

Fever

Its source is the transfer of the High Commissioner to Turkey, and there is nothing strange in that. For politics, like other afflictions, provokes fever when it reaches certain acute stages that strengthen despair and weaken hope, or impose despair by force and erase hope entirely. And just as it is easy to observe the fever provoked by various afflictions in the bodies of patients — recording its rises and falls — so it is easy to observe the stages of the fever that strikes political figures and to record its ascents and descents. And just as the rise and fall of fever affects what patients say and what they do, so political fever leaves its mark on what political figures say and what they do. And just as the constitutions of patients and their reserves of strength and weakness enable them to resist fever and hold out against it, or subject them to its authority and compel them to surrender to it — so the constitutions of political figures sometimes enable them to resist political fever, so that no trace of it appears in their words or deeds, and sometimes deliver them up to the authority of that fever, so that they can neither resist it nor hold out against it.

We have known among Egyptian political figures many leaders upon whom events bore down and misfortunes assailed and crises besieged from every direction — yet they stood firm against them, bore them with patience, their faces remaining radiant and their lips smiling, their speech remaining straight and even, with no crookedness or distortion, no confusion or agitation in it.

Our now-resigned Prime Minister was among such people before this year — and he was perhaps among the most extreme of them in this quality, the most studied and the most vain about it. The serious and the facetious alike spoke often of that smile which never left his radiant face whatever the circumstances. But the Prime Minister changed this year. Most likely, illness on the one hand and the unrelenting strain of political toil on the other weakened his powers of resistance and made him a man like other ordinary people — susceptible to political fever, which drove him beyond his accustomed bounds and pushed him toward words and deeds that do not issue from seasoned statesmen, and that did not formerly issue from him. Had his powers of resistance not weakened to the point where he had become like other people, the transfer of the High Commissioner would not have shaken him — for this transfer is an ordinary matter of no significance and no consequence, and will have no effect whatsoever on Anglo-Egyptian policy. Grant that it is of great consequence and far-reaching effect on that policy, as the opposition — who know nothing of politics and understand nothing of its subtleties and inner workings — would have it; even then, men of genius in statecraft and men of great stature do not show, or do not display, their concern about things of great consequence and far-reaching effect.

Yet no sooner did the news of the High Commissioner's transfer reach the Prime Minister than he leapt up in elation or agitation — bounding from Lucerne to Paris. Nor did he content himself with moving to Paris in order to be near our legation there and our legation in London, and to keep communication easy between himself and the two capitals — the capital of Egypt where domestic policy is being settled, and the capital of England where both domestic and foreign policy are being settled — but he hastened his return to Egypt, curtailing his leave and his convalescence drastically. Everything indicates that had the Prime Minister been able to leap to Egypt as he leapt to Paris, he would not have hesitated or faltered. But crossing the sea required patience, and he was compelled to prepare and reflect — yet the political fever began to rise by

degrees, for reasons we may know or may not know. And the Prime Minister was not content with hastening his return — he sent his secretary ahead of him as a herald of this return and of what it carried, or as a harbinger of this return and of what it carried in the way of resignation, or as both herald and harbinger at one and the same time.

The Prime Minister would have done better to keep his private secretary with him until his return, for he had taken him along only because he needed him — so to do without him for more than two weeks was a serious sacrifice that the Prime Minister would never have made but for this political fever, which imposes extravagance upon people on many an occasion. Nor did the Prime Minister content himself with this herald-harbinger he had sent ahead of him — he wished to add to him a herald in the morning and a herald in the evening, or a harbinger in the morning and a harbinger in the evening. So he summoned the Al-Ahram offices, then summoned the Al-Muqattam offices, and charged them both with carrying these two messages to those in Egypt who have a concern in the affairs of the Cabinet.

The Prime Minister thus sent ahead of him a troop of heralds and harbingers. It would have been appropriate, after this — the message having been delivered and the messengers having discharged what was asked of them — for him to calm down, to settle, and to return to the manner of statesmen who know how to bear misfortunes and events with patience. But the Prime Minister did not calm down and did not settle, and did not return to the manner of patient statesmen. Instead the fever continued to rise, and the Prime Minister's words and deeds began to tumble over one another in a violent and alarming manner — negotiations were continuing between him and Alexandria, he was dispatching another harbinger or another herald by means of an English journalist, he was preparing to board the train in order to dispatch yet another herald or harbinger through the Reuters offices; and our Minister Plenipotentiary, Fakhri Pasha, taking alarm at this vehemence, asked the Reuters representative at the station in the manner of one reassuring himself about the Prime Minister: "Do you really think that what you see in this man gives reason to think that its owner is ill?" The train carried the Prime Minister onward to the city of Venice — and in Venice, for those who know it, there is that which inspires calm and tranquillity. It is enough for a troubled soul to look upon those serene and peaceful canals that thread their way through the city for his spirit to grow calm and his heart to be at ease; it is enough to look upon those gondolas that glide over those canals in stillness and gentleness for his spirit to grow yet more calm and his heart yet more at ease. It is enough to look upon the manifestations of art and the marvels of beauty that nature and human hands have together created in that city for his spirit to turn away from politics and its symptoms and its ailments, and to rise into a sweet and serene sky of imagination that breathes into the soul life and repose, hope and pleasure and delight.

All of this is calculated to soothe the fever of bodies and the fever of souls — yet Venice failed to achieve with the Prime Minister what it achieves with philosophers and writers and poets, and with ordinary people as well. It did not soothe his vehemence, nor moderate his agitation. Rather, he boarded the ship as he had boarded the train — if the reports are accurate in circulating that he telegraphed the Chief Secretary requesting that a date be fixed at which he might have the honour of an audience with His Majesty the King upon his arrival in Alexandria. I confess that I hope with all my heart that this report is not accurate, for if it is, it is truly remarkable. All people know full well that eminent Egyptians, on returning from a journey near or far, seek the honour

of a royal audience in order to present to the holder of the throne the salutation they owe him and to express the reverence and respect that overflow their hearts. Prime ministers and their ministerial colleagues are the foremost among people in this and the swiftest to it. And all people know that such audiences are requested after the return — not before it, and after those requesting them have entered their names in the register of the Palace. We do not believe that appointments of this kind are requested in this manner — by telegram before boarding ship, or from on board the ship — unless there are momentous events, or events short of momentous, that require the Prime Minister to hasten to seek this appointment before he reaches Alexandria. This is particularly the case given that the people had already learned that he would have the honour of an audience — they learned this from the nature of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, and they learned it also from the Prime Minister's own statement, which he announced to the English journalist and to the Reuters offices before leaving Paris. You will agree with me without doubt that this report, if accurate — and I hope it is not — indicates that this political crisis found in the Prime Minister a man of weak powers of resistance and endurance, who was thus driven beyond his accustomed bounds and carried past the limits of convention.

The reports tell us that the Palace has not yet fixed the appointment that the Prime Minister requested by telegram. He will arrive safe and sound tomorrow in Alexandria, God willing, and he will go to Ras el-Tin and enter his name in the Palace register like any other prime minister or eminent Egyptian. There will be ample time thereafter for the Prime Minister to receive the fixing of the appointment he requested for the honour of an audience with His Majesty the King. He may receive this appointment on Tuesday evening; he may receive it on Wednesday; he may receive it later still. But what is reasonable, customary, and appropriate to the procedures of the Palace and the conventions of politics is that he should receive the fixing of this appointment in Alexandria — not in Venice, and not on board ship.

After all that, these behaviours that have issued from the Prime Minister in recent days — most of which have been confirmed and are no longer open to doubt — are clear evidence that those who advised the Prime Minister to withdraw from government and relieve himself of the burdens of politics when illness weighed heavily upon him were neither betraying him nor mistaken. They were in truth sincere advisers, and in truth rightly guided toward what was correct.

All we can hope is that this end to which the governance of Sidqi Pasha has come may be a lesson for others who take on the leadership of cabinets — teaching them that shouldering the burdens of governance as it ought to be shouldered, and as befits a man of dignity, requires complete health, full strength, and a vigour that knows no weakness and need fear no faltering.

Kawkab al-Sharq, 4 September 1933.