

Reconciliation

At first they were merely rumors whispered secretly from one person to another. Then they spread openly through conversation, circulated through clubs and gatherings, and finally settled in people's minds as an explanation for the ministerial crisis.

You have surely understood what I mean. Hardly had the "Prime Minister" stirred his crisis from Paris or Versailles before newspapers began hinting at a disagreement between him and a high-ranking official whose influence had placed limits upon his authority in government.

The newspapers suggested that the "Prime Minister" resented these restrictions and wished either to free himself from them by resigning or else to remain in office with power entirely concentrated in his own hands, beyond the reach of any official whose position granted him influence over affairs of government.

The "Prime Minister" returned after the country had been filled with reports of his resignation, its official causes publicly declared by him, and its hidden causes discussed by journalists and storytellers alike.

No sooner had he attended the tea gathering organized in his honor than observers noticed that this "high official" was absent from the gathering. Immediately they began linking his absence to the crisis itself.

Some claimed that the official had not merely stayed away from the reception but had left Alexandria entirely, leaving the city to the celebrants. Others insisted that he had remained in the city and spent the hour of the gathering visiting one of the ministers who had been too ill to attend.

People pursued endless interpretations that either strengthened or weakened the supposed connection between the crisis and the absence of this "high official." Yet the days that followed convinced most people that this official was not entirely innocent of responsibility for the complications surrounding the Ministry and the worsening difficulties it faced.

For people knew that the official and the "Prime Minister" had previously met frequently. He visited the Prime Minister at home and in his office, held long discussions with him, and even attended certain meetings of the Council of Ministers. Yet since the Prime Minister's return these meetings had

ceased—or at least all public knowledge of them had ceased.

The “Prime Minister” exerted considerable effort trying to persuade people that illness alone had driven him toward resignation. But people remained unconvinced, and they were justified in their doubt. Healthy and powerful men often pretend illness when circumstances force them to withdraw from power. How much easier, then, for a man already associated in public memory with sickness to make illness the explanation for political crisis.

Thus people concluded that illness alone could not explain the crisis, especially since the Prime Minister’s previous illness dated back only eight months. They therefore listened willingly to the journalists and storytellers who insisted that disagreement between the Prime Minister and this high official played a major role in producing the crisis.

Then Al-Ahram strengthened this belief by reporting confidently that when the Prime Minister considered resigning, he had written to Egypt recommending a successor and proposing that the affairs of the state be divided into two parts: one under his own authority within Parliament and the other under the authority of his successor within the administration.

Al-Ahram further declared that certain influential circles had rejected this proposal, thereby intensifying and complicating the crisis.

Naturally people expected the “Prime Minister,” or at least some official authority, to deny these reports decisively and remove all doubt. Yet no such clear denial ever appeared. The government newspapers attempted timidly to challenge the story, while the voice of Al-Ahram remained strong and persuasive. Consequently people believed Al-Ahram, especially since officials who frequently issued denials about lesser matters remained strangely silent on this issue.

Yesterday Al-Muqattam reinforced all these reports by describing the small private meeting held at the home of the “Minister of the Interior,” attended by the “Prime Minister,” his former deputy, and this “high official.” There they drank tea together, mixed perhaps with sweet reproaches or bitter reproaches, until relations were restored and they departed thanking their host for his successful mediation.

Clearly, then, there had indeed been tension, and tea together with reproach had served to soften or heal it. The newspapers and the storytellers had not invented the disagreement between the “Prime Minister”

and this “high official.”

Nor were people mistaken when they believed that the Prime Minister’s withdrawal of his resignation had not truly resolved the crisis but merely postponed it. For crises are not ended simply by ignoring their causes.

The very fact that the Minister of the Interior worked so carefully to arrange this reconciliation proves that all involved recognized that the disagreement between the “Prime Minister” and this “high official” remained like a thorn in the throat of the Ministry and a splinter in its side that had somehow to be removed.

But did they truly succeed in removing that thorn completely? Or did they merely soften its sharpness enough to allow tea to pass comfortably through the throat, even when mixed with reproach?

The government supporters will certainly insist that relations between the “Prime Minister” and this “high official” have never been purer than they are now. Yet these same supporters have also repeatedly claimed that the Ministry has never been stronger than it was at the very moment when the Prime Minister attempted to resign.

Do not therefore listen too carefully to those who insist that one evening of tea removed every difficulty and purified the political atmosphere completely.

Listen instead to the ancient poet, who understood human conflict more honestly:

“Bring me my weapon, for I see the war growing only more violent.

Grass may grow upon the graves of the dead,

Yet the bitterness within hearts remains unchanged.”

We sincerely hope that harmony may indeed return between those who quarreled and that the tea they shared may cleanse hearts of resentment and hostility.

But we hope for something greater still: not merely that the affairs of the Ministry may become orderly again—for ministerial affairs concern us only secondarily—but that the affairs of Egypt herself may become orderly.

Egypt is greater and more important than any ministry or any dispute among officials.

Yes, we sincerely hope this reconciliation may allow the “Prime Minister” to devote himself fully to the real crisis of the Egyptian people: to restraining the banks from devouring Egyptian wealth, preventing the state from seizing lands whose owners cannot pay taxes, declaring firmly to foreign powers that Egypt will repay its debts only in paper currency, and restoring to Egyptians confidence in the safety of their lives, property, and institutions.

We wish all this sincerely, while reminding those who reconciled on Thursday that reconciliation is lawful among Muslims unless it makes the forbidden lawful or the lawful forbidden.

And they know perfectly well that what is lawful in Egyptian politics is clear, and what is forbidden is equally clear. Personal quarrels and reconciliations do not alter the destiny of nations.

What truly creates crises, deepens them, and eventually topples ministries is precisely the corruption that no sound politics and no divine law can permit: making the forbidden lawful and the lawful forbidden.