

Toil

Kawkab al-Sharq, 5 July 1933

Heavy, exhausting is this toil which the present Cabinet has taken upon itself, in its attempt to extinguish the national spirit and smother this ember which every cabinet ought rather to have tended and nurtured, taking every care within its power to ensure that the passing days would only strengthen it, never disturb it.

Heavy, exhausting is this toil which the present Cabinet has taken upon itself in extinguishing this spirit and smothering this ember; and its weight, perhaps, grows heavier from time to time, and mounts from day to day, and may well reach such increase and such severity that it bears down upon this Cabinet as it has borne down upon other cabinets before it, and forces it, as it has forced other cabinets before it, to submission and surrender. For this spirit has been warred upon, this ember has been warred upon; the English have taken, and the cabinets allied with the English have taken, every path in their war against it. The English have employed, and the cabinets allied with them have employed, every means to extinguish it — yet neither the English nor the cabinets that supported them have succeeded, and this spirit has remained standing, strong, its might growing firmer, its power growing greater, its dominion spreading wider, taking ever greater possession of hearts and souls the longer the scheming against it continues, the fiercer the war waged upon it grows. And this ember has remained ablaze, sending its undying flame into sick hearts to purify them, into weak souls to strengthen them, into doubting consciences to wipe away every doubt, to remove every suspicion. Had the present Cabinet taken heed of past events, learned from what befell the cabinets before it, it would never have come to power at all; and had it, having neglected these events and failed to profit from the calamities of its predecessors, nonetheless taken up the burdens of governing, and thereby discovered some novel method of waging war upon this national spirit, some novel means of smothering this national ember, never before attempted, it might then have spared itself this heavy, prolonged toil it now undergoes, suffering through it without deriving from it any benefit, whether small or great. But man is weak, and the dominion of vanity over the soul is vast, and the mischief that false hopes work upon hearts and minds knows no bound, and the love of power and dominion beguiles, and makes one forget, and turns one away from every lesson and every warning.

This Cabinet arose three years ago, strong, exceedingly strong, vigorous, abounding in vigor. It was granted such might and dominion as had never been granted to any before it; such hope and such length of survival were held out to it as had never been held out to any before it; and its hand was given free rein over the affairs of this country as no hand had ever been given free rein before it. And so a parliament is dismissed, a constitution is altered, a new order is established, and vast might is spent to uphold this order, and tyranny is practiced without the least scruple or restraint, to compel the people into submission and belief in the present Cabinet. And boundless enticement is brought to bear upon souls, seizing every opportunity, probing where people's needs lie, discovering where the desperate stand in want. And there arises, too, a departure from this very new order itself, an overstepping of its own rules and principles, a narrowing of what latitude had been granted to the people within it. They wish to move, and find themselves compelled to stay; they wish to speak, and find themselves compelled to silence; they wish to write, and find their pens bound and their papers suspended. And they wish simply to live, and find the very paths of their living blocked before them, and punishments set up to bar their way.

All this had but a single aim: to turn the people away from this national spirit that had given life to their souls and their hearts, that ran with their very blood, and had become the very substance of their existence. Yet the Cabinet succeeded in none of what it wanted, won none of what it desired, and could not even convince its English friends that the matter was settled, for it and for them, that the wind had turned fair for it and for them, that its ship and their ship could now sail together upon a calm and tranquil sea, carrying it and them, one day, toward the negotiations it and they both seek, and the signing of the treaty they wish to impose upon Egypt by main force, to fasten upon Egypt as a fait accompli.

Indeed, the national spirit stands today just as it stood on the day this Cabinet took up the burdens of power. No weakness has touched it, no frailty has afflicted it, its dominion has not contracted — God forbid — rather, its strength has grown firmer, its dominion has spread wider still, and its shadow has lengthened. And the proof of this is that the Cabinet has been unable, and will remain unable, to change its methods of governance, to treat the people by anything other than the violence it has grown accustomed to treating them with, to enforce the Constitution as it stands and apply its provisions without violation or transgression. Its

political adversaries continue to be treated with abnormal measures, unsuited to peaceful life in a peaceful country: soldiers patrol around their houses, watchers and spies are posted around their persons, their every movement sets the Cabinet's heart racing, disturbs its composure, throws its calculations into disorder. Their speech is forbidden, and their contact with the people is something the Cabinet feels bound to block by every possible means.

What? Indeed, the Cabinet does not scruple — I will not say to break the law and violate order, but to depart from ordinary custom, and to fall into conduct that provokes laughter, that invites the shaking of heads and the shrugging of shoulders. From snatching a man off the express train, to arming the countryside, mobilizing the army, walling in the cities, digging trenches, erecting barricades — to whatever else you please of the measures serious countries adopt when nations face some looming external peril, or are struck by some ruinous internal upheaval.

And Egypt — thank God — is safe: no foreign enemy raids her, no civil war blazes within her. But her Cabinet has taken it upon itself to extinguish this national spirit, treating this spirit as an enemy against which it wages war, mobilizing soldiers against it, contriving every kind of scheme against it, and succeeding in none of what it wants — for the national spirit is not fought with numbers and equipment, is not resisted with force and weapons, is not won over by seduction and enticement. Rather, it is the resolute, successful Cabinet that keeps pace with it rather than opposing it, that supports it rather than warring upon it, that strengthens it rather than attempting to weaken or smother it.

The Prime Minister himself, when he was Minister of the Interior, once attempted to wage this very war against the national spirit, and his competence, his skill, his force availed him nothing at all; rather, this national spirit grew stronger, and the Prime Minister grew weaker, and the national spirit went on growing stronger, and the Prime Minister went on growing weaker, until the Prime Minister's own condition ended in illness, confining him to his bed, whereupon he set another minister over this war; and news of the struggle between this new minister and the national spirit reached the Prime Minister on his sickbed, restoring to him neither strength nor any nearness to recovery. And the national spirit went on growing stronger, and the Cabinet's resistance to it went on growing weaker, until the Prime Minister at last departed for Europe to rest and seek treatment, while the new Minister of the Interior remained in Egypt, waging this same war against this same spirit, expending the

very effort his predecessor had expended, spending the very cunning his predecessor had spent, bearing the very toil his predecessor had borne. God alone is capable of sparing this Minister of the Interior, in this war, the burdens his predecessor met with. God alone is capable of inspiring the Cabinet to submit to the national spirit, and to turn away from warring upon it and scheming against it, before this new Minister of the Interior's efforts come to the same end as those of the old Minister of the Interior before him. For the strength of nations is never overcome, and there is no path to subduing it. The national spirit destroys men, while men are powerless to destroy it — for it rests upon no immediate advantage, no false hope, no love of position, no craving for power; indeed, it rests upon no love of life itself, but rests instead upon a pure faith whose very substance is patience, endurance, and sacrifice.

The Minister of the Interior spent tremendous effort on Saturday and on Sunday, casting the people of Alexandria into prison, for no reason but his anxious fear that these people might chance to meet the leader of the Wafd and his companion upon their arrival in Alexandria; and he mustered whatever forces of the State and its soldiers he could muster in that port city, once a place of peace and safety, now made fearful as though for war. But the Minister of the Interior gained nothing by it, achieved nothing by it: the leader of the Wafd and his companion arrived in Alexandria, and the people received them — and what a people! And since when have ministers ever managed to imprison an entire people? There the soldiers stood watching, there the soldiers went in pursuit, there the soldiers' staves and whips fell upon bodies — but the Minister of the Interior, for all this, accomplished nothing, prevented nothing. The leader of the Wafd entered Alexandria, the leader of the Wafd met the people of Alexandria, the leader of the Wafd afterward addressed the people altogether; and it seemed, afterward, to the Minister of the Interior and his colleagues, that the struggle had ended, that the war had laid down its arms, that God had written victory for them and guaranteed them triumph — since no outrage had occurred, since security and order had faced no danger and suffered no harm.

And who, indeed, wanted any outrage to occur, or security and order to be disturbed? These are nothing but phantoms and dreams, frightening to men who are afraid of everything, alarming to men who are alarmed by everything.

All the ministers left the city of Alexandria save the Minister of Traditions. They came to Cairo to celebrate there the Prophet's Birthday,

as though they had left the Minister of Traditions behind in Alexandria to bring them word of what would happen. And the Minister of Traditions has, indeed, news to tell his fellow ministers — news of that meeting which took place, yesterday, between the people and their leader, during the celebration of the Prophet's Birthday in the port of Alexandria. The police had meant to prevent this meeting, and strove hard to do so, and massed their forces for it — but they prevented nothing, achieved nothing. You may read the news of this meeting elsewhere, and you will find it was more magnificent, more wondrous, than the Cabinet had ever imagined, than the police had ever imagined. And you will find, too, that security was never disturbed, that order was never endangered, and that the Cabinet is truly answerable for these efforts it spends without any need to spend them, and for these soldiers it musters without any need to muster them. It is toil wasted, weariness with no good in it, costing money, imposing hardship, and giving foreigners cause for laughter and amusement. It wards off no evil, for there is no evil in the matter; it repels no danger, for there is no danger in the matter; and it points to but one single thing: that all these efforts expended these several years past have gone entirely to waste, just as the efforts expended before them went to waste — and that this national spirit which they seek to extinguish or to weaken has neither been extinguished nor weakened, but has instead grown stronger, firmer, more formidable, until it has come to meet whatever war is waged against it with nothing but laughter and a smile.

How fitting it would be for the Cabinet to give itself rest, and give the people rest, to submit to God's decree concerning it, to cease this wasted effort, to lay down this long and heavy toil, and to content itself with the mere conduct of affairs, until God grants it leave to resign.