the days of occupation nor in the days of the Protectorate. They are even less likely to do so in the days of independence.

It was never within their power to appoint or dismiss Egyptian ministries. Let the Ministry therefore remain calm, and let its supporters remain calm. The English will not command it to resign, nor will it need to resist them or refuse obedience.

But who ever claimed that Egyptian ministries resign only when ordered to do so by the English? What absurd warning adorned the pages of *Al-Sha'b* this morning!