

Dreams

Kawkab al-Sharq — 3 April 1933

Could the African World, meagre as it is in stature and slight in standing, have ever dreamed that the Egyptian press would pay such attention to what it writes — the kind of attention that appeared this very morning in both Al-Siyasa and Al-Ahram?

Al-Kawkab mocked yesterday what the African World had written, and spoke of its view on a coalition ministry as nothing but a dream — one of those fancies that toy with the head of a weak man, especially when he rests in the shadow of the pyramids, where images and phantoms abound, troubling some souls and visiting dreams upon others.

Yet Al-Siyasa and Al-Ahram did not mock what the African World had written.

Al-Siyasa, for its part, apparently took care to restate what no one had ever doubted: that the Constitutional Liberals hold themselves in too high regard, and cherish their principles too dearly, to share with Sidqi Pasha the burdens of government, whatever the circumstances.

Al-Ahram, for its part, appears to have regarded the African World's article with a seriousness and care that the paper — as Al-Ahram well knows — scarcely deserves. And who can tell? Perhaps the African World was merely a pretext for re-opening the discussion of coalition and a national ministry; perhaps those who were visited — waking or sleeping — by the spectre of such a coalition with the Prime Minister are the very ones who prompted the African World to write and then approached Al-Ahram to comment on what the African World had written.

It seems that the Egyptian atmosphere is at present haunted by a spirit that hovers around a certain circle of people — the spirit of coalition with the Prime Minister. The experiment has failed, the attempts have come to nothing, patching things up has proved a wasted effort, and the only remaining option is that the Prime Minister should resign a second time and form a new cabinet on a broader coalition basis than the present one — one that would embrace parties other than the Unionists and the People's Party, as certain English newspapers suggested some days ago.

How remarkable is the Prime Minister — despite his illness — in the breadth of his ambitions and the reach of his imagination! It is as if he has not yet perceived that his colleagues, supporters, and partisans can never be the source of his strength; he himself is the very source of the weakness he feels and wishes to be rid of. Were he to temper his ambitions and restrain his imagination somewhat, he would recognise that the sole remedy

for this weakness is to heed the words of the ancient poet:

"If you cannot do a thing, then leave it,

And pass on to what you can."

It has been proved a thousand times over that the Prime Minister cannot govern; he can only rest. Why, then, does he not leave what is beyond him and turn to what he can manage — resign, attend to his health, rest, and let others rest?

Yet the Prime Minister's ambitions surpass his strength, and his imagination outdistances his capacity. And it is by no means rare for men to be undone by soaring ambitions and flights of fancy.

Stranger still is that neither the English nor a faction of Egyptians learn from experience or take heed of events; they press on with their hopes as the Prime Minister presses on with his, and surrender to fantasy as he surrenders to his — each of them convinced that the Egyptian question is still among those problems for which lame solutions may be sought or tortuous paths devised.

Time and again the English, alongside a faction of Egyptians, have resorted to these lame solutions and gained nothing; time and again they have followed these tortuous paths and reached nothing — or rather, reached failure and setback, only to be forced to start again as though they had never striven or laboured to find a solution, as though they had never sought one before.

The root of this confusion and entanglement in futile schemes is that the English and their Egyptian allies are unwilling or unable to acknowledge the plain reality: that the Egyptian nation truly exists, is truly conscious of its existence, is in earnest in seeking its independence, and is truly awake to the schemes being laid against it. It cannot be taken unawares; it cannot be beguiled by promises and hopes; it cannot be subdued by force or coercion; it will accept only what it itself consents to, not what others would have it accept.

Therefore, no sound and productive settlement between Egypt and the English can exist unless Egypt itself participates in that settlement. Therefore, circling around it is futile, and no good can come of attempts that have been tried time and again since the national movement began — attempts that have ended, always, as the nation itself willed.

Yes, this nation's taste is bitter to the English; but they are compelled to swallow that bitterness, or else matters will remain as they are. Whatever they do, they will succeed only in postponing the day when they must swallow it and acknowledge that Egyptian affairs must be restored to Egypt, and that any agreement must be made with the Egyptian

people.

Yes, there are Egyptians who love power and are impatient to reach it, who think — as the English think — that deceiving this nation is an easy matter, and that fine words may be dressed up for it until it is lured into accepting what it would not otherwise accept. Yet these Egyptians have seen ministries built upon such deception accomplish nothing; they see now a ministry that relies at one moment on dressing up its words and at another on violence and oppression, yet accomplishes nothing — despite its long tenure and its strong and unremitting support.

Time does not pass in vain or come to nothing. Perhaps the finest thing that the passing of mornings and the return of evenings has yielded for us in these days is that no man with any share of reason or reflection can any longer entertain the hope of bringing Egypt to heel against its will. The English and their friends among the Egyptians would do well to face this reality with courage and resolve, and to renounce the beguiling and deceiving dreams that have seduced them.

They speak of coalition — but upon what is this coalition to rest? Between whom is it to be formed? By what path is it to be achieved? From whom does the desire for it proceed? Is it to rest upon resolving the economic crisis? But there is also a political crisis — complex, deeply entangled, touching our relations with the English and touching the constitution and the system of government.

Is the coalition, then, to address economics but not politics? And yet our political crisis is perhaps the greatest single factor in our economic crisis. If the coalition is to resolve the political crisis, with which of the two should it begin? With the external crisis, so that what lies between us and the English is settled first of all? Or with the internal crisis, so that the country's constitution is restored first of all? And in either case, who constitutes the coalition? Is it the various minorities represented by the different parties, so that the few govern and the many stand in opposition as is now the case? If so, what has changed? What are the coalition partners to accomplish? When was it ever right for the few to govern and the many to oppose? Or are the few and the many to coalesce so that there are no longer rulers and opposition?

From whom, then, does the desire for this coalition proceed? From the Egyptians themselves? If so, the voice of the majority must be heard before any other voice. Or does this desire issue from the English, and is the coalition to be dictated to us by them? If so, where is national dignity — and who ever claimed that a foreigner has the right to decide whether the cabinets of sovereign nations should be coalitions or otherwise?

All these are matters that those who contemplate a coalition ministry — or a national ministry — must study. And if they study them, they will recognise that there is one indispensable precondition before any talk of a coalition or national ministry: that Egypt's freedom be restored. The present ministry must resign; free parliamentary life must return; and only then — only then — can sincere and serious thought be given to coalition. Then the desire for coalition will arise from the free Egyptian people, openly, in full view of all, with no one directing it, no one dictating it, proceeding from no single quarter.

Until that day arrives — the day on which Egypt can think freely, with dignity, and in full independence of mind — Egyptians must be united in resisting the present ministry and those among the English who support it.

They will say: but coalition is the means by which the ministry is to be brought down and its burden lifted. Who, then, imposes this precondition and insists upon it? Is it the English? Then let us leave them to their devices until they find themselves in a predicament from which there is no escape save by yielding to the will of the nation.

This path may be long, and pain may have to be endured along it; but political struggle is neither idle play nor a game. Whoever does not know patience, the bearing of pain, and the long wait is unfit to involve himself in the politics of nations.

I do not oppose coalition or a national ministry; I may even love and desire them. But I want a coalition born of the nation's conviction and will — a coalition that rises from the people and is not imposed upon them from above. What do the coalition's advocates say to a solution which I believe to be just without a shadow of inequity, straightforward without ambiguity or room for misinterpretation? What do they say to this: let the present ministry resign, first of all; let free elections be prepared thereafter; and let coalition and a national ministry be the subject of that election.

Let the advocates of coalition and a national ministry put their case to the Egyptians; let the opponents of coalition and a national ministry put their case to the Egyptians. Whichever of the two prevails in a free and honest election — to that party let all the affairs of Egypt be entrusted, within the bounds of the constitution, to be decided by them without suspicion, doubt, or accusation.

I believe that presenting the matter in this way is well suited to dissolving the dispute over coalition and to uniting the voices of all those who are determined that the resolution of the Egyptian question must rest — first, last, and above all else — on the will of the nation, pure from every blemish, free from every doubt, safe from every outside influence.

Let the opponents of the ministry cooperate through patient, honest struggle and resistance until God lifts its harm from Egypt; then let them, thereafter, appeal to the nation on the question of which ministry will resolve Egypt's great problems: the party ministry, or the national ministry?