

Impotence

Kawkab al-Sharq, 8 July 1933

Had this appeared in any cabinet, in any free country, that cabinet could never have remained in power, nor kept its grip upon the conduct of affairs; but in Egypt it is one of the very causes that prolong the life of the present Cabinet, and lengthen its survival. It may well be the foremost cause of the unbroken life, the long endurance, this Cabinet enjoys. For had this Cabinet possessed any measure of strength, any share of capacity, any readiness for resolve, firmness of purpose, resistance to the foreigner, and a genuine defense of Egyptian interests, its English supporters and its foreign friends would have grown uneasy with it, these and those would have banded together against it, would have contrived difficulties for it and scattered obstacles before it, and driven it to resign. But they — thank God for good and ill alike — are entirely content with it, entirely delighted with it. It is only natural, then, that they should guard it most jealously, surround it with care and solicitude, recite incantations over it and prepare amulets for it, whenever its weakness grows severe or it is threatened with the danger of collapse. And why should they dislike a Cabinet that arose, so it is said, to protect Egypt and secure her interests, to defend her resources against foreigners before anyone else — and yet could not preserve for her, against the foreigners, a single thing, could not ward off a single act of aggression from her, nor turn aside a single covetous design upon her? It has secured for the foreigners, and continues to secure for them, everything they wanted, while proving utterly, completely incapable of securing for Egypt any benefit at all from these very foreigners.

It circled, and prolonged its circling, around the British Foreign Office, hoping to win negotiation, and found nothing but a reply that was courteous at first, but grew harsher by degrees, until it ended in outright severity, and became something very like doors slammed shut in its face. Certain questions arose between it and the English, and it could manage nothing but absolute submission, a compliance with no trace of resistance or steadfastness in it. Certain questions arose between it and foreigners other than the English, and its position toward them was no better than its position toward the English — and this, notwithstanding that it claims to be a Cabinet of honor and dignity, a Cabinet of pride and independence. Egyptians have witnessed its stance on the debt question ever since it arose, and are ashamed for it, and ashamed for themselves,

at this weakness so unbecoming of a Cabinet that feels itself possessed of any dignity in this modern age.

It declared, from the moment the debt question arose, that it would pay only in paper currency, and it was incumbent upon it, for its own sake and for the benefit of the country whose affairs circumstance had entrusted to it, to follow this declaration with action, and to make payment in paper an accomplished fact admitting neither argument nor dispute. But it did nothing, and could do nothing, possessing neither strength nor capacity to resist and stand firm before the foreigner.

It did nothing — God forgive the expression — rather, it did worse: it made its own declaration an utter absurdity, its own words idle noise, neither frightening nor useful. It accepted litigation before the Mixed Courts while knowing full well, and crying out as loudly as it could, that this question was unfit to be a matter for litigation before the courts at all — and yet it accepted this litigation regardless, and proceeded with it. And the strange thing is that it proceeded with this litigation while, at the very same time, proceeding with political negotiations, thereby giving the Powers occasion to say to it: why do you not wait for the court's ruling? Then the courts ruled against it, and it proceeded with the litigation and appealed, all the while continuing the negotiations, giving the Powers occasion to say to it once again: why do you not wait for the court's ruling? — especially once the first-instance ruling had appeared in our favor, sparing us the trouble of pressing for what we want.

So too did its extraordinary competence, its consummate skill, its unrivaled mastery in the conduct of both political and financial affairs alike inspire it to speak without acting, to promise without keeping faith, to litigate before the courts while claiming it would never carry out the courts' judgments, and to go to the courthouse while going, at the very same time, to the foreign ministries. Positions the very least that can be said of which is that they are contradictory and confused, issuing from no straight or clear policy, but rather from confusion, hesitation, and incapacity.

And these negotiations have already dragged on, and appear set to drag on further, to excess. They began in Egypt, and continued in Europe when the Prime Minister traveled last year for sport and rest; then they resumed in Egypt; then they continued in Europe when the chief of the Royal Advisers journeyed to Italy, France, and England; then they resumed in Egypt and continued in Paris when the director of the

Mortgage Bank traveled there; then they resumed in Paris when our own Prime Minister went there for treatment and rest; then they resumed once more in London — and God alone knows when they will end, and to what result they will come. But the one thing that admits of neither doubt nor dispute is that they will never end in anything that secures Egyptian benefit, or preserves Egyptian dignity. For negotiation, in this matter, means nothing but bargaining; it means give and take; it means that Egypt cedes some part of her right, and the foreigners cede some part of what they claim as their own right, so that the disputants meet halfway — when in truth she ought never to have ceded them anything at all.

This would have been necessary, had Egypt possessed a strong Cabinet, capable of saying and doing, of promising and keeping faith, of willing and carrying out what it wills. But Egypt possesses — thank God for good and ill alike — a Cabinet strong to excess when measured against Egyptians, weak to excess before foreigners. And so this Cabinet asks nothing of Egyptians without striving relentlessly to enforce it, spending upon it every effort bearable and unbearable, at times to the point of provoking laughter and smiles. But should it want something of foreigners, then ask about gentleness and tact, ask about charm and courtesy, ask about lightness and accommodation — and then ask, beyond that, about submission and surrender.

Had our Cabinet shown toward Egyptians even a fraction of the charm and courtesy it shows toward foreigners, it would have been somewhat easier to bear — but how could it ever do so, when doing so would expose it to failure and the danger of resignation? Had it been patient and forbearing over the Jebel Aulia affair, had it taken its time and shown restraint over the Lake Tana affair, had it thought and deliberated over other company matters besides these two, had it taken things slowly over the education question, it might have been somewhat easier to bear — but it is hasty, excessively hasty, whenever it demands something of the Egyptians. And this is understandable enough: for the Egyptians possess neither the power nor the might that foreigners possess, nor are Egyptians capable, as foreigners are capable, of embarrassing the Cabinet and forcing it to relinquish power. It is thus only natural for the Cabinet to be gracious toward foreigners and harsh toward Egyptians. And fairness demands that we record that it has, in this, achieved the very utmost it could wish: it has won everything for the foreigners at the Egyptians' expense, and has won nothing for the Egyptians from the foreigners. This debt question will end, should the

Cabinet's lease on life be extended long enough, in a manner Egyptians will not welcome. Egypt will pay in gold, or will pay in paper on condition that interest rates be raised, compensating foreigners for some part of what they lose by the abandonment of gold in payment.

Egyptians have no business saying anything, or objecting to anything, for God — glorious and exalted — has graced them with the most capable and competent of cabinets, the most generous in gentleness toward them, in affection for them, in solicitude for their interests. Whoever says otherwise has abandoned his reason, and clings only to wishful dreams and vain hopes.

And what strangeness is there in this? Is it not incumbent upon Egyptians to believe that they possess a Cabinet that manages their affairs and watches over their interests, even though its head has been incapable of conducting and managing affairs for long months now, and will remain incapable of conducting affairs for months more, while he seeks treatment in Cairo, seeks treatment in France, seeks treatment in Switzerland, without anyone finding any harm in it, since affairs proceed calmly and securely, with no crookedness in them, no disturbance? And if absolute political incapacity has not compelled our Prime Minister to resign, why should mere physical incapacity compel him to resign? And who knows? Perhaps some hold it a good thing that Egypt should have nothing but a nominal cabinet, whose ministers pass through the ministries and sit at their desks and do nothing at all. Who knows? Perhaps some see good in this, since it serves their purposes and secures their interests, and spares them the burden of responsibility — but these responsibilities may one day prove heavy and grave indeed, on the day when everything goes to ruin, as everything inevitably must go to ruin, if Egypt continues to be governed in this manner in which she is governed now, her resources continue to be neglected in this manner in which they are neglected now, and political and physical incapacity continue to be the very foundation of her ministers' survival, as they are now.

On that day, those who are content with our present condition will think, and find no benefit in thinking. On that day they will make their calculations, and find no use in calculation. On that day they will seek reform, and find no way to it. God alone is capable of preserving Egypt from ever sinking to such a depth of misfortune — by inspiring the Prime Minister, or inspiring whoever advises the Prime Minister, to resign before a day comes when neither resignation nor dismissal will be of any avail.