

Pardon Me...!!

Kawkab el Sharq, 27/4/1933

When actors fall ill, they step away from the stage. When singers fall ill, they cease to sing. When athletes fall ill, they withdraw from play. But when ministers fall ill, they cling to their portfolios, fling themselves upon them, and lash their bodies to their chairs with ropes of flax — as Imru' al-Qays would say.

Among actors and singers there are those who retire from the stage and fall silent before age overtakes them and weakness sets in, because they know full well that everything has a term it cannot exceed and a limit it cannot surpass. They know that if they persist in performing until weakness catches them, they will falter and fall short, stirring in their audiences two contrary emotions: indignation in the hard-hearted, who prize their own pleasure and entertainment above all else, and pity and compassion in the tender-hearted, who extend sympathy and condolence to the weak.

We saw the celebrated actress Marthe leave the Comédie-Française in 1917 at the very height of her glory, because she could not bear to see the public's admiration for her turn to pity or to contempt as the years advanced. And we saw Silvain, the great actor, remain at the Comédie-Française into old age, until some received him with pity and others with whistles and jeers.

So too we have seen prime ministers who, upon sensing weakness or suffering some slight indisposition, resigned at once — so that the interests of the state might not be imperilled and their own competence not become a subject of gossip. And we have seen others whom illness visited and lingered over, whom weakness struck and made its dwelling, yet who would not resign and would not heed the counsel of those who advised resignation. They held fast to their offices as though they had no objection to illness being their companion on the slow road they travelled, until they stumbled at last to its destination — the relinquishing of power, willing or unwilling.

We have seen, among actors and prime ministers alike, both kinds; and both have stirred in us, by turns, the emotions of compassion and of exasperation and displeasure. How we used to wish that our prime minister would be unwilling to arouse either of those responses in us. For the newspapers yesterday and today have been explaining his agitation and his flustered incoherence before that telegram published by *Al-Ahram* the day before yesterday — and the communiqué that followed it yesterday — by saying that his health has deteriorated, his nerves have given way, and he has become incapable of resistance, incapable of composure and of mastering affairs. Had he been sound, vigorous, and possessed of his full faculties, master of himself and of others as well, he would not have had need of that long declaration he broadcast in the press yesterday — a declaration that establishes nothing and denies nothing, and points to only one thing: that affairs have slipped from his grasp, scattered beyond his control, and that he can neither contain nor manage them.

People claim that among the most severe symptoms of the illness from which we pray God may restore the prime minister is forgetfulness, disordered thinking, and an inability to reason

soundly. A group of them were discussing the prime minister's declaration yesterday — and they were not all his adversaries, nor all his supporters. Some among them were opponents, and some were supporters, supporters to excess. Yet all of them repudiated this declaration: his friends repudiated it in anger, and his adversaries repudiated it in pity.

They all stopped at the passage near the end where the prime minister speaks of what he calls the myth of the national government, laying down for it conditions and restrictions identical to those set out by Sir Percy Loraine a year ago — conditions published in *The African World*, discussed in *Al-Ahram*, and debated in the press for weeks — conditions which require those inclined towards a national government to embrace the new constitution, to submit to those charged with implementing it, and to place their hands in the hands of those implementers; conditions which hold that the country has a constitution that must be obeyed and respected, and that this constitution requires that national governments may only be formed by agreement with the parliamentary parties currently in existence.

These men stopped at this passage in the prime minister's declaration. Some of them laughed at it; some felt pity for him. And they said to one another: The prime minister has governed for three years, during which time Egypt possessed a constitution to which he was among those who swore an oath of loyalty and fidelity. Egypt had a parliament established by that constitution, and it was the rightful obligation of anyone forming a government to reach agreement with the parliamentary parties, and to strive earnestly to win their confidence and earn their approval. Why, then, did the prime minister not observe this constitutional principle on the day he formed his government? Why did he not submit to the constitution and respect its sanctity, having sworn that he would? Why did he not build his government on the consent of parliament and the agreement of its parties? Why did he abolish that constitution and replace it with another? Why did he dissolve that parliament and establish another in its place? Was he at the time persuaded that he was committing a transgression? For who is more unjust than those who commit transgressions knowing themselves to be in the wrong? Or was he at the time persuaded that what he did was entirely permissible? In that case, why is that same act permissible for him and forbidden to others? And who has claimed that the standards of morality, law, and order apply to one man but not another, to one faction but not another — so that what Sidqi Pasha does is seen as an evil, while what someone other than Sidqi Pasha does is not?

Those who establish such pernicious precedents for others deserve no surprise, and no grounds for anger or indignation, when others repay them in kind with the very evil they themselves set in motion. Those who fling open the doors of subverting order and violating the constitution deserve no shock when others enter through the very doors they opened, and prepare themselves to do what their predecessors did — the predecessors who drove them towards this evil. Those who tamper with established institutions, altering and overturning them for no reason other than that those institutions do not suit their own opinions, inclinations, and interests, ought to know that they are imposing those private opinions, private inclinations, and private interests upon an entire nation. They therefore deserve to receive from others what others received from them — quite apart from the nation's reckoning with them for the interests they neglected, the rights they squandered, and the dignity they trampled.

The prime minister has set for all those who covet power and cling to it the precedent of abolishing the constitution and dissolving parliament. Let him therefore not be surprised if there arise in Egypt, whether from among his friends or his enemies, those who do today to the new constitution and the new parliament exactly what he did yesterday. And so long as the craving for power, the ambition for authority, and the greed for office and the wealth and prestige it yields — so long as all of this entitles men to perjure themselves, to abrogate pacts and pledges, to set one constitution in place of another and summon one parliament in place of another, then a great door of evil has been opened upon this nation, and the life of the nation has been placed on the edge of a deep abyss into which its politics, its morals, and its social order are on the verge of tumbling — unless it possesses sufficient patience, steadiness, self-mastery, hope in the future, and trust in God to preserve it from the fall.

All of this was what those men discussed yesterday. And some of them said to one another: Had the prime minister not been ill, he would not have betrayed himself with this speech. And others said: Had he not been ill, he would not have said with his own tongue and in his own newspaper what his adversaries have been saying about him ever since he rose against the constitution and abolished it, rose against the parliament and scattered it, rose against liberty and cast it into the depths of the prisons, binding it with the heaviest of chains and fetters.

And had the prime minister not been ill, he would not be condemning in his adversaries what he permitted himself, nor prohibiting others today from what he was urging them towards for years. For to what was the prime minister calling when he formed his government? He was calling for revolt against the constitution, and calling for the subversion of order. Had he issued that call and pressed it before taking office and securing the alignment and support of the British, the government of the day would have been fully within its rights to bring him before the courts to answer for his rebellion against the constitution and his violation of order. But he did all of that as prime minister, with the reins of power in his hands and the forces of the state at his disposal — so that no one was able to bring him before the courts or call him to account for what he had done. Only his opponents, who were then and still are champions of the law, defenders of the constitution, and guardians of the sanctity of order, were able to denounce his conduct — as they continue to denounce it to this day, having suffered grievously at his hands, and continuing to suffer.

All of this was the conversation of those men yesterday. The prime minister may rest assured that people are saying this, and more, and that they will go on saying this and more for as long as he retains his grip on power. He may rest assured that those who flatter his position, who paint for him a picture of total triumph on every front and tell him that public opinion holds him in the highest esteem, are deceiving him and lying to him. He may be certain of this, turn it over in his own mind, and dwell long upon it in thought. And if he does so, he will not blame those who dream of a national government and strive toward it if they consider seizing their moment and vaulting to power without approaching him in friendship or placing their hands in his.

For they had no desire to do so when he was strong; all the more reason they should have no desire to do so now that he is weak. And in preparing to displace him from power and succeed him in it, they do no more than he himself did — for the standard of governance in Egypt today

has become, through the lamentable work of Sidqi Pasha and his like, nothing but force, force alone, without order and without a constitution.

As for Egypt — where the ambitious arise, where the reckless tamper with her freedom, where the arrogant aspire to her humiliation — she stands fast in her place. She has no love for scheming and no inclination toward it. She despises governance that comes from afar rather than from within, that arises from the violation of the constitution rather than from it, that is no mirror of her free will, her independent judgment, the image of her honour and her dignity.

This Egypt detests what the prime minister has done, and has no wish to do as he has done. She holds fast to her faith, her rights, and her dignity. She is confident that this covert and overt war between those who covet power and those who aspire to it will exhaust them all, drain all their strength, and before long restore affairs to their proper course and return them to those who deserve them.

Let the prime minister think, then, if his health permits him to think. Let him act, if his strength permits him to act. Let him strive, if he is able, to turn away from his office those restless souls who press toward it and wish to climb to it — those souls who read his words yesterday, his pride in his own strength, his demand that men place their hands in his in order to reach power, and could only respond with one word that speaks volumes of esteem and regard:

Pardon me...!!