

Orator ...

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Kawkab al-Sharq, 21 February 1934

1 Which of the two is more skilled at persuasion and more capable of it, more adept at bewitching souls, at carrying off minds, at charming hearts, at captivating understanding, and at picturing things in those forceful, splendid, masterly images which a man cannot feel without surrendering to them, believing in them, resting content in them, and laying down every weapon before them: is it our prime minister, the good man, who bewitched the Chamber of Deputies yesterday and overawed it, until it came to believe that the Foreign Ministry's budget was a truth that must be ratified, submitted to, and approved; or is it the writer of al-Sha'b, who this morning bewitched his many or few readers, overawed them, and compelled all of them — ourselves among them, gladly — to believe that the prime minister is an orator none can outrun, whose fire none can extinguish, and before whom no day can dawn? For in truth we stand bewildered, turning between these two skilled men: between the prime minister, before whom all the opposition were routed yesterday, and the writer of al-Sha'b, whom all the other writers believed today.

2 It is only fair to note that between these two skilled men there are differences which it would not be right to neglect when one wishes to judge between them, and to set one above the other in the enchantment of eloquence.

3 For the prime minister has at his disposal tools and means that help him bewitch minds, captivate understanding, silence his opponents, and overpower those who resist him; he is the prime minister, and from this capacity he holds a majesty no other man possesses, so that his word weighs as ten words, and his voice weighs as ten voices.

4 Were he to speak before taking office, or to speak after relinquishing it, he would attain in persuading his opponents and silencing his interlocutors only a tenth of what he attains when he speaks as prime minister.

5 The prime minister is a good man, and the goodness of good men has a profound effect in persuading those they argue with, silencing those who dispute with them, and compelling opponents to submit; for this goodness is by its nature a blessing that smooths away difficulties

entirely, erases obstacles entirely, and makes its possessor a saint, or something like a saint; and then this goodness works upon minds a strange effect, inclining them to a ready disposition to believe whatever the good man says, and to trust him; for when the good man speaks he says nothing but the truth — or such, at least, is the good man's way.

6 The good man, likewise, is well-guided and does not err, nor is he exposed to error; for his goodness protects him from error or from exposure to error. And once this is known of him, people's hearts are quicker to believe him, more inclined to follow him, and further removed from doubting what he says.

7 And if to these two qualities you add the qualities of wit, grace, lightness, and tact, and then add to all these qualities that of skill in eloquence, and a monopoly of strength in the art of oratory, you will be able to recognize the traits by which the prime minister excelled yesterday; for he persuaded the deputies that the Foreign Ministry's budget was a truth that doubt ought not touch, nor argument rise against.

8 Hence one ought not be astonished, upon examining the splendid rhetorical images the prime minister drew upon yesterday to persuade his opponents and silence those who opposed him, to find them in themselves slight and trivial, not of a kind to persuade, not of a kind to silence — yet they did, for all that, persuade and silence, and secured for the prime minister the ratification of his budget just as he wished. And who could judge that comparing what we spend on the Foreign Ministry with what Poland spends, or Czechoslovakia, or any European country you please, would in itself suffice to persuade people — since what we spend does not exceed our capacity, nor does it rise above what we ought to spend? But these are the prime minister's qualities and merits: his words, each of which weighs as ten words; his intonations, each of which weighs as ten intonations; his gestures, each of which weighs as ten gestures; his voice, which weighs as ten voices; and the readiness of the deputies to be moved, profoundly and eloquently, by these words, these intonations, these gestures, and this voice.

9 All of this prepared for the prime minister the triumph he won yesterday, and smoothed the path for the Foreign Ministry's budget, so that it passed through the Chamber of Deputies in peace.

10 As for the writer of al-Sha'b, he has none of these merits: he is not a prime minister, he is not a good man like the prime minister, and he

has neither the wit and grace nor the lightness and tact that the prime minister has; he is merely a man like you and like me, who speaks as you speak, and as I speak, and writes as you write, and as I write.

11 His words are like our words, his intonations like our intonations, no one of them worth two, let alone ten; and his voice, like our voices, does not weigh as ten voices as the prime minister's voice does. And yet, for all that, he has managed to persuade his readers, many or few, myself among them, that our prime minister is an orator — an orator unlike the ordinary orators we hear and admire and are moved by what they say; an orator unlike Sidqi Pasha, for Sidqi Pasha was a calm man who, when he spoke, relied on nothing but his well-known audacity, who was not skilled at choosing his words, and who deceived his listeners with a smile that bewitches only when its bearer is prime minister.

12 An orator unlike the leader of the opposition, even though he follows the leader of the opposition's method in the Chamber of Deputies, comparing Egypt with Europe; but the leader of the opposition is a man of moderate temperament, sparing in voice and gesture.

13 An orator unlike Abd al-Hamid Effendi Sa'id, for he does not boil over nor seethe, does not grow agitated nor rage as Abd al-Hamid Effendi Sa'id does; and yet our prime minister is, for all that, a more eloquent orator than all of these, than those above all of these, and than those below all of these.

14 He is not like al-Hajjaj or like Ziyad, for these two orators stood nearer to the bedouin than to civilization, and neither of them was skilled in the French language — they had only the slightest acquaintance with it — nor could either of them give the letter B its sweet Parisian articulation.

15 An orator unlike Pericles, Demosthenes, and Cicero, for all of these were ancients who were not as skilled in the arts of oratory as the moderns are.

16 Our prime minister is an orator to whom only two men can be likened: one of them, the orator of the French Revolution, Mirabeau; and the other, the orator of the French Third Republic, Waldeck-Rousseau. And the point of resemblance between our Egyptian orator and the two French orators is that our orator is like Mirabeau in this: that admiration for him depends on seeing him and hearing him, as Madame de Staël said — you may admire him up close, but from a distance that is another

matter entirely. And the strange thing is that you may admire him, yet you cannot convey your admiration to anyone else, for it is an admiration beyond description — an admiration that is beyond description because our prime minister, like Mirabeau, is an orator beyond description.

17 And our prime minister is like Waldeck-Rousseau in that he is a volcano covered in snow, not like al-Khansa's brother, a beacon with fire upon its summit; for if you see the prime minister, or speak with him, or hear him as he begins his speech, you are not captivated by him — rather, you grow presumptuous toward him, and make light of his strength; but once he grows roused and gathers himself to attack, words fall from his mouth as burning rocks fall from the mouth of a volcano. That is why the opposition grew presumptuous toward him yesterday; and when he set upon them and attacked, they feared lest one of these burning rocks should strike them, and so they turned their backs and fled for safety, and the Foreign Ministry's budget was delivered safe, and passed through the Chamber of Deputies graceful and fair, swaying and strutting, until it reached the Senate!

18 Do you see, then, the differences between these two skilled men: one man who has his share of eloquence, but who also has other tools and means that sustain him, serve him, and help him to triumph — and he is the prime minister; and another man who has no tool or means except boundless genius, a sharp tongue, and a flowing pen — and he is the writer of al-Sha'b! And each of the two men has won what he wanted: the prime minister saved the Foreign Ministry's budget from its opponents and schemers; and the writer of al-Sha'b proved that the prime minister is an orator to whom only Mirabeau and Waldeck-Rousseau can be likened!

19 Do you not agree with me that the writer of al-Sha'b stands nearer to skill, holds a greater share of mastery, and has a firmer grip on the reins of eloquence than the prime minister? As for me, I believe in this rare skill and this dazzling mastery for them both; and how could I not believe in the skill and mastery of one who saves the budget from the deputies, and how could I not believe in the skill and mastery of one who proves that the prime minister is an orator to whom only Mirabeau and Waldeck-Rousseau can be likened?

20 And how could I not offer both men my fairest thanks and my sweetest praise? For their talk is delightful and sweet — more delightful and sweeter than talk of politics, education, and economics!

21 And after all this, what more does Egypt await, now that God has united in a single man both Mirabeau and Waldeck-Rousseau? What does Egypt await, and what prevents her from demanding of France, and then of Europe, and then of the whole world, recognition of her leadership in oratory, after she has already won recognition of her leadership in politics?