

Dream

They say that those who sought to define government never found a better definition than the one proposed by certain French philosophers: that government consists in foreseeing consequences, preparing for the future, and anticipating what is yet to come. And they say that no ministry on earth has ever understood this definition so thoroughly, appreciated it so fully, and transformed it into living reality quite like the present Egyptian Ministry. The clearest proof of this, they claim, has been jointly provided by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Works. The newspapers informed us that the government had decided to construct a great lecture hall for the Egyptian University and to spend seventy-five thousand pounds upon its construction. According to the newspapers, this decision had been made even before the plans were completed and before the hall had taken its final form on paper. But when the drawings were finally prepared and the hall assumed visible form upon the page, it appeared that building it upon the earth would require not seventy-five thousand pounds but eighty-five thousand. The matter was then presented to the Council of Ministers, which did not hesitate for a single moment before approving both the design and the additional expense. There is no doubt that Europe—with all its universities, its ancient academic traditions, its hopes for the future of higher learning, and its immense wealth and prosperity—will burst with envy and fury when it learns that we intend to spend such a sum upon this hall. And once we truly spend this money and erect this building, Europe will surely bow before us and acknowledge for modern Egypt a greatness rivaled only by the greatness of ancient Egypt itself. How could it be otherwise? We shall possess a hall in which lectures will be delivered and conferences held, a hall extending over three thousand square meters and capable of containing four thousand people. According to the French, it will cost eight million francs; according to the English, eighty-five thousand pounds. I confess I do not know how this sum might be calculated in German marks, Italian lire, or the dollars of President Roosevelt and his American companions. This hall will contain seats for the common people, others for the respectable middle classes, and still others for persons of rank and distinction. It will be adorned with a royal box for His Majesty the King, balconies for Their Highnesses the princes, and private chambers for Their Excellencies the ministers. It will possess such vastness and height, such ornament and magnificence, that it will become one of the grandest—if not the grandest—lecture halls in the entire world. And if you ask what lectures will be delivered there, the answer is clear: those distinguished foreign professors whom we invite from Europe to lecture at the university will finally discover a setting worthy of themselves, of the learning they bear, and of the dignity they represent. Egypt will even be able to summon a great international conference to resolve the “crisis of knowledge,” just as England recently summoned its economic and financial conference to solve the world economic crisis. That conference, too, will be held in this magnificent hall. Perhaps Egypt will succeed in solving the crisis of science more successfully than

England succeeded in solving the crisis of economics. Then morning dawned, light spread across the sky, and those responsible for the affairs of the university awoke. Those responsible for the treasury awoke as well. They asked themselves: what had they imagined? What had they done? Reality answered them plainly: they had been dreaming, and had attempted to transform their dreams into reality. Then they awakened to discover that they had accomplished nothing but wastefulness and extravagance. It pains us deeply that imagination should exercise greater authority over the university and those who administer it than reason itself—the reason that calls for prudence, wisdom, moderation, and economy.