

Rest

As for Cairo, it is immersed in a calm that resembles sleep — the kind of calm in which the conscience suffers the most intense pain, and in which the heart is thrown into the most violent turmoil, while the outward senses remain tranquil and settled, as if beyond this apparent tranquility and stability there were no seething conscience, nor agitated heart.

And as for the farthest reaches of Egypt, it is awake — intensely awake, moving with violent motion, raging with immense fury. In its groaning, its movement, and its raging, its conscience and its feeling, its heart and all its outward senses, take part together.

Yesterday it was calm and settled like Cairo, but it awoke, and its awakening drove it into this violent motion today, because two leaders of the people journeyed to it to visit it and renew the covenant with it: they are His Excellency the venerable President Mustafa al-Nahhas Pasha, head of the Wafd, and the great master Makram Ebeid. And our ailing Prime Minister sees the calm of Cairo and is pleased, and he senses the movement of Upper Egypt and is displeased.

I do not know to what extent his health allows him to endure the successive effects upon his soul of this pleasure which has neither depth nor permanence, and the effects of this displeasure which resembles fear. And I do not know to what extent his health allows him to contemplate the philosophy of this calm that brings no relief, and the philosophy of this activity that brings no reassurance. But the thing about which there is no doubt is that political life does not smile at our ailing Prime Minister with a sweet, beautiful mouth. Perhaps his quiet, sorrowful glances, which are not free of apprehension, fall upon this political life and see in it a face with much frowning, and upon it much scowling, with no share of the cheer of hope, nor of that delight which betokens strength and the love of survival and the desire to have more of it.

For the Prime Minister's ways, since he leapt to power, have been very long, very arduous, very tortuous. He does not advance a step without being compelled to halt; he does not look ahead without being compelled to look behind; he does not swerve to the right without being compelled to veer to the left. And every time he presses forward, exertion drains him and fatigue brings him to his utmost limit, he looks and finds the road before him stretching without end, twisting without order. So he goes forward and goes back; he takes to his right and takes to his left. He gazes long at the sky and gazes long at the earth, and he listens with both ears, hoping to make out something clear from these echoes that reach him, yet he makes out nothing.

And all of this affects his limited strength, so it weakens; and his energy, so it flags; and his health, so it sickens. And he forgets the long road before him, and forgets the short roads he has traveled. And he forgets the punishments and the hardships, and forgets these mingled echoes, and sinks for a time into his illness and his pains, and so he rests in weariness and is calm in anxiety. Then he comes to, and makes a feeble effort toward recovery, and recovery makes a feeble effort toward him as well.

And he takes refuge in this hotel in the shadow of the Pyramids to complete his share of this wearying rest, and he opens his eyes to look ahead, and lo, the road stretches without end; and to look behind, and lo, he has covered only a short distance — very short. And he descends into himself seeking there the provisions and supplies to traverse this road that does not end, and lo, his health is meager and in need of care, and his strength is frail and in need of tending, and what remains for him of effort is greater a thousand times and more than the energy he possesses. And he is worn out; he is angry without revolt, and indignant without fury. And a smile, all resignation, is drawn upon his pale face and his furrowed brow.

Thus does the Prime Minister now spend his days in Mena House. He has covered a far, arduous stage, yet he is still at the beginning of the road, and he has none of the implements of travel that would enable him to proceed on his way. Everything around him tells him that his policy has failed, and failed. He has neither won the support of the people, nor won the neutrality of the people, nor realized for this people any of its hopes — such that, if he denies it today, he may be compelled to acknowledge it tomorrow. Nor is he able to mend what has passed and resume a new policy that would erase all or some of the traces of his old policy.

Everything around the Prime Minister in politics is bleak and dark, even in his private circle. His aides are weak; their shoulders, however broad, cannot independently bear these burdens which he has carried alone. And the people sense that and dwell upon it, and go to excess in doing so. And Parliament walks along its path with a gentle tread, with no vigor in it and no fertility, until *al-Ahram* describes it as a sick invalid. And the nation looks upon all of this with indignation filled with that pride which appears in the guise of pity and compassion for those who have exhausted, in wronging it and trifling with its interests, a strength that would have been better spent in doing it good and realizing its hopes.

This is the Prime Minister's rest now in Mena House. It is not the rest that a patient deserves after the patients have groaned, nor the rest that a striver deserves after struggle has worn him out. But the Prime Minister is the one who chose his path to this rest, and took this stance toward his entire nation — a stance that brought him no good, and was followed by nothing but illness and pain and sorrow. And he is the one who spent all his health with a generosity that resembles extravagance, to realize what there is no way to realize, and to attain what there is no hope of attaining. If anyone could compel the Nile to turn back and climb to its source instead of flowing downward to the sea, then the Prime Minister could compel the Egyptian nation to turn its face away from its hopes and its lofty ideals of true freedom and true dignity and true independence, and to content itself with a little of the appearances of freedom, the appearances of dignity, and the semblances of independence under the shadow of infallible guardians.

The Nile will always flow to the sea, and Egypt will always flow toward realizing its hopes and attaining its lofty ideals. And all those who ascribe to themselves more strength than they possess will always grow weary and always fail and always be dejected — those who take this long, arduous, tortuous road that the Prime Minister has taken.

Kawkab al-Sharq, 20-3-1933, p. 219.