

Incompetence

Kawkab al-Sharq (Hadith al-Massa), 10 April 1934.

It is an incompetence the Egyptian cannot acknowledge, and cannot hold his head up with before himself, nor before any other foreigner — this incompetence into which the Ministry has fallen, if what the newspapers have been reporting for some days now about its position on this matter is true, this matter that has occupied it, and has occupied the Egyptians, for some time: the matter of the Egyptian judges in the Mixed Courts.

For the Ministry itself was bewildered last week, and this week the bewilderment has passed from it to the people. Has this matter been resolved, or does it still stand where it stood? And if it has been resolved, on what terms? On terms that satisfy the Egyptians, because they restore to the judges their rights, preserve their dignity, and secure for the Minister of Justice the freedom he ought to enjoy in expressing his opinion, and the independence to undertake any course of action without receiving harsh, stinging lessons — or on other terms that do not satisfy the Egyptians, and do not restore any right to their judges, and secure for the minister neither freedom nor independence?

Questions the people pose and find no answer to, or find on them answers mixed and contradictory; for some ministerial newspapers claimed on Sunday evening that everything had been concluded, and that the conclusion of everything was not to the Egyptians' liking, nor did it testify to any skill on the Ministry's part, or to any strength and firmness in the conduct of affairs; for it was said that the matter had ended in a postponement of the case, on the understanding that the government would then enter negotiations, in hopes of winning what the Egyptian judges wanted — recognition of their right to preside over chambers.

And it is plain that the president of the Mixed Court of Appeal demanded nothing less than this in his famous letter; so for the matter to end in this result means nothing other than the government's submission and surrender to what the president held.

And we knew that the Ministry denied this most vehemently, or that the Minister of Justice refused it most violently, and we knew that the crisis had grown so tangled precisely because our Ministry held that the matter needed no negotiations, while the president of the Court of Appeal

held that there was no way out of it except through negotiations; so the Ministry's acceptance of the idea of negotiations, if what some of its evening newspapers published is true, can only be called submission and surrender.

And we should like to know, then, what all the sternness and refusal and tangling of matters was for?! And what all the anger and denial, the insistence and persistence, the squandering of nights and days, were for, when the matter was bound to end in submission and acknowledgment?! And what the hinting at resignation was for, when the matter was bound to end in abandoning that resignation, without victory or triumph?! And what induced the Minister of Justice to write to the president of the Court of Appeal that he would not agree, when in the end he was bound to agree?!

These are questions we should have liked to understand, but when, these days, have the Egyptians ever succeeded in understanding anything of the Ministry's affairs, should they wish to understand it? The Ministry's affairs are riddles and puzzles that none but those deeply versed in knowledge, and those privy to the inner workings of things, can grasp, as they say.

Then Monday came, and what had been said on Sunday evening was somewhat retracted, and the newspapers began saying that the matter had not been accurately portrayed.

But something happened today that portrays the matter accurately beyond any doubt: the pensions case has been postponed to the 27th of next October. And the meaning of this postponement is that the crisis has been given a temporary resolution today, for the Egyptian judges will not, in this judicial year, be removed from sitting on the First Chamber, so long as this case has been postponed.

Will the government, then, enter into political negotiations, as the president of the Court of Appeal wishes, to resolve this matter before the summer ends — in which case the Ministry has without doubt been defeated — or will the government refuse to enter into political negotiations, and insist on resolving the matter at once, thereby securing, from this very moment, recognition of the Egyptian judges' right to preside over chambers, to take effect from the beginning of next judicial year?

A question it is not easy to answer now, though everything suggests that the Ministry will apparently take the first path, entering into political negotiations after having refused to do so, and accepting what the president of the Court of Appeal wants after having refused it most vehemently.

And among the signs of this is what all the newspapers report of the Ministry's own agitation over this very postponement; for it was said that certain foreign quarters did not want so long a postponement, but the Ministry pressed for it until it secured it — does this not suggest that the Ministry wants to widen the time before it, in the hope that the negotiations will drag on, and perhaps not be concluded within mere weeks?!

And among the signs of this, too, is what all the newspapers report of the Ministry's agitation over the matter of its reply to the president of the Court of Appeal; for it was said that the Minister of Justice had finished this reply, and had cast it in firm terms, and was about to send it, when he was told: wait. So he waited; then objections arose from certain foreign quarters over some of the phrases in this letter, and the minister was asked to change them, and the minister refused this change.

And I think you will agree with me that a minister who is about to send a letter and then delays sending it, and a minister who finishes his reply and then cannot deliver it because certain foreign quarters object to some of what it contains — I think you will agree with me that a minister caught up in all this is not the man who can resolve this crisis with the firm, decisive, and swift resolution the Egyptians want.

And the meaning of this is that the Ministry has relieved itself of this heavy burden through the long postponement at which it has arrived; it has gained time and been able to catch its breath, and will most likely leave the matter to political negotiations that may begin now, or may begin after a while, leaving the whole matter subject to whatever fate conceals; and the meaning of that is that the Ministry — if all this is true — has entirely changed its position, accepting what it would not accept, submitting to what it would not submit to, consenting to debate what it would not consent to debate, and it has now become possible that it will enter into negotiations with no guarantee of success, whereupon the Egyptian judges will return to where they stood yesterday, the Egyptian judges will remain where they stand now, and the Egyptian Ministry's position will be one of such weakness and confusion that no ministry

would wish to stand in it.

And so, what was all this clamor and uproar for?! And what did the Ministry adopt the language of firmness for, and don the garb of severity for, when it was bound in the end to arrive at this surrender and submission?!

The Ministry cannot claim that it found no victory or support among the Egyptians, for the Egyptians granted it a victory and support such as it had never won before, and such as would have sufficed for it to take a stand closer to firmness and to the preservation of right and dignity; but the Ministry did not profit from this victory, nor benefit from this support, and perhaps it found both exceedingly oppressive, and perhaps it detested both most intensely, and perhaps it would have preferred that the Egyptians grant it nothing of either.

For the Egyptians embarrass it when they think well of it and expect good from it, and reckon that it is capable of preserving right or upholding independence.

And the Egyptians embarrass it when they expect miracles of it, though its own head has declared that he did not come to work miracles — and when has this Ministry ever succeeded in fulfilling a single one of the Egyptians' demands, or restoring a single one of the Egyptians' rights, or preserving a single one of the Egyptians' honors?!

Ask it what it did about the public-debt question, and ask its head what he did in the crisis he stirred up between himself and the High Commissioner over tradition, and ask it what it did in the affair of the brokers, and ask it what it did in the matter between the Minister of the Interior and the director of the lighting company. Ask it what it did about any problem, domestic or foreign; and you will find it did nothing, however much its partisans claim it did everything.

It is an incompetent ministry, unable to rise to these heavy burdens that ministries must rise to, unable to bear the responsibilities of government, whether because it cannot win the people's support, or because it cannot bear this support when circumstance and chance grant it. It is an incompetent ministry, unable to do more than shuttle between government offices, its members scattering across the corners of the earth, surrounded by supporters and helpers, so that people might say they are ministers and nothing more.

And who knows?! Perhaps the ill circumstances that have surrounded Egypt for years wish to deliver the affairs of this wretched country into the hands of ministries of this stamp, that they might corrupt and unsettle these affairs, so that we might then read, in the Times, the Daily Telegraph, and the Morning Post, what we read there: that the Egyptians are unfit for independence, and cannot do without England's assistance.