

Confidence

Kawkab al-Sharq, 1 August 1933

Every phenomenon of social life has its well-known precedents, its inherited customs, and its rules that people observe and do not deviate from unless driven by compelling necessity. When the Union Party holds a farewell celebration for the Minister of Traditions, convention requires that the People's Party's pride be stirred and that it hold a farewell celebration for one of its own ministers — the Minister of Agriculture, for instance. And convention requires that the People's celebration be grander and more splendid than the Union's celebration. When a man of finance is on the verge of bankruptcy and all that bankruptcy entails, convention requires that he give people the impression that he has never in any of his days been as wealthy and prosperous and abundantly well-off as he is in these days. He loses no time in staging a celebration, inviting people to it, and lavishing on its decorations and embellishments, on generosity to his guests and their comfort and entertainment with every variety of life's pleasures — until the morning comes and in its light, as the common people say, the newspapers carry the news that the host has opened a path for himself down which people travel without return, or has been unable to open such a path for himself and so the government has opened another path leading to one of those houses that accommodate the insolvent. And when a government feels in itself weakness or listlessness, and senses that its seat is tottering and will not stay firm, that the ground beneath its feet is heaving as though it intends to give way, that hearts have turned from it and recoiled from it, and veered from one path to another, and that tongues have been unleashed against it with other than the praise and flattery and encouragement and enticement with which they had formerly honoured it —

when a government feels this, or anything resembling it from near or far, it displays force and might, proclaims vigour and ferocity, and speaks — speaking to excess — of how it has never in any of its days been stronger than it is in these days, when weakness besieges it from every side and listlessness advances upon it from every direction and bankruptcy takes it by every road — until the morning comes and in its light, as the common people say, people look and find either a resignation submitted or a dismissal decreed, and a ministry departing as another is summoned.

I am the most ardent believer in the strength of the present Ministry in Egypt, the most thoroughly assured of the power and resources it commands, and the force and coercion it deploys; fully informed that nothing in Egypt is beyond its capacity, and wholly confident that it has never in any of its days been stronger than it was yesterday, stronger than it is today, and stronger than it will be tomorrow!!

I need no proof of this for myself or for others. The ministers continue to go to their offices and return to their homes, some of them residing in Egypt and some travelling to Europe. The people continue to be kept away from the Wafd and the Wafd's leader by police force and military coercion. The Ministry still commands the means to deploy whenever it wishes in dispersing the people if they gather, and silencing the people if they speak, and turning back the Wafd's leader and his companions if it occurs to them to undertake a journey that the Ministry does not approve of or favour. The proof stands — praise be to God — of the Ministry's strength, and the evidence speaks — praise be to God — of the Ministry's might. We believe all of this with a faith unshadowed by doubt or suspicion! How I wish that all the people, or most of the people, or at least some of them, would believe in the Ministry's strength as I believe in it. People desire this and strive for it — but the Ministry has friends whose share of ignorance exceeds their share of forbearance, and whose portion of foolishness is greater than their portion of good judgment and good fortune. They wish to defend the Ministry — though the Ministry has no need of defence — yet defend it they do, doing it harm in the process, tempting people against it, and giving them the impression that it is in its final gasp. Among these people are the Ministry's writers who write for it in its own newspapers and in the newspapers that are loyal to it.

These people say things about the Ministry that it does not wish said of it. They say, for instance, that it is satisfied and at ease over the stability of public order and the regularity of security, because order is indeed stable and security is indeed regular, and because the incidents that occur cannot be prevented — let alone averted — for that is beyond the capacity of governments!!

They say this, knowing full well that the Ministry does not accept this and does not wish it said of it — for it is not at ease over the stability of public order, nor over the regularity of security. Had it been at ease it would not have cancelled the leave of district governors and police chiefs;

had it been at ease it would not have formed a committee to strengthen the police in the provinces and compare the ratio of police to population. And it knows full well that people are killing and wounding one another — individuals and groups — in broad daylight and in the darkness of night. And it knows full well that a strange phenomenon has appeared in Egypt in these days: the organisation of raids and preparations for assault between villages — nay, between clans within a single village. No sooner had people read news of the battle of al-Shubak than the newspapers appeared with news of a new battle in Sohag. The Ministry is too intelligent and too self-respecting to claim that security is stable when it is in turmoil, and that order is regular when it is rocking and lurching until people fall from it as corpses — some slain and some wounded. But the Ministry's newspapers, wishing to defend the Ministry, attack it instead — because people assume that these newspapers write from the Ministry's inspiration. And they permit themselves to describe the Ministry as weak and remiss when its inability to protect security and maintain order becomes apparent — but they do not love or accept describing the Ministry as lying and obdurate. The Ministry does not lie — it is its newspapers that are obdurate and contentious and extreme in their obstinacy and contentiousness, as though they hold the people's intelligence in contempt.

These newspapers, wishing to defend the Ministry, make themselves frivolous and say things about the Ministry that, if true, would make its resignation inevitable because its work would be done and its mission at an end. These newspapers claim that the Ministry does not fear the Wafd, does not dread it, and takes no account of it — because the Wafd is dead! Dead and thoroughly dead! Dead and become an inert corpse that feet tread upon and eyes do not stoop to regard!!

Such is what a Ministry newspaper says — doing harm to the Ministry from many directions. It does harm to it because it lies about it — for the Ministry still fears the Wafd and dreads it and takes a thousand and one accounts of it; for if it did not it would not have surrounded the leader's house with soldiers, and would not have mobilised and massed its forces every time the Wafd's leader contemplated a visit or the performance of a prayer.

These newspapers do harm to the Ministry because they render its present existence useless and unprofitable, and crush anarchy. And perhaps they wish the Wafd long life so as to ensure their own long

survival — for to speak of the Wafd as dead is to demand that the Ministry resign. And these newspapers do harm to the Ministry because they speak of the Ministry's adversaries in a style that can at best be described as extremely refined — like the refined style in which the Minister of Traditions and the Minister of Agriculture speak of the opposition.

It is in no way in the Ministry's interest for people to attribute to it this refined style. And these newspapers do harm to the Ministry because they attribute to it this kind of self-confidence that resembles the self-confidence of a bankrupt man in the last days of his wealth and the first days of his insolvency, and give people the impression that this confidence is nothing but affected and manufactured — intended for the bearing up and the endurance and the awaiting of events. And I do not know what use the Ministry of Education is if it does not teach the Ministry's writers how to defend the Ministry.

The Ministry's newspapers are a mirror of it. And we affirm to the Ministry that they present it in an image that does not indicate strength, nor security, nor stability — but rather indicates weakness and fear and turmoil. We know full well that our Ministry lacks neither courage nor manliness, and that the courageous man is one who does not deny the danger that is present but stands firm before it and charges at it. The corruption of security is a real thing that the Ministry does not deny but acknowledges, and strives to eliminate. And it is not the Ministry's fault if it cannot eliminate this evil and yet remains in office.

The same may be said of the defence by the Ministry's newspapers in every matter in which the Ministry needs defence. And it needs defence now in everything. Its writers claim that it has done in the matter of the debt the utmost it is capable of doing; its adversaries do not deny this, but say that what it has done amounts to nothing. And since it cannot do better, it is obliged to resign.

It is well and good for the Ministry to trust itself, and for the Ministry's supporters to trust in it — but better still would be for this trust to be sincere and for its representation to be accurate. Everything in the Ministry's actions and its supporters' words indicates neither sincere confidence nor the portrayal of peaceful souls. And among the gravest dangers is for people to see with their own eyes the Ministry's inability even to trust itself.