

Marvels

This blessed era is determined not to pass away before it has exhausted the wonder of the people — just as it was determined not to begin before it had exhausted the wonder of the people. For this country had been secure and tranquil, content with its methods of governance, possessed of the dignity and honour that befit a rising country of broad hopes and great aspirations — a country that the British had tried to deceive but could not deceive, and had tried to ensnare but could not ensnare. Then the Prime Minister arrived and reduced this rising, strong, hopeful, secure, and fortunate country to the worst condition to which countries can be reduced — of regression and weakness, of sorrow and fear and wretchedness.

He placed himself and a group of his associates in the position of infallibles who alone know how to govern and therefore never err, who alone know how to conduct affairs and therefore never stray from the true course, who know Egypt's interests better than Egypt knows them herself, and who wish to compel Egypt toward what they consider good — compelling her by force — and to drive her toward what they desire for her with her nose pressed to the ground. They proceeded to impose themselves and their policies upon Egypt by compulsion — by brute force at one time, and by seductive cunning at another — until much blood was shed and a few consciences were sold, and Egypt began to look upon all of this in stupefied astonishment that could not exhaust itself, astonishment that all of this could occur in the twentieth century, within the hearing and sight of advanced civilisation. While the human conscience slept or looked away — neither awakening nor turning its gaze, making no scruple about averting its eyes from what the Nile was witnessing: the subjugation of a whole people by a handful of men. The Prime Minister considered himself to have achieved a dazzling success — a success that ended in prolonged and severe illness, and then in resignation or the resolution to resign. And his friend the High Commissioner also considered himself to have achieved a dazzling success — a success that ended in his leaving Egypt in winter, remaining in limbo for months, and then being transferred to the land of the Turks.

The two friends considered themselves successful, but they failed wretchedly in the eyes of the Egyptians — who commended to God's account the righteous sons they had lost, the hardship and toil they had borne, and the suffering and violence they had endured, counting all of this as a small price in the cause of preserving dignity and honour, and in the cause of attaining freedom and independence.

Such was the beginning of this blessed era — remarkable in every aspect, singular among the eras of the twentieth century. And now it wishes to end in a manner remarkable in every aspect, equally singular among the eras of the twentieth century.

A Prime Minister who has been ill — incapable of working, absent and unable to oversee affairs — yet despite all of this clutches the reins of government with a weak and trembling hand, capable neither of holding them nor of managing them. And despite his illness, his weakness, and his incapacity, he nursed the ambition of completing his policy with a treaty that he would impose on Egypt by force, as he had imposed other things upon her. When this was frustrated — because the British had despaired of his ability to impose such a treaty and to bring Egyptians to respect it — he seethed and boiled over, announced his resentment and anger, hinted at

resignation, the hint then became an explicit statement, and the explicit statement then became a declaration that drove the Prime Minister beyond all bounds and made his utterances the wonder of wonders in these days.

A Prime Minister residing in a foreign country, who has proclaimed a thousand times and more that he is fiercely jealous of Egypt's independence and dignity — yet who does not scruple to expose her private affairs in the salons of Paris and Versailles, discussing them with journalists without restraint, without caution, and without regard for propriety. He announces to an English journalist that he has not resigned but that he will meet His Majesty the King. Then he announces the very same thing to the Reuters office at one of the railway stations of Paris, in the presence of a group of Egyptians and foreigners — among them a representative of the French Foreign Minister — as though between the Prime Minister and Egypt there existed a sharp crisis of the gravest and most terrible kind, whose affairs concern not Egypt alone, nor even His Majesty the King and his Cabinet alone, but the entire world — and which is therefore to be conveyed to the Reuters office to be broadcast to the ends of the earth: that Sidqi Pasha has not resigned, but will see His Majesty the King. The meaning of this being that when he sees His Majesty the King, he will either be granted what he desires, or he will resign. Pardon me — this is talk that would have been better said in Alexandria or Cairo, not in Versailles or Paris. This is talk that would have been better addressed to the Egyptian press, not to the English newspapers or to the Reuters office. This is talk that, to describe it in the mildest terms, oversteps the bounds of propriety, violates all conventions, and ought not to issue from a Prime Minister. Everything the Prime Minister has done in recent days oversteps the bounds of propriety, violates all conventions, and ought not to issue from a Prime Minister. A Prime Minister ought not to announce the opening of a ministerial crisis in a foreign country, and a Prime Minister ought not to give his crisis this form which his friends and supporters consider weighty and momentous, but which is in reality laughable and trivial.

For Europe, and the world beyond Europe, has crises and problems of far greater importance and gravity than the crisis of Sidqi Pasha and the problem of Sidqi Pasha. Whether Sidqi Pasha withdraws from power or retains power is not among the matters upon which the fate of peace in the farthest reaches of the earth depends. Nor does it befit a Prime Minister — however powerful he may be — to speak to foreigners about his ministerial crisis in this tone that suggests strength and violence and the capacity for defiance and the infliction of embarrassment. How much less so when he is weak, abandoned by circumstances and deserted by his patrons?

I told you that this blessed era wishes to end in a manner remarkable and contrary to all norms, just as it began in a manner remarkable and contrary to all norms. But what caused this blessed era to begin remarkably and anomalously was the Prime Minister's excess of self-confidence and his assurance in those who were then supplying him with strength and support. And what causes the conclusion of this era to be remarkable and contrary to all norms is Sidqi Pasha's immersion in despair and his loss of all composure in the face of this shameful failure that he had neither anticipated nor reckoned with. Had despair and failure not driven the Prime Minister beyond all bounds, he would not have become entangled in those varieties of self-contradiction in which he has been entangled in recent days. For on Tuesday he was announcing to the Al-Ahram offices that he had the most reliable assurances that the change of High Commissioner would not change British policy in Egypt — yet on Friday he was speaking to the Reuters office and the Al-Ahram

offices announcing to both that all he wished for was that the new High Commissioner would not depart from the policy of the old High Commissioner. God be glorified. And those most reliable assurances — what has God done with them? They had been convincing on Tuesday; they dissolved on Wednesday and Thursday. And by Friday the Pasha was spending his morning and his evening wishing that the new High Commissioner would preserve the policy of the old High Commissioner. The most likely outcome is that the Prime Minister will arrive in Alexandria on Tuesday and find that he can no longer even wish — that he has no choice but to resign himself to despair, and to receive the most reliable assurances that the change of High Commissioner will indeed change British policy in Egypt, and will substantially alter the relationship between the High Commissioner's residence and Egyptian affairs — not because the British wish this or resist it, but because the policy erected by Sidqi Pasha and Sir Percy Loraine has ended in such failure and collapse that there is no option but to abandon it and resume the circulation within that circle the British have drawn for themselves, in the hope that they might find from it a way out.

The amusing thing about the Prime Minister is that he has forgotten — perhaps illness caused him to forget, or perhaps despair caused him to forget — that begging favours of the British is something unbecoming to the man of the celebrated historic riposte to Mr MacDonald. For the British are a people upon whom Sidqi Pasha does not make wishes — he issues orders to them. Sidqi Pasha ought not to wish upon the British that they preserve for their new High Commissioner the policy of their old High Commissioner — he ought to command them to do so with the full force of command. Either they obey, in which case there is peace; or they disobey, in which case there will be a celebrated historic riposte — a riposte such as that celebrated historic riposte that Sidqi Pasha hurled in the face of the British three years ago and which they received in submission and humility.

All things change. The Prime Minister may have been strong three years ago — defying the British and holding them to the boundaries he prescribed — and then become weak after three years, making wishes upon the British at a railway station in Paris — with the whole world as witness to this wishing — that they not change their policy in Egypt by changing their High Commissioner. Then believe me, and believe the Prime Minister, when he tells you that the present Cabinet has never been stronger than it is now, and that we have the most reliable assurances that British policy will not change with the change of High Commissioner.

You will without doubt be incapable of reconciling these contradictions — but do not forget that this blessed era wishes to end in a remarkable and extraordinary fashion, just as it began in a remarkable and extraordinary fashion.

Kawkab al-Sharq, 3 September 1933.