

# Torpor . . .

*Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), 22 June 1934*

The Ministry went to excess in making promises, until those who believed them — among the ministry's supporters and friends — grew hopeful, expecting that clear signs would come to them proving that this unhappy country had at last been granted a good government, one that would bring it out of darkness into light, out of hardship into ease, out of poverty into wealth. They expected it to resolve for them whatever knotty problems seemed intractable, and to smooth away for them whatever obstacles proved stubborn, so that the crisis would clear from every direction. Then they went on waiting, month after month after month, while the sky rained down upon them promises and hopes, the clouds rising sometimes from the direction of the Finance Ministry, where the brilliant Minister stood, and sometimes from another direction, where the Premiership stood, where the good man stood. Then the rain would fall upon the halls of Parliament, where the Senators and Deputies who believe in the Ministry sit, expecting good from it, never doubting it, and never begrudging it their trust. And the supporters and friends went on waiting as the withdrawal of promises and hopes rose to the sky, then the rain would descend from it onto the earth — but the earth remained barren, untouched by fertility, dead, with no life stirring in it. Until the supporters and friends began to feel that these clouds that rained promises and hopes upon them were on the verge of betraying their expectations, and disappointing their hopes with a corrupting disappointment. There, a large faction of them gathered — they say it numbered upward of forty — and consulted together, then agreed among themselves to interpellate the Ministry and drag it out of the life of promises and hopes into the life of productive speech and useful work.

And they signed the interpellation, and put it forward, held firmly to it, and pressed the Ministry hard, and debated it at length — then it responded to them, and accepted the battle they had put forward, but it kept postponing the day of the confrontation, once and then again, and refused to arm itself with its weapons, until, when there was no escaping the plunge into its depths, a date was set for it: last Tuesday.

What a day it was! Hearts pounded until they nearly reached the throat, or nearly leapt from it entirely; sight grew so intense that eyes nearly started from their heads, or nearly popped out of them; and

people's very breath hung suspended, everyone waiting for the battle to begin, everyone waiting for its outcome. Would the crisis be resolved, or not? Would the Ministry emerge victorious, or would the Deputies emerge victorious? Would Egyptians be secure in whatever means of life remained in their hands, or would they despair? Would Egyptians welcome an era in which children eat until they are full, and drink until they are quenched, and find in it what shields them from heat and cold, and the events of time? Or would Egyptians welcome an era in which hunger is added to hunger, misery to misery, and deprivation to deprivation? It would have been reasonable for the activity of these specialists to match the intensity of the battle's subject matter, in unity and firmness, in strength and vigor. But the battle began listlessly, and spoke, and spoke, and denied, and one denial answered another, and the Finance Minister spoke words neither offered ahead of time nor delayed, until, as time wore on somewhat, the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies looked at the members present in the hall — and behold, they had taken to interrupting one another, one after another after another, until, when the session was adjourned, the number of Deputies present at the time of adjournment was fifteen — as the newspapers reported. And it would have been reasonable for the Deputies to be no less enthusiastic than the ministers for resuming the battle, and for the ministers to be no less eager to return to hostility with the Deputies — but the ministers and the Deputies alike showed a love of safety, a preference for wellbeing, and an inclination toward peace, so that one day might come in which the disputants could bind up their wounds, mend their affairs, and renew whatever provisions and reserves they might need. Then, when Thursday came, the combatants had all the tools of engagement and struggle ready to hand, and had armed themselves for a defended war that would spare nothing it touched, leaving it like ashes — and it was reasonable for the Deputies to gather in force, for their numbers to be large, for their readiness to be splendid, and for the spectators who witness the encounter to grow so numerous that the galleries and chambers grow crowded with them — but the appointed hour for battle came, and the ministers arrived for their appointment without delay or tardiness, and remained waiting for the adversaries who had demanded the confrontation and pressed for the fight — waiting, then waiting, then waiting — then the bell was rung, and the insistent, urgent summons went out continuously — but the Deputies did not come to the appointed meeting, and behold, the arena remained empty, as though vacant. The ministers spread their authority over it, able to conduct themselves in it however they pleased, since its defenders had not come, and since the

very people who ought to have rushed to it did not hurry to reject it. It was as if the Deputies and the spectators had agreed that those parties should not come to the arena, and that these others should not hasten to witness the encounter — so the galleries and chambers were not crowded, and the ministers went off, feeling they had shown more concern for the matter than was warranted, and had found in it more than it deserved. Then news of this battle, which had not begun and had not ended, was cast before people — and it did not amaze anyone, and no one marveled at it, but rather this news passed by people who paid it no heed, and cared nothing for it. What is the explanation for that? And what is its interpretation? The explanation is easy, and its interpretation simple: the Deputies were not expecting anything from the Ministry, so why should they burden themselves with the trouble? And why should they bear its hardship?

And the spectators were not expecting anything from the battle either. So why should they confine themselves for hours in the galleries and chambers? And the people were not expecting anything from the battle either. So why should they trouble themselves over its reports, and concern themselves with its accounts?

And so it seems God willed that Egypt's affairs should end in this torpor — the swords of crisis suspended over necks, the specters of misery terrifying to the soul, the fires of hunger raging in bellies, the pang of deprivation tearing at hearts — and yet the people, despite all this, expect no good from their ministry, and expect no aid from their government; instead they surrender themselves to despair, and expect God's judgment upon them, while the Ministry proves incapable of appointing them, powerless to be of any use to them. It may well have grown weary of itself, and grown weary of them; and the Deputies know this, or sense it, and meet this despair with despair of their own; torpor descends upon them until it reaches the point of exhaustion, and the ordeal reaches its farthest extreme, and Egypt becomes, officially, an image and a form only — the affairs of state growing harder and more constrained, and we receive from neither the Deputies nor the Ministers anything but torpor, and shortcoming, and turning away, and surrender to fate. Whoever wishes Egypt's affairs to end at this degree of humiliation for the Egyptians, let him rejoice, for he has achieved what he wanted. Whoever wishes those charged with Egyptian policy to turn away from it, let him be content, for he has gotten what he wanted. Whoever wishes the Egyptians to leave their affairs to fate to conduct as it pleases,

without any interference from them, without any care, let him be reassured, for he has gotten what he wanted. Then whoever wishes the English to be occupied with the Egyptians' company more than the Egyptians' company itself is occupied with them, let him take delight, and let his eye be soothed, for he has gotten what he wanted. And people say that yesterday there was a clash between the police and workers in which blood was shed, in which live rounds were fired, and in which some people were wounded — and these very people, it would naturally have followed, should have asked the Deputies about this in yesterday's session, and the Deputies ought to know from the Minister of the Interior how this happened — but the Deputies did not meet yesterday, because the heat was intense, or because they had grown weary of the recent talk of mortgage debt, or for whatever reason you please. They did not meet, and did not question, and did not question the Minister of the Interior, and learned nothing from him. And it seems most likely that the English already know everything about this incident.

Let official Egypt rejoice in this delightful torpor, for sleep is welcome in the season of summer.

Taha Hussein

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