

Delay

Kawkab al-Sharq, 23 June 1933

What has God wrought with the civil servants? And with their pay increments? And with the preparations for those increments? For it has been reported that a great gate of exceptions was flung wide open before the Prime Minister had even left Egyptian soil, and that a company of the favoured, the saintly, the well-connected, and the well-regarded were touched by the wings of mercy: their salaries were raised and they were advanced several grades above their existing ones. It has further been reported that the wretched among the junior civil servants complained of this preferential treatment, chafed against it, and pressed insistently to be touched themselves by these same wings of mercy. It has been reported that the government felt compassion for them and showed them sympathy, and asked each ministry to submit a list of names of those who deserved to receive the mercy of God and the mercy of the Ministry, in recompense for the long years they had endured in misery and borne the burden of deprivation. It has been reported that the Ministry considered setting aside — or had already set aside — ten thousand pounds to restore to these civil servants some portion of the compassion, sympathy, benevolence, and solicitude that was their due. Then it was reported that the Ministry formed a committee to examine how these increments should be distributed and how these civil servants should be promoted and advanced. After that, it was said that this committee met and dispersed once or twice — I cannot be sure — and then the conversation broke off and people's attention was drawn away from the matter of these civil servants, their increments, and their promotions; no one thought of them, no one spoke of them. Whether because events in Egypt follow one upon another so swiftly that each erases the last, or causes the last to be forgotten; or because affairs in Egypt are not fond of speed, but prefer deliberateness and calm — particularly when need calls for speed and urgent necessity presses for it; or because of both reasons at once. Nevertheless, the misery of these civil servants continues to press upon them, and their need may well grow from day to day. Their lot and their children's lot of deprivation may well grow heavier between sunrise and sunset, and their resentment at that preferential treatment and their indignation at seeing others favoured over them may well intensify from time to time. It would serve the interests of the government, of the civil servants who were affected by the preferential treatment, and of those who are still waiting for some good, if the Ministry's promise of these increments were not to remain a Platonic affair — like a summer cloud that no sooner appears on the horizon and revives hope than it disperses and leaves despair in its wake.

The government is, without doubt, keen — and we are keen alongside it — that the civil servants should think well of it and hold it in good regard; that they should believe it when it speaks and trust it when it promises; and that they should await the fulfilment of its word and

the honouring of its pledge without having to wait too long. The civil servants who benefited from the preferential treatment may well take pleasure in being singled out, and may enjoy displaying this distinction; they may well be gratified that the Ministry has favoured them over others with generosity, sympathy, and preferment. But they are Egyptians, after all, and we do not imagine their satisfaction with this privilege lasts for more than a season — it will quiet down and settle once the days and weeks have passed. They are human beings, after all, and we do not imagine they enjoy having their brothers think ill of them, nurse grudges against them, or prolong their envy over what the Ministry has bestowed on them. They have rejoiced and they have prevailed, they have accepted the privilege and the pushing ahead in the ranks — but they do not begrudge others the same joy and the same triumph, and they do not begrudge others a share of this bounty that fell upon them.

These civil servants who did not hesitate to make sacrifices when sacrifice was demanded, nor to endure deprivation when they were asked to endure deprivation; who did not despair when it was announced to them that any increase in their salaries had been blocked; who did not recoil when it was announced to them that their meagre salaries would be reduced somewhat — these civil servants rejoiced when they heard that the Ministry wished to show them some sympathy and to raise their salaries a little. They rejoiced and returned to their families with smiling faces, telling them that some of their hardship might be lifted and some ease might come their way. They began to entertain hopes for themselves and their families, and they began to wait — their families waiting alongside them. It would not be well if what they gained in the end were despair and a harvest of disappointment. It would not be well if their waiting were to drag on as the winter night drags on, or as the month of fasting drags on in the saying of the ancients. What would be well is that the government should make haste to fulfil its promise and honour its word, and give these people some relief from what they are enduring.

We have tried to fathom the secret of this delay and found no way to do so. For what could be simpler than the work of this committee that the Ministry formed when the Prime Minister departed?

The affairs of these civil servants are plain and clear, their need for increments and promotion is plainer and clearer still, and their entitlement to those increments and that promotion is clearer and more evident than anything. Every ministry and department is capable of preparing whatever falls within its purview in the shortest possible time. The committee is capable of deciding the matter without any excess of procrastination and hesitation — yet there is evidently some difficulty in the affair. Where do ten thousand pounds go among all these many civil servants who need their increments, are entitled to them, and are waiting for them? And how is a just distinction to be made between those who

should be touched by a wing of mercy and those who must wait for now?

This is a genuine problem, and it would have been easy to resolve had the government been willing to set aside a more generous and substantial sum than these ten thousand pounds. The government still has every right to increase the amount, so long as its treasury permits spending on Mount Awliya, and on Lake Tana, and on conferences held in Cairo or attended by Egyptians outside Cairo without any need or urgent necessity calling for them. It is an unquestionable truth that the junior civil servants are more deserving of the thousands that have been allocated — or that it is intended to allocate — for the Aviation Conference; for there are doubtless many things we need before we need this Aviation Conference. It is equally unquestionable that these civil servants were more deserving of the thousands spent on the Railway Conference; for it is a thousand times better that Egypt's junior civil servants should live at ease and apply themselves to their work with love and dedication than that the foreign delegates to this conference should enjoy our lavish hospitality and all the pleasure and comfort it entails across the length and breadth of Egypt and along the banks of the Nile.

Whatever the case may be, we wish to remind the government of the matter of these civil servants in case it has forgotten it, to urge it on if it still remembers, and to ask it not to adopt patience as its guiding principle the way the Prime Minister has adopted patience as his guiding principle in the matter of negotiations, concessions, the debt, and other general political questions. For it may be easy enough, as we said yesterday, for the sated to be patient with the hunger of the hungry, for the prosperous to be patient with the hardship of the destitute, and for the healthy to be patient with the illness of the sick — but the thing that is truly difficult and truly burdensome is for the hungry to be patient with hunger, for the destitute to be patient with hardship, for the sick to be patient with illness, and for the deprived to be patient with deprivation. These civil servants have been patient, and have been patient well; it is time for them to reap its fruit. Now that the government has moved away from withholding the increments and has promised promotion to these civil servants, it would be well to hasten to fulfil this obligation without delay or evasion — for people have long said that the best act of generosity is the prompt one.