

Majesty ...

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That our ministry is awe-inspiring and dreadful admits of no doubt, and no question reaches it from any side. For how could one doubt the ministry's majesty, or question that dread issues from it as light issues from the sun and flame from fire? It is capable of raising the bridges that stand erected, stationing soldiers all around them. And if raising a bridge proves beyond it, it fortifies that bridge thoroughly, and lines it with motorcars, end to end, leaving no way through for passers-by. Tell me, how could you doubt its majesty and dread, when the ministry can raise the bridges that can be raised, and block the bridges that cannot? And when have you ever seen a weak, insignificant ministry capable of raising bridges and seizing roads? And who could claim that the weak are capable of lifting such weights? Bridges are heavy beyond doubt, and nothing but violent effort and fearsome force can lift them from their places, and our ministry's strength is not confined to its muscles and its arms, but is a vast, far-reaching strength that takes in intellect, takes in cleverness, and takes in cunning, enabling it to resolve predicaments and dissolve difficulties. People had been saying that on one of the roads leading to Qalyubia there stands a fixed bridge that cannot be turned, cannot be moved, and cannot possibly be raised, and that the Wafd leader and his companions might have taken that road, and crossed over that bridge which can neither be turned nor raised. The strange thing is that the ministry had foreseen this, grasped it, and reckoned with it, and furnished the Wafd leader and his companions with proof that iron answers to iron, and that if they were wind, they had met with a whirlwind — proof that, had they thought of taking that road, the ministry had already thought of it first, and had cut off the way before them; and proof, too, that cleverness is not confined to the people, but is one of God's blessings that He spreads between the people and the ministers, and perhaps reserves chiefly for the ministers, who then graciously part with a small share of it, granting it to the people, that they may manage to live and go about the affairs of life.

And so too the ministry furnished Egyptians, and the foreigners who watch Egyptians, with clear and decisive proof that it is strong and clever: it raised the bridge on the Shubra road, because it could be raised, and lined the other bridge with ranks of motorcars, ranks of

soldiers before and behind it; and there remains no doubt that the European powers now know that Egypt lies beyond the reach of the stars, more impregnable than the sky's own punishment, and that no power will henceforth think of raiding Egypt or assaulting it, for Egypt has a ministry that knows how to cut off the roads before raiders — raising the bridges that can be raised, and blocking the bridges whose raising is difficult or impossible.

And so Egypt's renown spread across the horizons, and Egypt's majesty settled into hearts, and the accredited ministers received a harsh lesson, albeit a droll one, teaching them that Egypt is not among those countries where foreigners presume to object to the chief justice's speech, and press their protest upon the prime minister; and it has now become certain that the Mixed Courts will be abolished tomorrow or the day after, and that the Capitulations will become a thing talked of in the past, and that the French minister will never think of pressing a protest or an objection upon the prime minister, for the ministry will cut off his road to the seat of government. It will line every road leading to the good man's office with ranks of motorcars, ranks of soldiers before and behind. And the French minister will be compelled to go back grieved and downcast, for he was unable to deliver his protest and meet the prime minister — just as the Wafd leader went back grieved and downcast, unable to leave Cairo or to reach Qalyubia. And how is he to leave Cairo, when the ministry has raised one bridge for him and blocked another against him?! And it seems most likely that the accredited ministers will be confined to Cairo whenever they resolve upon a protest, and will abstain from recreation on the island, or anywhere else that would oblige them to cross the Nile or any of its canals. For who knows — perhaps the ministry will raise the bridges against them, or block them, so that they cannot even find their way back to their own houses.

And in this fashion God willed that our life should be sport and play, laughter and helpless laughter — and why not? Are not people of their ministers' persuasion? If the rulers play, the ruled must play along. And so long as our ministry raises bridges, and raises them well, let us laugh at the raised bridges, and laugh well; and so long as our ministry considers that the utmost strength it can attain is to cut off the road before people as they come and go, that people may know it is strong and clever, let us ourselves affirm its strength and cleverness, and let us boast of it to the nations and peoples of the earth.

The ministry need not resent this of us, nor resent our putting it to the test now and again, for we are eager that it remain strong and clever, and that it never forget its strength and its cleverness; and so feasts must be held, and the Wafd and its men invited to them, that the ministry may forbid them, and raise bridges on their account, and block other bridges.

And if it is right that we should make foreigners feel Egypt's majesty, it is equally right that we should make them laugh, and entertain them a little. We may make them laugh and entertain them at the opera by night, so let us make them laugh and entertain them on the Shubra road and the Mataria road by day. That is something hospitality imposes upon us, and the generosity and liberality we are distinguished for. And if the ministry refuses to let Egyptians honor one another, or host one another, it ought not refuse to let Egyptians honor foreigners and host them, and discharge toward them the duty of entertainment and diversion, that our reputation may be the better for it, and that people may know we are a people of might, and a people of gentleness and ease, that we strike fear into the enemy, and that, for all that, we make him laugh and divert him.

Now, then, can we understand from the ministry's conduct since this feast that it is strong, as the good man has said, and can we understand from this same conduct that it is weak, as we ourselves say? For my part, I am certain that the ministry is strong, as the good man has said, and that it is weak, as we say.

Strong, in that it can raise bridges and muster troops; and weak, in that it needs all this merely to prevent one man, or several, from visiting a village, a town, or a province.

Strong, because it can violate the constitution and depart from the law without being dismissed or brought before a judge; and weak, because it cannot remain in office except by violating the law, assaulting rights, departing from the constitution, and being assured of impunity.

Strong, because it says it is strong; and weak, because it cannot prove its strength except by treating the capital as a besieged city, and compelling Egyptians to live the life of prisoners, moving about only within set limits, and stirring only in places assigned to them by decree.

Our ministry is very strong, and the proof of it is that it turned the Wafd leader back from Qalyubia. Our ministry is very weak, and the proof of it is that it turned the Wafd leader back from Qalyubia; for it could not,

and will never be able to, turn the hearts of the people of Qalyubia back from the Wafd leader.

Our ministry is very strong, for it still makes its way to its offices and to parliament. And our ministry is very weak, for it is compelled to injustice and oppression merely to be able to make its way to its offices and to parliament.

Yes, our ministry is strong, and our ministry is weak; the present order is stable, and the present order is precarious; and the English see all of this, marvel at all of this, and laugh at all of this.

And what is there to stop the English from laughing, if they wish to laugh, when Egypt has people who insist on being exactly where the English wish them to be?!