Discord

Kawkab al-Sharq, 21 March 1933

Yes — discord in the shadow of coalition, rift beneath the wing of accord, and quarrel in the bosom of peace. And why not? Where have there ever been found brothers who do not disagree? When have you seen kinsmen who do not quarrel? Life is simply a path towards agreement of opinion at times and its disagreement at others, particularly when temptations multiply, and when fortune allows close friends to grow stronger and weaker by turns, to see one party among them exalted and another humbled, one group's hands filled with good things and another group's hands empty of everything.

The parties united in government are composed of individuals who possess the virtues and the failings of human beings; they agree on public interests that do not concern their personal selves, and they disagree when it comes to private interests from which they can benefit — in money or prestige, more or less.

Evidence of this: the partners in government did not disagree for a single moment on the construction of the barrage, because the construction of this barrage is manifestly beneficial to Egypt and clearly advantageous to the Egyptians — it will bring fertility to Egyptian soil and guarantee prosperity to Egypt's people. And Egypt's treasury is capable of constructing this barrage; it has accumulated piles upon piles of money and can spend from them without reckoning, without fearing poverty or risking bankruptcy. And do not believe the Financial Adviser — he is an Englishman who hates what is good for Egypt, harbours evil towards her, and insists on seeing her land barren and desolate and her people indigent and destitute. When he advised the government not to rush the construction of this barrage and affected concern for the state treasury, he was thinking of nothing but the interests of the English, who detest this barrage and fear its construction in the Sudan!

Let the government beware and let Parliament beware — and the government has taken care, paying no attention to the Adviser and giving no heed to his opinion. When has our present cabinet heeded the opinion of the English? When has it accepted their counsel? It doubts them

thoroughly, mistrusts them entirely, and has set itself, ever since it took up the burdens of government, to forcing them into what they do not want and making them swallow what they cannot stomach.

Our government turned away from the Adviser's counsel, and Parliament turned away from it too; the two coalition parties agreed in this rejection as well — they neither sought the Adviser's opinion nor paid it any heed. And why should they seek it and pay it heed? The Adviser is an Englishman who ought to be viewed with suspicion by the two coalition parties, who trust no Englishman and care for nothing but forcing the English to acknowledge Egypt's dignity, sovereignty, and rights.

The coalition achieved itself around Jabal al-Awliyā’ in its finest form and most splendid shape, and the coalition triumphed in this matter over two stubborn adversaries: the first, the Egyptian nation, which has no desire for this fertility and no wish for it, and which must be compelled against its will to have its land made fertile, and must be compelled to have its children made wealthy even if they detest wealth — because the masters of the hour and the rulers of the day understand the nation's interests better than the nation itself, and are more capable of realising the people's benefits than the people! And what is the value and worth of a cabinet if it cannot lead us to the good against our will?

The second adversary was this English Financial Adviser, who had conspired against Egypt with the Governor-General of the Sudan. While the Governor-General was working to persuade our cabinet to abandon the barrage out of mercy for the Sudanese, consideration for them, and care for English interests in the Sudan, the Adviser was counselling the cabinet to abandon the barrage in order to protect the state treasury from weakness and the state budget from disruption.

The two coalition parties knew how to hold firm against these two adversaries — meeting the nation with force and coercion, and meeting the English with skill and manoeuvre, with studied indifference and deliberate disregard.

The coalition triumphed yet again when education policy was raised, and when the two coalition parties understood that this ignorant and heedless nation wished education in all its branches to spread among its sons across all their classes and stations — and that the spread of education in this fashion might erase ignorance, dispel heedlessness, and give the nation a strong and vivid sense of its rights and its dignity, dangerous to the ambitions of the ambitious, the mischief of the mischief-makers, the monopolising of the monopolists, and the sacred persons' hoarding for themselves of influence, reach, power, and authority.

There the coalition partners sensed that the coalition was being exposed to danger, and there the coalition partners united on the position that restricted education is better than extensive education, that the spread of ignorance is better than its contraction, that governing the people depends on the people remaining ignorant and heedless, and that knowledge, understanding, competence, and aspiration to the highest ideal are qualities that must be reserved for the wealthy and their like. It is quite enough for the people's sons to work in the fields and factories and to remain a flock well-fitted for subjugation and conscription.

There the coalition was strengthened and its knot tightened; the two coalition parties gave their support to the Minister of Traditions. The coalition triumphed yet again when the leisure and amusements of the foreigners were put at risk, when some deputies moved to abolish the Opera subsidy, and when it became apparent that this idea was malicious: outwardly showing consideration for the state treasury and sympathy for those who pay taxes and expend strenuous effort and great labour in doing so, but inwardly depriving the foreigners of the pleasure of watching theatrical performances, listening to singing, and enjoying dancing. How could things be set right if the foreigners were deprived of what they aspire to and covet of this luxurious pleasure — to be added to what they already enjoy of superiority over Egyptians in everything, and privilege from Egyptians in everything? The Egyptians must submit and the foreigners must be entertained! And on this the coalition's word was concluded and its knot tightened around it.

You may rest easy and be content: the coalition will not be exposed to danger for as long as the clear and manifest public interest calls for its strength and firm establishment.

But when trivial matters arise that have no consequence and no substance, it is permissible — indeed, it is fitting — for the coalition partners to disagree and the united to part ways, for the coalition to crack today so that its crack may be repaired tomorrow.

Look at the two coalition parties, their disagreement intensifying until it threatens great danger, until the ministers strain themselves at conciliation, until members break ranks with party decisions, until some of them resign or threaten resignation — because the Chamber of Deputies requires two Deputy Speakers, and each of the two coalition parties covets both positions for itself to the exclusion of its partner.

This is a trivial matter of no real consequence: it is all the same to Egypt whether the two Deputy Speakers come from the Union Party or the People's Party, and it is all the same to the English in particular and foreigners in general whether the two Deputy Speakers come from the Union Party or the People's Party — for the barrage will be built, education will be restricted, and there will be theatre, dancing, and singing.

But the People's Party is extremely greedy, knowing no limit to its gluttony for domination and control. It is not content with monopolising power and cabinet posts, to the point that it wants to deprive its friend and sibling of everything.

The Union Party has endured grave burdens from the People's Party: the leader of the People's Party removes the Union under-secretary for this reason; the leader of the People's Party promotes the People's men to the cabinet and leaves the Ministry of the Interior without placing a People's man in it, but without placing a Union man in it either — choosing for it instead a man said to be distant from the parties. Then the Chamber of Deputies requires two Deputy Speakers, and the People's Party will not leave these two posts to the wronged Union Party — it will not even leave it one post of the two, but wants to monopolise both for

itself.

Am I called when a battle of grim ordeal falls upon them,

yet when the ḥays is stirred, Jundab is the one they call?

Yes — thus has God willed it for the Union Party in these days. God alternates the days among people; God humbles parties and exalts parties; God makes some parties heads and others tails. And God stirs in the souls and hearts of the Union men a fire that blazes and a flame that rages — for they abandoned their under-secretary and let him down. Had they known how to support him and stand up for him, he would have known how to redress their wrongs and repel the tyranny of the fraternal party.

This is what the Union Party says to itself, and some of it the Union Party says to the people. As for the People's Party — it has the government, and upon it rest the responsibilities of government; it is therefore entitled to the greater share of the government's benefits and privileges.

The Union Party had no business aspiring to contest or challenge it; its leader is not one who can hold his ground against the leader of the People's Party, having abandoned his under-secretary so that he became a body without a soul. Let it therefore be content with what God has given it and with what the People's Party has conceded to it — for otherwise the People's Party is capable of replacing one people with another and one party with another. Is it not said that there is a third party in the Chamber of Deputies? The Union Party had therefore better remember the ancient poet's words:

Measure where your foot will fall before you step —

whoever climbs a slippery place unawares will slip.

In this fashion the coalition partners disagree and the united part ways. The nation watches this coalition and smiles, and watches this discord and laughs, as one smiles and laughs who watches players at their game. The nation knows full well that the disagreement of the two

parties will avail nothing, and that their coalition will benefit nothing — for neither of them commands the obedience or submission of the one who holds the string: he who is now resting at Mena House, and who leaves the two parties to play because he is weary, or because he was poisoned, or because he wishes to amuse himself, until when he has finished amusing himself with the play of his two parties, he pulls the string — and at once the coalition is strong and sound, and the bonds between them are in the finest state of warmth and amity.