

Reception

Egypt has never witnessed anything like this before today, nor will it witness anything like it again. Whatever the passing years may bring, this moment will remain unique in Egypt's history, for the Prime Minister whom Egypt receives today is an extraordinary man among Egyptians—and indeed among all Eastern peoples. Neither Egypt nor the East has ever known his equal in the past, nor will either know his equal in the future. When have people ever seen a sick man govern with the authority of the healthy, a weak man rule with the power of the strong, or an absent man govern as though always present? When have they seen a minister persuade the impoverished debtor that he is prosperous and wealthy, the hungry and deprived that he is full and satisfied, the fearful that he lives in safety and peace, the enslaved that he is free and independent? Human life depends less upon reality than upon illusion. People are happy whenever happiness is suggested to them and they are persuaded to believe in it, whether or not they truly possess it. The Prime Minister has succeeded magnificently in this task. There is now, supposedly, no one in Egypt who feels hunger or poverty, no one who fears oppression or injustice. All the people are intoxicated without wine; the Prime Minister has bewitched them away from reality until they are satisfied and content. This evening he will arrive in Alexandria and witness one of those miracles to which he has become so accustomed that they no longer astonish him. He will see fifteen million Egyptians all gathered to welcome and celebrate him. No old man, no child, no infant will have stayed behind. They will have come from every corner of the country until Alexandria itself contains them all, and the sun rises from the west when the Prime Minister appears before the people. Had even a fraction of such a miracle occurred for any other great man, it would have intoxicated him and driven him beyond the bounds of moderation. But the Prime Minister has grown used to all of this until he has become weary of it. Thus he will cast his gaze upon the nation that adores him, then gesture with a single finger as though saying: "Return now, thanked and rewarded. You have fulfilled your duty. Go back to your lives of prosperity, tranquility, abundance, and smiling contentment." Then one curtain will fall and another will rise. The first curtain will descend upon the comic scenes staged for Egypt, France, and the whole world in Versailles, Alexandria, and the railway stations of Paris throughout the past week. People first saw a Ministry proclaimed strong and stable, then suddenly threatened with resignation. They saw hesitation, bargaining, advance and retreat, negotiations flashing like lightning through the air. They saw threats directed against Egypt, and weakness displayed before the English in tones of pleading and supplication. Programs were published announcing the royal audience, the reception, and the ceremonies. Then suddenly the crisis was declared resolved, either by resignation or by remaining in office. Upon all this the first curtain shall fall. The second curtain rises upon something perhaps serious, perhaps still comic. The program was abruptly changed once again. The royal audience may now take place this very afternoon. The ship has

increased its speed. The matter appears more dangerous and more grave than people first imagined. Those who hold authority clearly do not wish this crisis to continue, however amusing it may seem, because it stirs conflicting emotions and contradictory passions in the people. Thus the serious part of the story may begin today—if the Prime Minister's health permits it. Egyptians will soon discover whether the drama of the past week was seriousness or jest, courage or retreat, or merely another political maneuver. Whether Sidqi Pasha resigns or remains, whether his resignation is accepted or refused, one undeniable fact has appeared clearly before everyone: the Egyptian nation—except those who live for the Prime Minister and through the Prime Minister—felt joy and satisfaction when it heard that the Ministry might resign. Likewise, the nation rejoiced when it heard that the High Commissioner had been transferred. This joy means only one thing: the Egyptian people are profoundly weary of the policies of this era and long to be rid of them. This national will may be understood correctly or ignored. Sidqi Pasha may be removed from power just as Sir Percy Loraine was removed from representing Britain in Egypt—or perhaps he may not. But one thing is beyond dispute: the will of the Egyptian nation is now unmistakably clear. If this truth is ignored as it has been ignored for the past three years, such neglect will benefit no one. Egyptians have shown today, more strongly than ever before, that they refuse to be governed against their wishes or turned into instruments serving the ambitions of others. They wish their affairs returned to them so that they may govern themselves for their own interests, not for the interests of foreigners or privileged minorities. If this truth is understood, Egypt's affairs may proceed well. If not, then difficulties will multiply and disasters already approaching the country will eventually descend upon all alike—the guilty and the innocent together. God alone can guide men toward wisdom and teach them that the politics of monopolizing power and exploiting entire peoples for the benefit of a small group belong to the past and can produce nothing but harm.