

Modesty!

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1 That our ministers in this happy era are tutors who teach us morals and hold us to good conduct and rectitude in what we do and say — that is beyond doubt, denied only by the opposition. And when have the opposition ever acknowledged the truth? And when have the opposition ever denied anything but the truth? They are simply an obstinate lot, whom you ought not listen to; but if you are ever forced to, since they are the loudest of people, the most clamorous of people, then listen to them, and believe the opposite of what they say. If they tell you the government is wasteful with money, understand from this that it is frugal; if they tell you the government squanders the freedoms, understand from this that the government overdoes the protection of freedom and tolerance toward its opponents, to the point of nearly tempting them into disorder. Take no other course with the opposition than this: invert their words entirely. As for the ministers, believe them, and trust them; for they say nothing but the truth, want nothing but the good, and do nothing but what is right.

2 And the most particular trait distinguishing our ministers, and especially their head, the good man, is that they are clever, and therefore modest; clever enough to understand matters as they truly are, to see what we are capable of and what we are not, and to judge what we deserve and what we do not deserve — and it is precisely this cleverness that drives them so firmly to modesty, and plunges them so deeply into it. Their cleverness showed them that the old constitution was more than was fitting, so the constitution was reduced to the narrowness befitting it; and their cleverness showed them that enjoying freedom the way people enjoy it outside Egypt would corrupt our morals and our institutions, so the enjoyment of freedom in Egypt was reduced to the narrowest possible limit — or, better said, abolished.

3 And their cleverness showed them that our university was more advanced than befits a country as ignorant and weak as this one, so our university was reduced to what universities ought to be among a people of the fourth or fifth rank among civilized peoples. And in this manner our ministers have proceeded throughout this era, except in certain areas where modesty does not suit, and moderation is not becoming — such as conferences, advertising, and the like; for in all these matters it is well for

us to indulge in some excess and some exaggeration, so that foreigners may profit from us on the one hand, and be deceived about us on the other, and so that people may believe us rich though we are poor, advanced though our acquaintance with advancement is distant, and independent though our independence is a mere illusion, a species of fancy.

4 And the latest lesson given us in modesty, which we must surely profit and benefit from, is this lesson delivered by the good man when he spoke to certain English writers in an interview broadcast in England, which al-Ahram reported this morning. In this interview, our prime minister, the good man, asks his English interviewer, calmly, gently, and with becoming diffidence: why have the English not taken the step the Egyptians are waiting for from them? And when his English interviewer asks him what this step is, which the Egyptians await from the English, the prime minister informs him that it is the abolition of the capitulations. Before this, Sidqi Pasha had declared in Paris that he was waiting for the English to find the time to ask them for our help in abolishing the capitulations; so Sidqi Pasha, at least, knew why the English had not taken this step — Sidqi Pasha knew that the English were busy, and was waiting for them to be free of what occupied them, so that they might help us abolish the capitulations.

5 As for Abd al-Fattah Pasha, he does not appear to know that the English are busy, and so he asks what is keeping them from abolishing the capitulations. Had I been in this English interviewer's place, I would have answered the prime minister, the good man, that the English have not abolished the capitulations until now because the Egyptians have not paid them the price of abolishing the capitulations; and if Abd al-Fattah Pasha is able to complete the deal and pay the price, then the English are able to complete the deal and hand over the goods. But Abd al-Fattah Pasha, to our great regret, or to our great relief, is utterly incapable of paying the price, since he can neither negotiate nor conclude a treaty; and so the English will not be able to hand him the goods, and abolish the capitulations.

6 But the amusing thing in all this is the prime minister's modesty; for the man believes himself incapable of abolishing the capitulations alone, or of negotiating their abolition alone, and believes that if the English do not assist him, there is no path to abolishing the capitulations at all. And he is utterly anxious that the capitulations be abolished, out of mercy for the peasant and compassion for him, and so he asks the

English, calmly, patiently, and with becoming diffidence: why have you not abolished the capitulations? Have you ever seen a finer modesty than this modesty? Have you ever seen a more beautiful moderation than this moderation? Have you ever seen a truer sense of dignity than this sense? Have you ever seen a firmer faith in independence than this faith?

7 As for the opposition, they will be outraged, and remain outraged, at this talk; for they do not wait for the English to abolish the capitulations — indeed, they do not wish the English to have sole credit for abolishing the capitulations — but rather wish to be done with the English first, so that they themselves may labor to abolish the capitulations, taking whatever paths suit dignity, benefit, and independence. Do you see the difference between these opposition men, whose pride spoils their affairs so that they achieve nothing, and this modest man, whose modesty sets his affairs right, so that he achieves everything?

8 And even more exquisitely modest, and still more revealing of it, is that the prime minister tells his English friend that the time has come to reconsider the organization of the Mixed Courts; whereas not long ago the chief justice had wanted and demanded of His Majesty that the Mixed Courts be abolished outright, and that Egypt gain full independence in judicial matters, rather than merely having these courts reorganized. See, then, the difference between the prime minister and the chief justice! The one is modest, neither excessive in his demand nor extravagant in his hope; the other is proud and exceedingly ambitious, satisfied with nothing less than the outright abolition of the Mixed Courts. And see the result of the proud men's pride and the modest men's modesty: the chief justice's pride was rebuffed by the foreign ministers plenipotentiary, who took their rebuff of it straight to the prime minister; while the prime minister's modesty was approved by his English interviewer, who singled it out for a measure of praise. You will say that the outcome of the two was the same — the Mixed Courts were neither abolished nor reorganized — but that is another matter entirely, touching neither the proud men's pride nor the modest men's modesty; it is hostage, rather, to the relations between us and the foreigners, and hostage to whichever ministries happen to be running affairs.

9 And the strange thing is that the present Parliament is also proud: in the Senate, the abolition of the Mixed Courts was demanded, and in the Chamber of Deputies, the abolition of the Mixed Courts was demanded, and both chambers wish the capitulations abolished by a

purely Egyptian path. But the prime minister is a teacher, and a teacher well-versed in the art of instruction; he knows how to bring Parliament back to modesty, he knows how to school Parliament in moderation, and he knows how to depict Parliament's demands with the precise, honest portrayal that suits what the Egyptians are actually capable of demanding. So he contents himself with reconsidering the organization of the Mixed Courts, and he wishes the capitulations abolished — but only on condition that it come from the English, not from the Egyptians, and before the treaty, not after it.

10 Do you see what modesty looks like? Do you see what success looks like? And after all this, the Egyptians still doubt the present ministry's competence; the Egyptians still question whether the present ministry alone is suited to Egypt, and capable of realizing her hopes and winning her independence. God forgive us, what are we saying — has independence not already been won? Then what were the Egyptians doing on Thursday? Were they not celebrating Independence Day?