

Rivalry

Kawkab al-Sharq, 29 July 1933

They are two parties, brothers by both mother and father, between whom no disagreement has occurred and none will occur. There has been no breach between them and there will be none. The truest depiction of the affection and fondness between them, of the bond that will not snap and the love that will not rust, is the old poet's verse:

*Two who suckled together at a mother's breast,
swore by the dark night: we shall not part.*

And they shall not part, God willing — for they rose to power together, abided in power together, and will relinquish it together on the day the Daily Telegraph's prophecy is fulfilled, or a little before, or a little after. They will taste together the pleasure of distance from power, just as they tasted together the pleasure of nearness to it and tenure within it. But who could claim that rivalry does not occur among brothers? Rivalry is a phenomenon of life, evidence of strength, and one of the effects of vigour.

The Union Party is powerful beyond doubt, because among its members is the Minister of Traditions. The People's Party is very powerful indeed, because its leader is the Prime Minister. The Union Party is very powerful indeed, because its leader is the Senate President. Since both brotherly parties are powerful to this degree — which surpasses all bounds — rivalry between them is inevitable, so that people may see which of the two ministers serves his party better and is more useful to it: the Minister of Agriculture for the People's Party, or the Minister of Traditions for the Union Party? And so that people may see which of the two presidents is more blessed and more bountiful to his party: the Prime Minister for the People's Party, or the Senate President for the Union Party? This rivalry does good and no harm, improves and does not impair. For rivalry can be in good as in evil. Racing to be first can be toward benefit as toward harm.

The People's Party and the Union are brothers who have not differed and will not differ, friends who have not grown hostile and will not grow hostile. Both are earnest in serving Egypt and devoted to its benefit — and if they compete, their competition will be in nothing but good; and if they race to be first, their racing will be toward nothing but benefit and goodness and right conduct. There is therefore every reason for them to

compete — and they have competed, these past two days. The Minister of Traditions is travelling to Europe to take the cure and rest, and may incidentally look for foreign members for the Language Academy — so the Minister of Agriculture must travel to Europe to take the cure and rest, and may incidentally look for a variety of cotton, or a colour of linen, or an art of date-drying, or a method of honey-clarifying. The Minister of Traditions feeds minds and guards morals. The Minister of Agriculture feeds bodies and guards skin from cold and heat. Both are equally fit to think of people while taking the cure and resting. The Union Party sensed the significance of this journey contemplated by the Minister of Traditions, and mobilised to bid him farewell and organised a celebration to encourage him, with speeches and tea — whereupon the People's Party sensed the significance of the journey contemplated by the Minister of Agriculture, and mobilised to bid him farewell and organised a celebration to see him off, and words were said and words were heard — though the People's Party got a head start, having not served tea nor poured it for the guests but instead laid on dinner and dined the guests.

This is why the People's Party was more generous than the Union Party, or richer than the Union Party — for dinner is one thing and tea and sweets are another. Dinner stays in the stomach longer and is harder to digest. Tea stays briefly and digests easily. The People's Party is therefore materially superior to the Union Party. This is natural and beyond dispute. We said that the People's Party monopolises the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Agriculture controls what the earth produces in plants and what the earth rears in sheep and goats and poultry and what the earth yields in fruit and grapes.

But the Union Party surpassed the People's Party in another respect — the intellectual respect. The Union orators were more numerous than the People's orators. Only one minister spoke at the People's gathering — the leader of the People's Party himself, minister of what the earth produces and what the earth rears in plant, animal, and fruit.

The two parties are therefore evenly matched — one excelling in nourishing bodies, the other in nourishing minds. These two modes of nourishment then equalise one another, and the two parties remain as they always were and will always be: two racehorses, neither outpacing the other by more than the distance that its companion immediately covers.

The hidden subject for whose sake the two parties held their celebrations was that ill-omened letter, the Daily Telegraph letter. The two parties had no choice but to compete in rebutting this letter and adducing plain proofs and damning evidence that this letter is nonsense of the purest nonsense and delirium of the purest delirium, and changes nothing in the Ministry's position — because the Ministry's position is not held hostage to what the newspapers in Egypt or in England say, but is held hostage to something else that everyone knows, and that the Prime Minister has proclaimed a thousand and one times: the satisfaction of His Majesty the King and the confidence of Parliament. The two parties had no choice but to race to outdo one another in the elegance of rebutting this letter, and race they did — and curiously, they were evenly matched in this too. Neither surpassed the other by much or by little. Neither outpaced the other by a finger's breadth or a fly's wing, as they say. God did not vouchsafe either of the competing parties the grace of adding a single letter to what the Prime Minister had said a thousand and one times; rather, both competing parties wished to deploy arts of eloquence in expressing themselves on this subject. Curiously, they were evenly matched in these arts too. The Minister of Traditions wished to mock the English writers and the Egyptian opponents, and deployed a style of wit unlike any other and a manner of elegance unlike any other, rising from the language of the common people to the language of the elite, from the idiom of the masses to the idiom of ministers. He said that these English writers were laughing up their sleeves at the naive opponents. And the Minister of Agriculture wished to condemn these opponents with a political condemnation that was upright and clean and innocent and chaste, issued only by men of high culture and pure tongues and generous natures who rise above vulgarity — and he said that those who were neither People's men nor Unionists had their perceptions blinded by lusts and private interests, had lost their way, and were wandering in confusion. Both ministers, as you see, are racehorses in everything — neither of them reaches the finish line without the other having already reached it.

The two parties will apparently achieve no decisive result from this competition, and will go on racing forever without either outpacing the other. They will compete forever in good and right conduct without either surpassing the other in good and right conduct. Egypt will benefit from this unceasing competition and this race that never stops, and will no doubt reap from it sweet fruits in intelligence and skill, in brilliance and eloquence, in the refinement of speech and the purity of tongue. We will

learn how to mention laughing at beards, and how to describe political opponents as men whose perceptions have been blinded by lusts and interests so that they lost their way and wandered in confusion. If Egypt does not take its example from its ministers, from whom will it take example? If Egypt does not imitate the Minister of Traditions, whom will it imitate?

What is amusing about this competition is that it brought nothing new. People had learned the Ministry's view of the Daily Telegraph correspondent, believed it, and were persuaded that the Ministry was more firmly established than Al-Muqattam and more firmly rooted than Al-Ahram. People had learned the Ministry's view and believed it, and were persuaded that it had given Egypt what no other ministry had given it in blessings and bounties — rescuing it from hunger, healing it of disease, raising its head, preserving its dignity, repelling the aggression of foreigners, and stemming the tyranny of the English. People had learned the Ministry's view and believed it, and were persuaded that the nation had granted it confidence and permanence, singled it out with affection and love, and that Alexandria had been the foremost Egyptian city in its confidence in the Ministry and its belief in it and its readiness to sacrifice for it with lives and property. Alexandria remains the most devoted of Egyptian cities to love of the Ministry and support for it and sacrifice for it with lives and property. And every Egyptian city in which a minister speaks becomes the foremost Egyptian city in its love of the Ministry and the most devoted to sacrifice for it with lives and property.

And all of Egypt is the most devoted of all Egypt to love of the Ministry and the most eager of all Egypt to sacrifice for it with lives and property. Who knows? Perhaps the two brotherly parties who have not parted and will not part compete only in speech — and how effortless is competition in speech, and how profitable and rewarding, for it makes one laugh and soothes care and lightens the bearing of pain.