

Concerning the Crisis . . .

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), October 23, 1934

The Prime Minister still clings fast to silence, drowning himself entirely in it, persisting stubbornly in denial, believing this to be a form of statesmanship — or, at the very least, that it can be described as the policy of a tactful, shrewd, and nimble man, one who values patience, and dislikes rushing to meet events, or getting ahead of crises and catastrophes.

We would very much like the Prime Minister to know what everyone already knows, whatever their class, station, or share of intelligence and perception: that silence may indeed be golden at times, but at other times it can sink so low as to become the basest of metals, scarcely worth anyone's attention or regard; and that silence may indeed suit a statesman on certain occasions, but on others it can turn so thoroughly bad, and so excessively bad, that it becomes a genuine sin, or something closely resembling one. We would like the Prime Minister to know, and we would like those who surround him and advise him to tell him plainly, that his silence might have been tolerable a few weeks ago, and might then have passed for statesmanship, shrewdness, and intelligence — but that it can no longer be tolerated, no longer accepted, and no longer explained except in one of two ways: either it represents an incapacity beyond which no greater incapacity could exist, and the first duty of any incapable man is to resign; or else it represents a despotism beyond which no greater despotism could exist, and the first duty of any people is never to accept despotism, let alone side with despots, or single them out for sympathy and support.

There is nothing of intelligence in it whatsoever, nothing of strength whatsoever, nothing of skill or competence whatsoever, in a prime minister remaining silent while events themselves speak, or denying while crises openly declare themselves to the public in the ugliest candor imaginable. True statesmanship lies, rather, in the Prime Minister speaking out, so that people are not left to form their own suspicions of him; true courage lies in the Prime Minister openly declaring to the public that their affairs stand in genuine difficulty, and that he is either capable of resolving that difficulty — and remains in power precisely for that reason — or incapable of resolving it, and steps down from power precisely for that same reason. We continue to wish to believe that the

Prime Minister holds himself in too high regard, and that the nation's rights are held in too high regard by the Prime Minister himself, for him to choose silence merely to preserve his own comfort, and to cling to his post, and to whatever salary and prestige come along with it. We continue to wish to believe that the Prime Minister possesses too sharp a mind, or too penetrating an insight, to believe that Egypt's affairs are somehow not Egypt's own concern, but concern only himself and those who whisper counsel in his ear — as though he and his associates amounted to anything more than mere individuals, entitled to the very same rights as everyone else, yet bound, by virtue of their own posts, to considerably greater duties than everyone else. It is not fitting for them, nor fitting for anyone to accept from them, that they should enjoy the full benefit of their rights while falling short in the discharge of their duties. And what possible benefit could the Prime Minister and his associates derive from denying that the sun has risen, when its light dazzles every eye and its heat scorches every body? And what possible benefit could the Prime Minister and his associates derive from denying the crisis itself, when its every image reveals itself to the public in the ugliest, most repulsive form, heralding the gravest evil and the most horrific danger? People are talking, in Egypt, in England, and across Europe, of an acute crisis in Egypt, and of specific demands the English hold against the Egyptian government — demands people name outright, and openly debate — while the Prime Minister remains either silent or in denial, never emerging from silence except to plunge deeper still into denial, and never emerging from denial except to return once more to silence, until the whole affair has become genuinely laughable, or until it is high time people actually laughed at it, in days such as these.

Everyone is talking of English demands touching the very guardianship of the throne, exactly as they touch the guardians themselves; of English demands touching al-Ibrashi Pasha's own involvement in matters of governance; of English demands touching the appointment of a new head for the Royal Cabinet; of English demands touching the removal of two ministers, or more than two, from their governing posts.

The public says all of this aloud, writes it with their own pens, broadcasts it in their own newspapers, and debates it as thoroughly as debate allows — and we would very much like to know, then, what meaning, near or far, this silence in which the Prime Minister keeps drowning himself could possibly carry, and what, exactly, the Prime

Minister imagines himself to be concealing through this silence, when everything already lies plainly exposed? And what, exactly, does the Prime Minister imagine he stands to gain from this silence, when every possible resolution to the crisis remains utterly hopeless for as long as the Prime Minister and his associates remain in their posts, persisting in their present policy, drowning themselves ever deeper in this profound silence?

Stranger still is that the Prime Minister's own newspapers keep pressing the public to support him, to champion him, to unite behind him — yet in defense of exactly what, when the Prime Minister himself admits to nothing whatsoever? And against whom, exactly, when the Prime Minister himself never once speaks of having any opponents or attackers at all?

These very English newspapers wade freely into the current system of government, speaking of al-Ibrashi Pasha in terms that can only be described, at the very least, as surrounding him with considerable suspicion and doubt, and speaking of certain ministers in terms that can only be described, at the very least, as pouring outright accusation upon them — rendering their continued presence in government an affront to English dignity itself, utterly unfitting for whatever responsibilities England must ultimately bear. Has the Prime Minister actually read these words? Yes, he has read them, and was asked about them, and said nothing whatsoever, or said only that he would leave these newspapers free to say whatever they please. Does the Prime Minister realize that he did not assume his post merely to leave newspapers free to say whatever they please — even when what they say touches the very integrity of government, the character of ministers, the fine workings of the present system, the relationship between the ministers and the throne, and the relationship between the throne and the people themselves? And that any prime minister who witnesses all of this, reads it, and remains silent about it, has no business retaining his own premiership at all, nor expecting the public's trust, let alone expecting their sympathy or support?

Is it true that the English are pressing for the removal of certain ministers from the government? Yes, this is true beyond any doubt — every newspaper in Egypt has published it, and the major newspapers in England have proclaimed it openly. But what Egyptians actually wish to know is the Prime Minister's own position on this demand: does he accept it? If so, where, then, is his own dignity, and where his solidarity with

colleagues he has worked alongside for an entire year? And which, precisely, does he hold dearer, which does he love more — the post itself, or his own dignity? Does he reject it? If so, why has he not declared this rejection openly to the public, and why has he not shown his government taking this stand, so full of pride and self-respect? Or is he simply wavering between acceptance and rejection, advancing then retreating, moving forward then turning back? Since when, then, have political crises ever been resolved through hesitation and disorder? Will the Prime Minister not agree with us that his government's handling of this violent, acute crisis has sunk so deeply into absurdity that it has become genuinely intolerable? Let the Prime Minister acknowledge, then, that certain of his colleagues stand accused, as certain English newspapers have said, of compromised integrity and questionable character — and if so, how did he ever accept working alongside them for an entire year? And why did he task the prosecution with taking Egyptian newspapers to court for discussing exactly what the English newspapers are now discussing themselves? Or does the Prime Minister deny all of this? If so, what explains his silence regarding it, and his refusal to take these very English correspondents to court as well? Or does the Prime Minister finally admit that harsh treatment, legal confrontation, and severity are simply things created for Egyptians alone, and for no one else?

Let the Prime Minister believe us when we say that his own conduct in these very days is about as far as any conduct could possibly be from leaving the public with any real awe for the government's authority, or any genuine acknowledgment of whatever standing that authority ought rightfully to hold in the public mind. And everything said regarding this one English demand applies equally to every other demand besides — indeed, there is one English demand in particular that we simply cannot understand, and that no one else can understand either: how the Prime Minister and those advising him have come to monopolize its handling entirely for themselves. This is the demand touching the very guardianship of the throne — for the throne belongs to all Egyptians alike, and everything touching it touches every single Egyptian alike. How, then, can the Prime Minister possibly monopolize a matter that touches him no differently than it touches every other Egyptian? Does the Prime Minister truly imagine his own shoulders too weak to bear the burdens he wishes to place upon them? Or does the Prime Minister imagine the public duty-bound to follow blindly behind him for no reason except that this is simply what he wants of them, and duty-bound to support him for no reason except that this is simply the support he

expects from them? No. The Egyptian people have not yet lost their own sense of honor, and we do not believe they will lose it any time soon — and the honor of the Egyptian people utterly refuses to let them become mere cattle, herded about by Zaki al-Ibrashi Pasha and Abdel Fattah Yehia Pasha exactly as these two men please. This is, rather, a sensible and mature people, who act only upon clear understanding, and move only upon genuine knowledge — so whoever wishes their victory and their support must inform them, openly, honestly, and sincerely, against whom, precisely, their victory is being sought, and toward what purpose, precisely, their support is being sought. No — the Egyptian people have not yet lost their sense of honor, and will never lose it, and that very sense of honor forbids them, and forbids them absolutely, from honoring men who have degraded them, from supporting men who have betrayed them, from loving men who have made them taste nothing but torment. The blood of the martyrs who gave their lives in the cause of this present era has long since dried upon the ground, yet its redness still stands vividly before every eye, painted indelibly upon every heart; and the very souls of these martyrs who gave their lives in the cause of this present era remain radiant still, hearing and seeing all; and the very graves of these martyrs who gave their lives in the cause of this present era still stand. And so the honor of the Egyptian people can never permit them to forget any of this, nor to support this very era — an era they never established, were never consulted on establishing, and have found in it nothing but degradation and disgrace, have tasted in it nothing but torment and humiliation. If this era truly seeks support, then let it seek that support from Sidqi Pasha, from al-Ibrashi Pasha, and from those who have championed these two men all along. As for the people themselves, they stand fully prepared to discharge their own duty on the day their own affairs are finally restored to them — but not one moment before.