The incident of Danšawâî which occurred on June 13, 1906, and the harsh sentence against the villagers who were involved in it, delivered by the Special Court at the conclusion of the trial and executed on June 28, are considered today as the turning point in the history of the British rule in Egypt. The Egyptian historian ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Rdfi‘î, states in his book Muṣṭafá Kâmîl bâ‘ît al-ḥaraka al-wafanîya,¹ that the events of Danšawâî mark the end of that period of British rule in Egypt, in which it had enjoyed peace and tranquility and the beginning of a period in which it was engaged in a constant struggle with the Egyptian national movement.

It is not surprising that events which have been imprinted in the nation’s memory as a historical milestone have also become a frequent motif in its literature. The first literary reaction to the Danšawâî incident came soon after it had occurred in a poem by Ḥâfîz ibrâîm which was published a few days after the executions. Aḥmad Sawqi’s poem was written a year later and from then on the incident has remained a recurrent motif in Egyptian literature. Prose writing has not lagged behind. Soon after the episode of June 13, stories began to circulate giving all kinds of versions of what had actually taken place. These stories expanded after the executions and were often offered in the press as true reporting. A frankly literary account of the events was offered for the first time, also soon after they had taken place, when Mahmûd Ṭâhir Ḥaqqî began to publish in al-Minbar

¹ Third edition, Cairo 1950, p. 197 et seq., where the details of the incident, the trial and the executions are given.
his short novel ‘Aţrá’ Danšawāi which came out in book form in 1909. Although later writers also employed the incident in their writing Ḥaqqī’s novel has to date remained the most prominent fictional work dealing with that subject.3

What did actually happen in Danšawāi? There can be no simple answer to this question. From the very beginning the events were described in different ways in accordance with the individual inclinations of the writer and there is no authentic document—official or other—in which the events are given in a complete and orderly manner. No one of the individuals or institutions directly involved in the affair took the trouble to write such a report. al-Rāfi‘ī, who based his version on reports of the Egyptian press as they were published at the time, gives the following account:

On Monday, 11 June 1906, a company of the British Army of Occupation had started marching from Cairo to Alexandria. After two days the company reached Manuf, where five of its officers informed the district commissioner (ma‘mūr al-markaz) of their intention to go out pigeon-hunting in the vicinity of the village of Danšawāi near by, in the area of Šbin al-kūm. The little village was famous for the pigeons which had filled its prominent pigeon-houses (abrāj al-ḥamām).

That group of officers was accompanied by two Egyptians: an umbāšī and a translator. The umbāšī went to the head of the village (al-‘umda) to inform him of the imminent shooting so that the villagers could be warned and keep out of the officers’ way. The officers did not wait for the umbāšī and started shooting. They split into two groups and proceeded to shoot on two sides of the village. One of these groups, shooting on the side of the village’s threshing floors to the south, saw two pigeons perched on the treshing floor belonging to Muhammad ‘Abd al-nabi, who was the village mu‘āðīn and was working at that time on the treshing floor together with his brother Šahāta ‘Abd al-nabi. “An officer approached and aimed his rifle in the direction of the pigeon. An old man, aged seventy-five, named

---