

A Session

Kawkab al-Sharq, 13 April 1933

Everything these days is rushed the moment it reaches Parliament! As though some violent hidden force were driving our ministers, deputies, and senators to press ahead in haste, pausing at nothing, lingering over nothing, giving thought to nothing... !!

Whoever among them loves to think, to deliberate, or to feign patience, is weary and worn out, having lost the means of staying ahead and proving incapable of finishing the course — he must inevitably fall behind, must inevitably be turned back from proceeding along the way. Perhaps this haste in action, this inclination to snatch up matters in a single grab, just as a thief snatches something from people, is one of the very purposes for which the Prime Minister contrived his grave constitutional upheaval more than two years ago... !

Patience has its benefits, and thought has its uses. But patience in public affairs most often exposes severe shortcomings and much harm; and thought on public affairs reveals things that must be concealed, and brings to light matters that ought to remain obscure.

Thought and patience most often lead to outcomes that win neither praise nor favour. For who knows what might have happened had the leader of the Wafd not been snatched away from Qena? And who knows what might have come to light had the Ministry of Public Works' budget not been snatched away from the Chamber of Deputies yesterday? Let us, then, feign patience and deliberation in our own private affairs, never undertaking anything until we have turned it over in inquiry, study, and reflection. But as for public affairs — let us touch them with a gentle touch, let us pass over them with a swift passing, let us snatch them up with an elegant and masterly snatch! And thus our affairs proceed along their course, with no flaw appearing in them, no corruption or disorder becoming apparent in them.

And thus we furnish proof that the nation loves the government, and embraces it with affection, counsel, and devotion — when we snatch the leader of the Wafd away from it in a single grab, or place between it and

the leader of the Wafd a dense screen of dense soldiery.

And thus we furnish clear proof and conclusive evidence that the Ministry of Public Works has attained perfection and realised every hope, when its budget is laid before the Chamber of Deputies, and this Chamber proceeds to examine it, discuss it, approve it, and dispose of it in a single sitting lasting no more than two hours, or a few hours at most.

And thus the civilised world bears witness that the constitutional upheaval Ṣidqī Pasha brought about has yielded sweet and delicious fruit! He has established in Egypt an organised, firm, swift, and elegant administration! He has established within it an accomplished, perceptive, discerning parliament, zealous for the nation's interests, scrupulous in its oversight of public expenditure, and swift in all of this with a swiftness unknown to the European parliaments, which are still new to parliamentary life and to the oversight of governmental affairs... !

Some while ago the government submitted the University statutes to the Chamber of Deputies and urged their swift consideration; the Chamber duly hastened to consider them and approved them in under an hour! Some while ago the government submitted to the Chamber the law on specialisation at al-Azhar and urged its swift consideration; the Chamber duly hastened and finished with the law in two sittings! And yesterday the government submitted to the Chamber the budget of the Ministry of Public Works and urged its swift consideration; the Chamber finished with it in a single sitting!!

In the University statutes lies the future of the whole of modern education — and it is considered in under an hour. In the specialisation law lies the future of the whole of religious education — and it is considered in two sittings. In the budget of the Ministry of Public Works lie more than six million pounds, the Jabal al-Awliyā' Dam, the future of irrigation, and facilities of which the very least that can be said is that they touch the nation's life in its most intimate particulars — and this budget is considered and approved by the Chamber in a single sitting! And after all this it is said that the constitutional upheaval brought about by the Prime Minister has not served Egypt's interest, has not safeguarded all of its interests from neglect, and has not protected its

benefits from being squandered. O God, spare us obstinacy in matters of truth and grant us success in believing in the good... !

What more could Egypt desire than what it has already attained? Here are its laws, legislated in minutes; here are its budgets, approved in hours; here are its cabinets, enjoying the confidence of Parliament; here is its administration, commanding the love of all the people. Everything proceeds along a straight course, with no crookedness in it and no disorder — so what do we want? What do we desire? And why should we not be content?

But what, then, is this crisis that was stirred up yesterday in the Chamber of Deputies? And what has come over a group of deputies, seized by this belated anger, that they should grow indignant after so long being content, rebel after so long having calmed down and settled, and walk out of the session after so long having clung to their seats as a creditor clings to his debtor?

It is claimed that these gentlemen had, in days long past and in an age now gone by, submitted to the Chamber of Deputies an interpellation concerning the Jabal al-Awliyā' Dam — which was neglected, then postponed so that the Prime Minister might respond to it once God had graciously restored him to health. Then, yesterday, when the Public Works budget came up, they wished to postpone it in whole or in part so that the interpellation might take place and its discussion might occur — but the Minister of Public Works grew impatient with them, the Speaker of the Chamber grew impatient with them, and the very majority of the Chamber grew impatient with them. And it appeared to these gentlemen that they were lagging behind while the world around them rushed ahead, that they were falling short while the world around them bustled with productive energy, and that they wanted seriousness while the world around them preferred levity. But what is this seriousness that arrives after its proper season has passed and lags behind its appointed time?

These gentlemen supposed that the cabinet had been serious when it requested the postponement of the interpellation; yet it had already been said to them that the cabinet was postponing it only to extract this postponement from interpretation and pretext, and to defer this

interpellation to the season — as the ancient poet says — in which the figs and grapes ripen. And when these gentlemen sensed the impatience of the minister, the Speaker, and the majority, they grew angry, protested, and walked out! And then what happened? The heavens turned as they turn, the Chamber proceeded as it was wont to proceed, reaching its conclusion in the shortest possible course, and the budget was approved — the Jabal al-Awliyā' Dam included. And the honourable deputies will return this evening to the Chamber as though nothing had happened yesterday, their consciences clear and their souls content. And why not? They grew angry and protested; they walked out and abstained from approving what they did not wish to approve. How easy this clear conscience is to obtain, how readily this contentment comes, and how easily the causes of comedy and play are found in Egypt!

Then the Minister of Public Works rises and declares that he had once held one view of the dam, and then it occurred to him to hold another view of it. He used to denounce it, and now he extols it — and what scruple is there in that? What harm? Everything turns in circles — even truth and falsehood, even error and correctness, even rejection and acceptance. And whether the Minister of Public Works is pleased with the dam or displeased with it, the dam will be built regardless! The Chamber of Deputies accepted it a year ago and approved the funds for it yesterday. Let the Minister of Public Works be displeased or pleased, just as the deputies grew angry and then were content — none of it will change anything.

And God wills nothing less than that yesterday's session should furnish its own comedy: for the Minister of Public Works admitted, with charming candour, that his ministry had not yet charted a policy for itself! And so it cannot present this policy to the Chamber, since it dislikes presenting anything to it but the complete and comprehensive — which may be completed tomorrow, or the day after. But it will be completed, in any case, once the budget has been approved.

And the vote on the budget is taken as a whole, its details never discussed: if the deputies object, the Speaker grows angry; and if the Speaker grows angry, the deputies must duly become content; and once

they are content, the budget passes as swiftly as lightning. Al-Ahrām reported: 'The remaining members numbered thirty-five' — a number sufficient to approve more than six million pounds. And then the Egyptians claim that their affairs do not proceed as they would wish. Is there, then, any way at all for them to have what they wish?