

Rumor . . .

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Certain newspapers have been circulating it for some days now, concerning the national congress the Wafd intends to convene in the coming weeks — a congress the Egyptian people welcome with delight, hastening toward it, most anxious that participation in it be general and comprehensive, a true reflection of the Egyptian people's faith in their own rights, their attachment to their dignity, their earnestness in pursuing their hopes, and their determination that these hopes be realized in no spirit of play or idle amusement, and with no slackness or negligence whatsoever.

The Wafd has not yet issued its formal call to the congress; the head of the Wafd has not yet set the day on which its sessions will begin, nor the place where its meetings will be held; the head of the Wafd has not yet published a program of the congress's business, nor the names of those who will speak at it, nor the subjects the speakers will address. The head of the Wafd and its members have gone no further than to inform Egyptians that the Wafd intends to call a congress to study the general affairs of Egypt, and have asked Wafdists on the various Wafd committees to send their addresses to the Wafd's secretariat within a period that ended only the day before yesterday. And yet, for all that, the government's supporters and those who resemble them were struck with gloom at news of this congress, and found it most distressing indeed; the government's newspapers wrote more than once denouncing any thought of it, any call to it, regarding it as a form of unrest, a species of demonstration to be feared for the sake of security and dreaded for the sake of public order. But neither the Wafd nor the Wafdists paid the least heed to this nonsense the government papers were babbling. The Wafd went on with its preparations for the congress, and Egyptians went on sending in their addresses and requesting to take part in it, until the requests reaching the eminent Mr. Makram Ebeid exceeded ten thousand.

It was there that this amusing rumor was born, the one we wish to discuss here: certain newspapers put it about that the government's position had settled on preventing the congress from meeting, and on refusing permission for it, should such permission ever be requested of it.

This rumor was first put about in one of the morning papers, and no one paid it any attention; then it was put about in one of the evening papers, and no one took any notice of it either. Then the government's propagandists and rumor-mongers spread out to repeat it in gatherings, passing it around the various clubs — and still no one paid it any heed. It seems most likely that the papers which spread it will go on spreading it, and that the rumor-mongers who repeated it will go on repeating it in their talk, and there can be no doubt that the Egyptians who dismissed it will go on dismissing it just the same — for this rumor, however insistently its peddlers press it, truly deserves nothing but dismissal, indeed nothing but contempt. The government may resolve upon whatever it wishes to resolve upon; the government may decide whatever it wishes to decide; the government may swear its most solemn oaths that it will prevent this congress from ever meeting, standing between its members and their gathering — none of it will change the Wafd's position in the slightest, will erase a single letter of the Wafd's resolution, or turn a single Egyptian away from taking part in the congress. For Wafdists have never grown accustomed to fear of this kind, nor familiar with this sort of alarm at whatever the government's supporters claim the government wishes to do, or at whatever the government announces it will do. Wafdists, rather, are people who form a judgment and then act upon it, who reach a decision and then see it through to execution — undeterred by warning, unfrightened by threat, undissuaded from their purpose by the alarmism of alarmists.

And the government knows this about them full well, from long experience. Time and again the government's supporters have broadcast and spread their rumors, and the Wafdists paid no heed to any broadcast or any rumor. Time and again the government has warned and threatened, and the Wafdists listened to neither warning nor threat. We do not imagine the government has yet forgotten that it once forbade the lawyers certain things, and they did not desist; that it commanded the lawyers certain things, and they did not comply; that it issued the lawyers a law, and they did not submit to it, because they did not believe that law to be constitutional.

And so Wafdists do not believe the government has any right to prevent them from assembling, so long as they wish to assemble within the bounds of the constitution and the law. And so this rumor spread by the government's supporters, that the government will prevent this gathering, is mere idle talk that Wafdists have never grown accustomed

to heeding, or paying attention to, or fearing in the least. And so, even should the government itself issue such a warning that it will prevent the gathering, this will not turn Wafdists away from pursuing it in earnest, for they do not recognize the government's right to prevent a gathering that Egyptians desire within the bounds of the constitution and the law. The government has not yet issued any such warning, and we think it too shrewd to issue one, for it knows nothing so far of this gathering except that Wafdists intend to hold it — and the government is too skilled to court incidents, or to entangle itself in what it ought never to entangle itself in. No one knows what the political circumstances will be next month, when the Wafd sets about convening its congress. No one knows whether the government will still hold power by that time, or will have been removed from it. No one knows whether the government, should it remain in power, will still command the conduct of political affairs as fully as it does now, or whether the circumstances around it will have shifted — whether it will come to accept some of what it now refuses, and refuse some of what it now accepts, and whether the general course of political affairs will be left to follow paths other than those it has followed until now.

The government itself, moreover, wishes to hold gatherings of its own in Alexandria, at which ministers and the government's partisans will deliver speeches, and the government's supporters speak of committees the government's parties wish to form, and of opinions they wish to voice to the public in speeches delivered in defense of the government's policy and in reply to the opposition's criticism — speeches in which whatever tradition inspires will be left to the Minister of Traditions, whatever tact inspires to the Minister of Agriculture, and whatever propriety and grandeur inspire to the other ministers besides. Yet the new circumstances may not permit the government to allow itself what it forbids to others. The days ahead may not permit assembly, speech-making, and the organizing of committees to be granted to the feeble few among Egyptians while assembly, speech-making, and the organizing of committees are forbidden to the vast majority of Egyptians. And the government is too shrewd to deceive itself into believing that a government's days are always untroubled, that the ship of state always sails upon a calm and settled sea, before a fair and favorable wind — forgetting that the sea may grow rough, that the wind may turn to storm, and that the vessel may need a very great deal of skill indeed to come safely through the sea's turbulence and the wind's fury.

And so those who spread the rumor that the government will prevent the congress from meeting have offered the government neither good counsel nor any true service — they have sought only to entangle it in what it would do well never to become entangled in. And for all that, they have failed even in what they attempted: to frighten the Wafdists or turn them away from the congress. For Wafdists know no fear, and Wafdists are not so easily, so readily turned away from what they intend.

Let the government be reassured, then, and let its supporters be reassured: the congress will meet, even if its meeting proves a source of distress in certain quarters, a lump caught in certain throats, and a danger to certain men who busy themselves with politics while having nothing whatsoever to do with politics itself.