Meeting

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1 This is, without doubt, an acquaintance meeting, the kind that began some days ago between the High Commissioner and the ministers, and its most particular feature is that it is simple and unassuming, having produced no crisis, nor anything resembling a crisis; the proprieties were observed in it from A to Z. The ministers began by leaving their cards at Dobara Palace, and the High Commissioner then charged one of his household staff with leaving his card for the ministers. Then came the chance encounter: the High Commissioner met our ministers at some reception, and he was presented to them — God forgive us — or rather, they were presented to him. It then appeared that this much sufficed to establish the connection between the High Commissioner and the members of the ministry, and that the next step might well be for the ministers to be invited, one after another, to meet the High Commissioner. So that when one of them met him, the conversation naturally began, at first, with the weather and the rain, then shifted, little by little, from this general subject to particular subjects touching some aspects, and then to particular subjects touching every aspect, until the two interlocutors look up to find themselves deep in the very heart of the matter that conversation is meant to serve.

2 As for arrangement, it was the finance minister — as it appears and as is said — who was the first of the ministers to be invited to the High Commissioner's residence, and the newspapers reported that he remained with the High Commissioner a long while, and talk of the weather and the rain, however long it is drawn out, is short. It is most likely, then, that the two interlocutors were driven to weighty matters, and spoke of them in weighty terms; and the High Commissioner learned from the finance minister that, before taking office, he had wanted to turn the economy entirely upside down, and to bring about in the Ministry of Finance a revolution no finance minister before him had attempted — but that he had scarcely settled into the ministry before it became clear to him that moderation is better than impetuousness, that evolution is better than revolution, and that nothing better than the existing state of things could be achieved. And the High Commissioner learned from the finance minister that, upon taking office, he had been resolved to take a firm and resolute stand toward the states that are

Egypt's creditors — neither negotiating with them, since negotiation is weakness, nor litigating against them, since the matter does not fall within the competence of the courts, but simply paying them their debt and its interest in paper, and if they were content, so be it, and if they were angry, the matter was a light one. And he had announced this in the newspapers and spoken of it to the people; but then it appeared to him and to his fellow ministers that a settlement was better, that negotiation was not so bad, and that litigation might even be of use. So he followed Sidqi Pasha's course, negotiating, or awaiting negotiation, on the one hand, and litigating, or awaiting the court's ruling, on the other. And the High Commissioner learned from the finance minister many things: some touching the mortgage debt, some touching the Domains Administration, and some touching those officials who had not known they had a minister over them, until they were informed of it and came to know it. And perhaps the High Commissioner also learned from the finance minister that he has taken positions in the Chamber of Deputies which, at the very least, could be described as the stands of heroes and great men, and which reveal new theories in constitutional jurisprudence that the war minister is unable to follow, calling them instead a tangle of words. And it is likely, if not certain, that the finance minister left the High Commissioner's presence delighted by what he had heard, gladdened by what he had said, wondering deep within himself exactly what the High Commissioner's opinion might have been of the conversation that passed between them.

3 And when this evening arrives, there will take place between the High Commissioner and some of the Egyptian ministers another meeting, no less momentous, no lighter a matter, no slighter an affair than the meeting that took place a day or two ago. For the guest who will honor Dobara Palace with his visit, and who will himself be honored by a visit to Dobara Palace this evening — according to the newspapers — is the minister of education. And this title alone should be proof enough that this meeting is fit to rank among the greatest events in history; for the Egyptians have disputed for weeks now over which of the two momentous ministers, the finance minister or the education minister, is the greater in importance, the more considerable in weight, the greater in share of power, and the farther-reaching in his effect on people's lives — until the Egyptians agreed that the superiority belongs to the education minister, not to the minister of finance and the economy.

4 For the minister of education belongs to a party, or presides over a party, while the finance minister has no party; and the minister of education obtains from the finance ministry whatever he wants, gently at times, forcefully at others — he leases his house in Giza to the Arabic Language Academy even against the finance minister's wishes, and he keeps the grade of assistant under-secretary in his ministry's budget even against the finance minister's objection. And the minister of education has a profound effect on people's lives in every respect, even in their economic affairs, for he shakes every Egyptian family, several times a year, with the schooling fees he demands of them and exacts from them, harshly at times, gently at others; and he imposes the turban and forbids the fez upon a whole generation, thereby affecting their intellectual, economic, and social lives as well. He is, moreover, the leader of the young, disposing of them as he pleases and sees fit, and he loves nothing but the good, and approves nothing but what is right — and in this respect he is the fittest of the ministers to be closest to the High Commissioner and nearest to him in standing, since he controls the affairs of the youth, and whoever controls the affairs of the youth is a man of great standing in Egypt's political, scholarly, and literary life in every respect. And this sort of life is of particular concern to the English, for the young were, in days gone by, reckless extremists, deeply engaged in political matters, excessive in their engagement with them, and a continual torment to the Egyptian government and to the English alike; and so if a minister can turn them away from this extremism, wean them of this excess, and bring them to moderation, humility, and restraint in their lofty national ideals, he is well placed to please the English, and to win from the High Commissioner a delightful conversation, entirely composed of support and encouragement.

5 And I do not conceal that I hope the minister of education will read this column before he reaches the High Commissioner's residence this evening; for there may be some use in reading it before the meeting, and perhaps among the things the minister of education would do well to steer the conversation toward is the matter of university life, for the minister has, in that domain, a fine record of trial and achievement that ought not be hidden from anyone, and ought not be hidden from the new High Commissioner in particular. For the university, in the days of disorder when the opposition held power, was truly a dangerous environment: the Latin-educated were numerous there, and there were representatives of the Germans too, and Latin culture was prominent in the Faculty of Letters, and the English chafed at this and complained of

it; and freedom was understood in that university in a broad, mistaken, and dangerous sense, so that relations between professors and students improved to the point that both shared in work and leisure alike, as though they were equals. And the university was rushing headlong into this freedom at a frightening pace, nearly bringing it to the brink of disorder, when the minister of education came and knew how to set matters right, driving out of the university the elements of disorder, supporting within it the elements of order, and restoring the university to a measure of the modesty befitting the Egyptians' station, and the moderate ambitions that ought to be theirs; and he laid down for the university strict and firm regulations, teaching the university men how to hold authority in awe, submit to its command, and carry out what it wants. And the English element began to grow stronger, and the European element began to grow weaker, until it became expected that the university would, God willing, become a fine image of some of those excellent, advanced universities in parts of the British Empire — other than Great Britain itself, of course. And perhaps the best subject for conversation between the High Commissioner and the minister of education would be this new regulation laid down for the university union, which shackled the students' feet, bound their hands and necks, pierced their noses and ears, and taught them what gentle freedom and productive manhood truly are — a freedom and manhood resting on nothing but obedience, submission, and compliance with the command of superiors and supervisors. And if the minister can tell the High Commissioner that what prompted him to introduce this new regulation was that a group of the university's students had been seen engaging in politics over something called the Piastre Project, and had resisted them, and the ministry had disapproved of this resistance and punished them with this regulation — if the minister of education can relate this account to the High Commissioner, he will have arrived at the furthest success the ministers could hope for. And if the finance minister remained with the High Commissioner a long while, there is no doubt the minister of education will remain with him longer still; and if the finance minister came away pleased with what he heard and what he said, wondering about the High Commissioner's opinion of the conversation between them, there is no doubt that the minister of education will come away even more delighted, even more overjoyed, by what he said first and by what he heard second, and will return to his companions perfectly content, perfectly confident that the conversation between him and the new High Commissioner was decisive, shining proof that nothing better than the existing state of things could be achieved, and that those who

await a change in Anglo-Egyptian policy are dreamers — unless, that is, a slight change comes about that places the premiership itself in the hands of the minister of education.