Mirabeau ...?!

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1 If you like, say Waldeck-Rousseau; if you like, say Poincaré; if you prefer, say Gambetta; and if the French orators do not please you, say Disraeli, or say Gladstone — choose whomever you wish among the champions of oratory and the masters of eloquence, and bestow his name upon our prime minister, the good man, on one condition: that you choose no ancient Arab, no Greek, no Roman; for our prime minister ought not be likened to the orators of old, nor ought the orators of old be set beside the prime minister — only the modern European orators may aspire to such supreme honor, that the prime minister be likened to them, or they be likened to the prime minister!

2 As for the other orators, it is enough honor for them that our other leaders be likened to them, or that they be likened to our other leaders. Let our prime minister, the good man, be one of these European orators, whether named or unnamed. And it is most likely that we do him wrong by this comparison, and diminish his rank in eloquence, after this splendid and masterly speech, the like of which time has never heard before, and will never hear again, except when the prime minister next speaks before the People's Party, or in one of the two Houses of Parliament.

3 And we attempt, confident of our own powerlessness and failure, to analyze this masterpiece of eloquence, and to make easy what is difficult in it, so that people may understand some of these lofty meanings that descended upon the people of Alexandria yesterday. We attempt this, and know not where to begin nor where to end; for the most eloquent and most masterly speech is one the critics cannot approach from before or from behind, nor touch from above or from below. If you wish to speak of the prime minister's speech, you must spend time and effort and bear hardship and toil to analyze these tender, bewitching sentiments which the prime minister wished to express to his fellow citizens, the people of Alexandria — sentiments he condensed, with the utmost concision, into comprehensive words before which minds grow bewildered, and at which the necks of orators are cut short.

4 For the prime minister grew up among the people of Alexandria, and the prime minister grew up on the shores of the surging sea that floods Alexandria with its salt water, and the prime minister, having grown up among the people of Alexandria and grown up on their beautiful coast, filled their hearts with love for them, and with admiration for him, so that their souls were filled with trust and hope, and pride, and haughtiness.

5 And the prime minister, for all this, had scarcely joined the People's Party while it was still forming, and the Alexandrians had scarcely learned of it — or rather, scarcely heard word of it — before they were certain that the party was wholly good, wholly virtuous, wholly hopeful, and wholly successful, because the prime minister had joined it, and the prime minister had grown up in Alexandria, and grown up on its beautiful coast. For this the Alexandrians flocked to the People's Party, pouring in upon it in a flood, streaming toward it in a torrent, since they were joined to the prime minister by the bond of having grown up in Alexandria and roamed its beautiful coast on the one hand, and by the bonds of party principles and cooperation in serving the homeland on the other, so that the ties between them and the prime minister should be as strong as such ties ought to be — because he grew up in Alexandria and grew up on its beautiful coast; for they trust his weak person.

6 And 'weak' here means strong; 'weak' here means captivating; 'weak' here means that which bewitches minds, possesses hearts, and charms understanding. For persons who are weak in the true sense of the word do not fill people's hearts with trust, nor make them feel love and veneration; but you know that masterly orators employ figure and metaphor, and mean by their words the opposite of what they say — they say 'weak' while meaning 'strong,' and proclaim humility while concealing pride within. If they did not do this, and spoke as ordinary people speak, they would not be masterly orators, but orators of the second or third rank, like Ziyad and al-Hajjaj, not of the first rank, like Mirabeau and Gladstone.

7 Our prime minister, then, grew up in Alexandria and grew up on its beautiful coast; and so, when he joined the People's Party, the Alexandrians joined along with him, and when the ministry was formed, or formed for him, the Alexandrians formed it along with him — because he grew up in Alexandria and grew up on its beautiful coast!

8 And so long as this is the case, he ought not take any action without the Alexandrians taking it along with him: he loved Sidqi Pasha, and the Alexandrians loved him along with him, because he grew up in Alexandria and grew up on its beautiful coast; and he quarreled with Sidqi Pasha, and the Alexandrians quarreled with him along with him, because he grew up in Alexandria and grew up on its beautiful coast; and when Sidqi Pasha dismissed him from the ministry, he dismissed the Alexandrians along with him.

9 And when he resigned from the People's Party, the Alexandrians resigned along with him, and when he returned to the People's Party, the Alexandrians returned along with him; for the Alexandrians are his shadow, because he grew up in Alexandria, and grew up on its beautiful coast.

10 And so long as this is the case, the Alexandrians will follow him wherever he goes and wherever he is directed; they will rise when he rises, sleep when he sleeps, govern when he governs, and resign when he resigns. Do you suppose there exists on earth an eloquence resembling this eloquence, a magic approaching this magic?

11 And the prime minister has no need to speak to the Alexandrians, because he has no need to speak to himself: he is the Alexandrians, and the Alexandrians are he, because he grew up in Alexandria and grew up on its beautiful coast. But there are in the country opposition men who accuse his silence and entertain suspicions about him; so if he speaks, it is only to speak to these opposition men, to bind them with the argument, to set up the proof against them, and to compel them to admit the defeat and disgrace God has decreed for them. Were it not for that, he would not have spoken, and would not have wasted his time and the time of the Alexandrians who love him and trust him — because he grew up in Alexandria, and grew up on its beautiful coast.

12 And the prime minister is capable of ignoring the opposition, and contenting himself with Alexandria, none of whose people oppose him — were it not that the hearts of good men are vast, immense, broad, not to be filled by a single city or by that city's inhabitants, however numerous they may be. He loves the Alexandrians, then, but he also thinks of the opposition, and cares to speak of them and to speak to them — and he has done so.

13 And the strange thing is that the opposition are still alive, struck down by no thunderbolt, annihilated by no destroyer, after this speech

which cast them into a scorching fire that leaves nothing surviving in its wake.

14 And what do you think of a man who grew up in Alexandria, and grew up on its beautiful coast, and possessed of the Alexandrians' trust enough strength to reach the very summit of it, and then stood to address the Alexandrians in order to annihilate the opposition, yet achieved nothing of what he wished? Is this not proof that we are living in the last days, and that the Hour is coming, beyond doubt, just as Sidqi Pasha's negotiations were coming, beyond doubt?

15 What? The prime minister tells the opposition that he took up the burdens of governing while circumstances were critical and rumors were rampant, so it was his duty first to clear the air — and that is why he was unable to resolve any single problem. The opposition answer him: but you did not clear the air; you only let it grow more and more corrupt, scandal following scandal, disgrace following disgrace, and newspapers and tongues growing bold against the ministry, questioning deeds and words that ministries ought to be above being questioned over.

16 What? He tells the opposition that he is proceeding on the debt question just as Sidqi Pasha proceeded — litigating on one side, negotiating on the other. The opposition answer him: then what fault did you find with Sidqi Pasha? What difference is there between you and him? And why did you take power in his place, if you do nothing more than follow his course and carry out his plan?

17 What? He tells the opposition that he will resolve the question of mortgage debts, but that he needs time to seek the decisive solution that does not burden the treasury beyond what it can bear. The opposition answer him: then where is this decisive solution? When will you arrive at it? What is your path to achieving it? And what do you think of the debtors, exhausted, for whom the delay has already dragged on so long that waiting has nearly ruined them?

18 What? He recounts to the opposition the story of the lawyers. The opposition answer him: but the lawyers did not submit to the law you issued; rather, they rejected it, and judged that they owed you no obedience in it; they defied your warning and elected Makram their bâtonnier, and they defied your law and kept Makram as their bâtonnier, while you look on at them, bewildered, unable to advance, and unable to retreat — and by this absurd position, which you yourself created, you have emboldened people against authority, and shaken their confidence

in the intelligence, the discernment, the awe, and the foresight that authority ought to possess.

19 What? He wishes to fall silent, and the opposition ask him about the crisis of the visit to the High Commissioner: what was its matter? How did it arise? How was it resolved? And the opposition ask him about the story of the Corniche: what was its matter? Where did it end? What was Sidqi Pasha's position on it? What did it do to right and justice? What did it do to law and constitution?

20 And they ask him about many things he cannot answer nor speak to; and so he deals the opposition a violent blow, imagining it will reduce them to ashes scattered by the wind, and declares to them that they are obstinate, and that he loves fair opposition. But the opposition receive his blow grim yet smiling, neither troubled nor afraid, taking from his blow nothing resembling fear or alarm. Then he withdraws, after this splendid and masterly speech, content and pleased — because he told the Alexandrians that he grew up in Alexandria, and grew up on its beautiful coast.

21 Can you still doubt, after this, that our prime minister, the good man, is an orator of the modern school, not to be likened to Ziyad or al-Hajjaj, but to be likened to Mirabeau, or Waldeck-Rousseau, or Disraeli, or Gladstone?

22 God forgive us! He is, rather, more skilled than all of them; for not one of them could say that he grew up in Alexandria, and grew up on its beautiful coast!