

Tomorrow . . .

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), August 29, 1934

Tomorrow, wisdom will be distinguished from folly, and light will slip free of darkness, and a certain people will learn where truth lies and where falsehood lies, and where those stand who comfort themselves with hopes and wishes, and where those stand who speak from nothing but certainty, and act from nothing but conviction.

Tomorrow, the supporters of the present government will discover that if it is anything at all today, or if it was ever, on any single day, stronger than it is now, then one day it too will become nothing more than a piece of talk, an item of news, a memory among memories.

At this very time last year, Sidqi Pasha was in Paris, summering, resting, and broadcasting into the air statements that betrayed a limitless strength, even as they betrayed a limitless weakness — statements that pointed precisely to disarray, to a loss of sound judgment, to the collapse of that political equilibrium a prime minister ought always to possess.

He would tell one group that he was returning to Egypt and might well tender his resignation, and tell another that he was returning to Egypt and might well not resign at all. He would tell one newspaper correspondent that his government had never, on any day, been stronger than it was now, and tell another correspondent that he simply could not understand why a government should resign so long as it enjoyed the confidence of parliament and the King's favor. He would tell this foreign newspaper that he was waiting for the English to finish with their general concerns before he would speak to them of particular matters.

Meanwhile the Cairo correspondent of the Daily Telegraph was cabling his paper that Sidqi Pasha's government was unwanted, and Sidqi Pasha was cabling the Daily Telegraph in turn that its correspondent had been harsh and unjust, exceeding the bounds of truth and straying from what was right.

Here at home, the ministers were declaring their confidence in remaining at their posts, while privately harboring a fear of losing them; whenever they spoke to the public or delivered speeches, they displayed strength and resolve and attacked the Daily Telegraph and papers of its kind. But left alone with themselves, they managed their affairs among

themselves in apprehension, and prepared for the next day with guarded caution. The government's newspapers, for their part, followed the government's own line, portraying matters to their readers in a false light, claiming the government would remain in office for as long as it retained parliament's confidence — until, left alone with themselves, their own writers would put their heads together, straining to work out which way the wind was actually blowing.

Then Sidqi Pasha finally arrived and tendered his resignation, leaving it to His Majesty the King to judge the matter and decide whether his health permitted him to continue working, or required that he rest instead. And so he grew bashful, grew timid, retreated, submitted, went through the motions of consulting physicians, declared himself fit for work, and carried on in office — claiming that he had never, on any single day, been stronger than he was in those very days.

Then no more than two weeks passed before Sidqi Pasha plummeted from the summit to the depths. He who had been everything became nothing. He who had been strength itself became weakness itself. He who had been a tyrant became subject to the weakest and most powerless of governments. He had meant to take pride in the very system he himself had established and the very parliament he himself had assembled — but the system abandoned him, and parliament forsook him. Then the members of his own party scattered from around him, until he became an outcast from every political body, with no corner left to shelter in, and no ally left to lean upon.

This whole chain of events began at this very time last year, when our own Prime Minister, the good-natured man, was away in Paris, summering and resting. Then, one morning or one evening, a telegram reached him informing him that he had become Prime Minister. The man had never expected this, had never even thought of it — but it was God's grace, bestowed upon whomever He wills.

At this very time last year, there was also visible disarray in England's political representation in Egypt: one High Commissioner being transferred, another being chosen, and then word that the transferred Commissioner would return to his post until the new one arrived. All of this filled the Egyptian atmosphere with turmoil and confusion, saturating it with news and rumor, and the government's opponents read it all, heard it all, and portrayed matters to their readers exactly as they saw them, neither adding to them nor, if anything,

subtracting from them — for they were being cautious, and disliked being accused of rushing events or hastening the course of the days. So what is happening now? What is being said? What is being published here and there?

Everything now suggests our present government is weak in the extreme, however much it claims to be at the height of strength; utterly incapable, however much it claims the most brilliant capability; thrown into the ugliest disarray, however much it claims the steadiest stability. It believes itself strong, when it speaks to the public — but God alone truly knows, and those firmly grounded in knowledge tell us that when this government is left alone with itself, it finds none of the sweetness of that belief, none of its warmth, nothing capable of inspiring confidence in its own soul or reassurance in its own heart.

The government's newspapers project security and contentment, confidence in tomorrow and the day after — but when their own writers are left alone with themselves, or speak candidly to others, they ask where they themselves stand, what is intended for them, and where they will find themselves tomorrow. The High Commissioner has gone off on what was said to be a short leave, only for that leave to keep lengthening; it was said that a man from his own household would act in his place, and instead the one acting in his place is the head of the Egyptian Department at the Foreign Office. The English newspapers write, whether on their own initiative, or at the prompting of the Foreign Office, or through their Cairo correspondents, that emergencies may well arise, that crises may well strike, and that England's representation in Egypt must be strong, firm, resolute, capable of swift action the moment an emergency arises or a crisis strikes.

The major English newspapers publish, through their Cairo correspondents, talk of the weakness of the present government, the fading of its political color, the collapse of solidarity among its members, and the necessity of change and replacement:

Either tomorrow, they claim — or if not, the day after.

And after all of this, Egyptians are still expected to sleep soundly, to believe that everything is entirely in order, that conditions are entirely calm, and that Egyptian life has never, on any single day, been as settled as it is now — apart, that is, from the flooding of the Nile, the corruption of public morals along the seacoast, and the formation of the Young

Egyptians' association.

These government loyalists possess a naivety beyond all measure; they imagine their own nation so foolish and so heedless that it can be deceived by children's games and trifling enticements. Were matters truly calm and orderly, were life truly sound and stable, minds would not be thrown into such turmoil, political affairs would not be thrown into such confusion, and this news would not be springing up out of thin air. It is not the Egyptians who invented these emergencies and their attendant talk; it is not the Egyptians who appointed Mr. Patterson to act in the High Commissioner's place; it is not the Egyptians who told the Times, the Daily Telegraph, and other papers besides what they have been broadcasting and continue to broadcast from time to time. The Egyptians did none of this — just as they did not summon the ghosts that appeared in that house a few days ago, and just as they did not order the Nile to overflow so extravagantly. If the government's loyalists wish to hide the plain facts from themselves, and prefer to bury their heads so as not to see what the days may bring, it is because they lack the courage needed to face facts squarely, and to believe that fortune turns, and that public office, as Al-Muqattam has long been accustomed to saying, is a loan and not an inheritance. If the government's loyalists are indeed so weak, so fearful, so thrown into disarray, then let them enjoy their weakness, their fear, and their disarray — but they do themselves a grave disservice if they imagine all Egyptians are like them: weakening before plain facts, fearing possible emergencies, thrown into turmoil by every surprise.

Not at all. Egyptians still remember yesterday, and have understood its lessons perfectly well; and it is for this very reason that they watch for tomorrow with hearts at ease, hopes shining bright, and souls content — not because they are deceiving themselves, imagining the gloom might suddenly lift without warning, but because they are wide awake, not asleep; because they are wary, and will never be caught unawares; and because they know their own rights, and are determined to hold fast to them, and refuse to do anything but remain alert to them.

They do not fear tomorrow, just as they did not panic over yesterday. They are confident that the nation, once it wills something, will surely attain what it wills — whether that pleases the tyrants and the colonizers, or angers them.

Let us await tomorrow, then, and let the government's loyalists await it too — for we have no doubt that some will laugh at others, and no

doubt that some will look upon others with a pity accompanied by a smile,
a smile carrying no small measure of contempt . . .