

Triumph

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The Prime Minister won it yesterday, at the close of day, and all Egypt rejoiced at it through the blackness of night. The sun had risen, yet the sun of rejoicing still shone upon men's souls, gleaming in their hearts, until people found themselves bewildered between two suns: the sun of day and the sun of triumph. It was fitting that the Prime Minister should exult in this victory, and fitting that all Egypt should revel in it, and be swept away by delight on his account — for the war had been fierce, the struggle severe, the adversaries strong and implacable; peril — utter peril — hovered about the ministry, evil — utter evil — stalked toward it, and terror — utter terror — stretched out to Egypt long arms, their claws dripping blood. Everything had grown so dark that people imagined this affair could have no end, nor this ordeal any way out.

Then, when God decreed the victory, and the deputies pronounced their confidence — some of them delivering it as a plain proclamation, others intoning it like a recitation — the anguish lifted, and the war was made plain, and behold, the Prime Minister had swept the field, leaving upon it but eight fallen, who had been the whole of the warring army, and the whole of the vanquishing foe, and the very root of the sedition and the source of the ordeal. So God turned the tide against them, and spared the believers the ordeal of battle, and it became only right that the Prime Minister should set down the record of his fine service and his colleagues' valiant effort, and the triumph of his ministry in the engagement — even as Julius Caesar used to set down his triumphs, and issue of them bulletins in Rome, which to this day are still reckoned among the marvels of eloquence.

And what is strange is that among the ministry's supporters and partisans are those who look upon this war with an eye of envy, speak of it in the language of glory, record the victory, and await from it good things to come, reckoning that it will fill the ministry's adversaries with dread and awe, and will restore to it the English's confidence, affection, and reliance — while knowing full well that there was no war, and there was no victory; there merely charged the assailants, and ranged the rambles, and spoke the speakers, in a war of phantoms and shadows, so that they triumphed though none was defeated on their account, and they prevailed though no war was ever set up against them; and the leader of

their adversaries declared to them that they wanted neither war nor stratagem, and sought neither the granting of confidence nor its refusal, being surrendered before the war, defeated before the battle, certain that the absolute majority in the Chamber would never dare to oppose the ministry, or to doubt it, or to attempt any stratagem against it. And that, if confidence there must be, the Chamber's need of the ministry's confidence in it is greater than the ministry's need of the Chamber's confidence in it. And that it had grown accustomed to seeing ministries hold parliamentary chambers in awe, and had not grown accustomed to seeing chambers in Egypt bring down a ministry; and that for all this, he, together with his contentious and oppositional colleagues, wished only to place their views on record, nothing more. This he said, and pressed upon it, and the Chamber heard him, and the ministry heard him, and the newspapers recorded it, and al-Ahram published it this very morning. And yet, with all this, the speeches of the orators multiplied in the Chamber of Deputies, and the Prime Minister pressed and insisted in his demand for confidence and in specifying its nature, and in showing his intense concern that it be a confidence unlike any other confidence; and yet, for all that, the parliamentary parties bestirred themselves in broad daylight yesterday, as though the matter were in earnest, and as though the ministry faced a genuine peril.

The speeches of the deputies, and the bestirring of the parties, and the Prime Minister's insistence, were, it seems, all meant to give people the impression that the matter was truly in earnest; but their authors overreached themselves until they came to imagine, even to themselves, that the matter was truly in earnest. And the Prime Minister rose, once the confidence — of which he had never doubted, before the interpellation or after it, that it was destined for him and reserved to him alone — had been duly granted; he rose and set down this dazzling triumph, and declared that the government would not resign, as though the Chamber of Deputies had ever offered the government its resignation, or any deputy had ever hinted at resignation to the Prime Minister — though the ministry will resign without any doubt, will resign at a time perhaps nearer than the Prime Minister supposes; but the cause of that resignation will be an embarrassment brought by neither the Chamber of Deputies nor the Senate.

The Prime Minister knows this; yet he has committed himself to a course he must see through to its full term, and carry to its end; he must put the question of confidence, and insist that it be lofty and dear; he

must win this confidence, and set down the record of this victory. But the question truly deserving reflection — not from us, but from the Prime Minister himself — is the effect of this victory upon his political standing with the Egyptians and the English. Will this dazzling triumph lead the Egyptians to believe the ministry's position secure and safe from collapse? By no means; the Egyptians have never, on any day, supposed that Parliament's confidence in the Prime Minister could ever weaken, and they leave the granting or withholding of confidence entirely out of their political reckoning, knowing full well that Parliament's confidence in the Prime Minister has been, and will remain until the ministry resigns, a confidence vast and without limit, as some of the deputies said yesterday.

Will this dazzling triumph lead the English to conclude that the Prime Minister enjoys the full confidence of Parliament, and so deal gently with him, and preserve for him their policy of support? By no means — the English know as much of the true nature of the bond between the Prime Minister and Parliament as the Egyptians do. And they, like the Egyptians, leave the granting and withholding of confidence out of their political reckoning. To what end, then, this war and this battle? To what end this contention and this struggle? To what end these lengthy speeches?

You may put all this to the Prime Minister and to the members of Parliament, and they will answer you with replies that alter nothing of the plain facts; and these plain facts are that Egypt has a right which she demands and presses for, and does not expect to attain at the hand of the Prime Minister, nor at the hand of Parliament; and that the English have a hope which they seek and scheme after, and have now become convinced that they will never attain this hope of theirs by way of the Prime Minister, nor by way of Parliament — so that there remains no course but for the matter to return to what it was. The sound Egypt, not the sickly one; the truthful Egypt, not the mendacious one; the Egypt that can speak of herself and speak truly, and can promise and keep faith. This Egypt, face to face with the English, and then either accord, or discord.

Let the Prime Minister triumph, then, as far as triumph will carry him; and let the Parliament's opposition suffer defeat, then, as far as defeat will carry it; for all this is but like those small ripples, scarcely to be felt, which the breeze stirs upon the water's face when it toys with the surface of a pool. But the triumph that truly changes things, and the

defeat that truly changes things — these are not to be sought in these diverting exchanges between ministry and Parliament, but must rather be sought in another quarter of Egyptian life, and in the relation between the Egyptians and the English.