

Solutions

Kawkab al-Sharq, 7 September 1933

The performance of this remarkable story, which the Prime Minister set in motion ten days ago to amuse the people, has yet to conclude. It may conclude today, or it may conclude tomorrow, or its run may extend for days yet. The people are therefore entitled to thank the Prime Minister for this comedy with which he has sought to distract them from the anxieties that beset them.

A hint at resignation — then an explicit statement; contemplation of resignation — then a firm resolve; then a challenge and an ultimatum; then a retreat and a moderating of tone; then hesitation that inclines more towards drawing back than towards pressing forward and persisting. Before tomorrow's dawn breaks and before tonight falls, the Prime Minister will have taken a step or several steps, drawn a curtain over this turbulence, and raised a curtain on a new act of the story.

Yet we are thoroughly sceptical that the whole affair is mere farce, or that the entire story is mere comedy. In all probability, behind this farce lies something serious, and beneath the comedy there are things that can only be described, at the very least, as enormously consequential and far-reaching in their effect on whatever remains of the Prime Minister's political life — which may prove short or may prove long.

Perhaps the dispatch sent by the Daily Telegraph correspondent to his newspaper before he left Alexandria — which perturbed the Prime Minister, broke his silence, drove him to appeal to the Daily Telegraph for mercy and fair dealing, which set the ministers on their feet and knocked them off them again, which filled the hearts of his supporters with dread and terror, and which prompted the holding of celebrations and the delivery of speeches — perhaps this dispatch will prove to be the most telling portent that alerted the Prime Minister to the fact that the atmosphere surrounding him was no longer clear or serene. For the Daily Telegraph correspondent confirmed in that dispatch — on the authority of a reliable source — that the present cabinet has no place among the seats of government, and that folly alone had driven out of this cabinet men who possess — in the words of the Daily Telegraph correspondent or his

reliable source — rare competence and outstanding distinction.

It was right that the Prime Minister should have known the true identity of this reliable source who whispered this revelation to the Daily Telegraph correspondent; and it seems the Prime Minister did know this source and was aggrieved by him. If you add to this the inescapable fact that this source was not only scheming against the Prime Minister in words alone, but was also opposing and resisting him in deed — finding ways to block things the Prime Minister wished to proceed, and to proceed with things the Prime Minister wished to block — you will understand that this comic story that Egypt is witnessing, and the world with it, is not entirely play; it is rather a story whose outward face is play and comedy, and whose inner reality is a grave and frightening seriousness.

The newspapers — with al-Ahrām at their head — claimed that the Prime Minister had put forward demands and made their acceptance a condition of his remaining in government. People began asking about these demands, seeking them out and trying to discover to whom they had been presented and before whom they had been laid. And to whom was directed the challenge that the Prime Minister had made manifest? No one gave a plain answer to these questions of the people; but the obscurity began to lift a little, and people and newspapers spoke here and there of the Prime Minister's exasperation with some of his colleagues, and of his wishing for two things: first, that the conduct of government be left exclusively to him with no one sharing it with him; and second, that he change the composition of the cabinet to remove certain individuals from it. People and newspapers pressed this line insistently, and then the Prime Minister began, since yesterday, to display his willingness to withdraw from resignation and to take up the burdens of government — having previously been resolute in shrugging them from his shoulders. Has the Prime Minister therefore been granted his demands, so that certain hands have been stayed from working in the government that he wants kept exclusively for himself, with no one troubling him in it? Or has the Prime Minister been permitted to change the composition of his cabinet to remove from it those colleagues who exasperate him?

These newspapers are today speaking of something relating to the tea party held for the Prime Minister yesterday, attended by those who attended and absent from it those who were absent. And in the newspapers' accounts and observations there are allusions that need neither explanation nor interpretation. These reports reach us in a steady stream — some of which have been published in the papers — that the Prime Minister may bring into his cabinet persons not currently in it, and remove from his cabinet persons presently serving in it. It has therefore been granted to the Prime Minister to have what he wanted, all or in part; but all of this is mere talk, in which the face of truth will not appear until this evening or tomorrow morning. We have been watching the story for ten days; there is nothing to prevent us from watching it for one more day or part of a day.

Yet thinking through all of this leads to two conclusions:

The first: that the path of domestic politics is no longer smooth or easy before the Prime Minister from this day forward. Şidqī Pasha has begun to taste what other ministers before him have tasted of that bitter gall that taints power when it approaches its end and draws to its close. If Şidqī Pasha were to heed his own counsel he would resign — not out of preference for his health, for it may appear that power has become more precious to him than health — but for another reason he knows full well: that power will hold no savour for him from this day forward, and that the road of power will not be free, from this day forward, of hardships and steep passes and injurious thorns.

The second: that all this uproar and commotion, all these manoeuvres and counter-manoevres, all this advance and retreat, revolves around specific individuals whose hands are to be given free rein in government, or whose hands are to be stayed from government to a greater or lesser degree — not around the great national interest. It is all the same to Egypt whether the Prime Minister continues attending his office or takes to his house; it is all the same to Egypt whether the Prime Minister's hand in government is given unlimited latitude or his hand is restrained somewhat; it is all the same to Egypt whether power belongs exclusively to the Prime Minister or this or that senior official shares it with him; and

it is all the same to Egypt whether the Prime Minister's colleagues are Wafdists or Unionists or independents. All of this is the same to Egypt, because Egypt is suffocating under the policy that the Prime Minister mapped out and proceeded to implement — a policy that has brought upon Egypt all the evil it has brought, and visited upon Egypt all the harm it has visited.

Egypt is satisfied by none of these solutions, nor by the wordplay with which tongues are let loose. The one and only thing Egypt wants and will settle for nothing less than is this: that it be the object of thought, that it be the subject of every calculation, that the changing of cabinets be a means of satisfying it and realising its interests — not a means of humiliating and exploiting it, and competing over prestige and power for whose benefit, exactly?

It appears that the politicians who manage Egypt's affairs of government among themselves do not wish to keep pace with the nation's hopes and aspirations until they find themselves incapable of that keeping pace; rather it appears that these politicians who manage Egypt's affairs of government among themselves have not been endowed with the discernment and good judgement that the British have been endowed with — those who look upon political affairs in Egypt from near or far. The British change their High Commissioner because they assess and understand circumstances, know the value of established facts, and wish to meet them with the necessary caution and astuteness; while the Egyptian politicians proceed along their path thinking only of themselves, stopping only at what they want for themselves in the way of power and prestige.

Whatever the case may be, the present ministerial crisis is nothing but a small ripple in that wave raised by a breeze on the surface of a lake, which vanishes before long without changing a thing. The real crisis that deserves to be thought through and earnestly addressed is far wider in scope, deeper in reach, more complex, and too hard to be resolved by whether or not the Prime Minister can be reconciled with other senior officials. Let the Prime Minister stay or resign — his staying changes nothing, and his resignation changes nothing, and the days will show the

Prime Minister that the matter is far more intractable than he thinks.