

Sieves

Kawkab al-Sharq, 1 May 1933

Such, it seems, are our ministers — if Al-Ahram's report proves true, and it does appear true, since Al-Ahram has today returned once more to affirming it, challenging the Prime Minister a second time, declaring to him in blunt candor and categorical certainty that it received this news from more than one minister. If so, then the Prime Minister confides to his colleagues a whole range of matters that ought to remain sealed secrets, being among those questions that must never be broadcast, those fine points that must never be spread abroad — and yet the ministers can scarcely part ways with their chief before they fill the earth with whatever secret he confided to them, whatever matter he entrusted to their discretion.

They are sieves, then — men to whom no secret ought ever to be confided, no confidential matter ever entrusted; rather, the Prime Minister alone, apart from them, ought to keep sole possession of the State's secrets and its graver affairs. For they have broadcast — if Al-Ahram's report is true — secrets the very least that can be said of which is that they disgrace the dignity of the State, diminish its standing, showing it agitated and alarmed at the mere rumor of the High Commissioner's transfer from Egypt, or his return and continued residence there; showing it terrified and panic-stricken at whatever is said of the Anglo-Egyptian Committee's satisfaction with, or displeasure at, the present order, its support for the Cabinet or its repudiation of it.

It befits the Cabinet's dignity, in the minds of Egyptians, in no way whatsoever — be they its friends or its adversaries — that it should display symptoms of this shameful weakness, it that speaks so much of independence, that claims such devoted attachment to its foundations, such zealous concern for its outward signs and forms — indeed, for its very substance, which ought to admit no doubt and tolerate no dispute.

No Egyptian ever believed the Cabinet to be independent to the degree it claimed for itself; no Egyptian ever believed the Cabinet had truly compelled the English — as it used publicly to say — to acknowledge the reality of this independence, to respect its sanctity, and to stand toward the Cabinet and the nation in a posture of neutrality. No one believed any of this — yet it was talk that circulated, and accounts the Cabinet's own papers found within themselves the courage to repeat,

whenever the need arose to repeat them.

But now — now that the ministers have divulged the secrets of the Council of Ministers, now that the ministers have broadcast the Prime Minister's private conversations, now that everyone knows, from the ministers themselves — if Al-Ahram's report is true — that the Cabinet was thrown into alarm over that telegram sent to Al-Balagh and published in Al-Ahram; now that everyone knows that the Prime Minister spoke by telephone to our Minister Plenipotentiary in London; now that everyone knows, from the ministers themselves, the very details of this conversation — we suspect that the Cabinet's papers will cease speaking of this independence, if they retain any shred of shame.

Is it not fitting to the Cabinet's dignity, in the minds of Egyptians, friends and adversaries alike, that they should come to know this weakness in it, sense this timidity in it, every time news arrives from London; that the ministers should inquire and investigate, then meet after their inquiry and investigation to calm one another, to congratulate one another, because the High Commissioner remains in place, not transferred, and because the Anglo-Egyptian Committee has failed and been denied success!!

It does not befit the Cabinet's dignity, in the minds of Egyptians, that its own head should announce in the papers that the survival or fall of cabinets rests entirely upon the King's favor and Parliament's confidence, only for a day, or less than a day, to pass before he tells his colleagues — if Al-Ahram's report is true — that the Cabinet has nothing to fear, since the High Commissioner remains in place, and since the Anglo-Egyptian Committee has failed to achieve the change of order it sought!!

None of this befits the Cabinet's dignity in the minds of Egyptians, and none of it befits the dignity of the Cabinet, nor Egypt's dignity in the minds of foreigners; for every Egyptian is ashamed that foreigners, who cannot see into the depths of these matters, should learn that this very Cabinet, which makes Egyptians taste every manner of torment, fears the English to this degree, dreads the transfer of the High Commissioner to this degree, quails before the maneuverings of the Anglo-Egyptian Committee to this degree — meeting Egyptians with harshness and violence, while meeting the English with supplication and fear; calling to mind the ancient poet's words to al-Hajjaj:

*A lion toward me, yet in war a broad-winged ostrich, fleeing at the
whistler's mere call.*

*Why did you not charge into battle like a gazelle? No — your heart was
but a bird's, caged within its wings.*

Indeed, these ministers, who betrayed the secrecy of their own Council and broadcast their chief's private conversations, showed no regard for the dignity of the Cabinet and the dignity of the State together — and there can be no source for all this but that these men have been charged with a task beyond their capacity, burdened with offices of State for which they were never prepared, and which they ought never to have been entrusted with. For the minister who, made privy to some political matter he dislikes, cannot restrain himself from broadcasting it and discussing it with others, and who, made privy to some political matter he likes, cannot restrain himself from discussing it and broadcasting it among the people — such a minister deserves not to remain in his post a single day, or even part of a day, for he has furnished proof that he is unfit for office, and ought never to bear the burdens of public life.

These ministers, who broadcast the secrets of their Council and their chief's private conversations — if Al-Ahram speaks truly — in a matter that disgraces the dignity of the State, are quite capable, tomorrow, of broadcasting the secrets of their Council and their chief's conversations in some matter touching the very security and safety of the State. And if Al-Ahram's correspondent could toy with those ministers who spoke to him, and draw out of them these secrets, then he, or some other skilled journalist, may well be able to toy with them again, and draw out of them secrets and confidences graver in danger than this secret, further-reaching in consequence than this conversation.

The Government scarcely learns of a single one of its own officials divulging administrative secrets, or broadcasting some private matter of its affairs, without punishing him with the severest punishment, without dealing with him in the harshest manner. What, then, has the Prime Minister prepared for these colleagues of his, if what Al-Ahram has published of them is true? And the paper affirms its truth, and challenges the Cabinet directly, and its own correspondent appears in person, and this challenge proceeds under his own name, thereby declaring that he stands ready to bear the responsibility for whatever conversations were relayed to his paper.

What, then, has the Prime Minister prepared for these colleagues? Will he refer them to the disciplinary board, or dismiss them from office? Or will he content himself with reproach and rebuke? Whatever the Prime Minister does, one thing is certain: these colleagues, on whom he relies and in whom he places his trust, are unworthy of his reliance and undeserving of his trust — for they have become sieves, and the secrets of the State ought never to be entrusted to sieves!

Al-Ahram challenges the Cabinet, and goes to excess in its challenge; we do not challenge, and go to excess in challenging no one — but we do want the Prime Minister to put an end to this danger to which the Government's dignity is exposed, and to show the people, by some decisive means admitting no doubt, that the ministers were never entangled in this offense. If so, then Al-Ahram must bear the responsibility for this audacity against the truth, and against the standing of the Cabinet; or else the ministers were indeed entangled in this offense, in which case they must be dismissed and removed from a government for which they have proven themselves unfit and incapable.

And after all this, what did the Prime Minister intend by this statement he issued yesterday, meant to give the lie to Al-Ahram — a statement Al-Ahram treated with respect, yet categorically denied?!

What did the Prime Minister intend by this statement? Did he fear the Egyptians, and wish to assure them that his Cabinet guards its dignity, and trusts in its own strength, too much ever to indulge in such excessive fear of the English, such abject submission to them? Or did he fear the English might take offense, and wish to swear to them that these conversations never took place, that the Council of Ministers never discussed the matter of the High Commissioner, and never spoke, whether little or much, of the matter of the Anglo-Egyptian Committee? Let the Prime Minister believe us when we say that the political predicament into which his Cabinet has been forced these days is, for the Egyptians, a far lighter matter than something else, far graver in danger: namely, that they should learn which of the two speaks the truth! Is it the Government, in its statement — or Al-Ahram, in its unbroken defiance?

The Cabinet's silence before this bold challenge is likely to erase whatever awe still remains for it in the hearts of its own supporters, after events have already erased that awe from the hearts of its adversaries. Let the Prime Minister, then, consider how he might find his way out of this predicament — a predicament from which there is no avoiding an

exit — and we see no way out of it but resignation, or a reshuffling of the Cabinet...