

Crisis . . .

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), October 21, 1934

No one denies it any longer. Rather, the public now agrees, with real precision, that it exists, that it has grown acute, and that it took on a violent, decisive intensity only yesterday, when the Deputy High Commissioner called upon the Prime Minister around noon. Everyone agrees on this — everyone, it seems, except the Prime Minister himself, who alone stands outside this consensus, telling people the matter is perfectly ordinary and routine, and that the Deputy High Commissioner merely spoke with him about the public debt question. Let us leave the Prime Minister, then, to bestow upon life the smile of his own lips, while frowning at it privately within himself, until the hour finally arrives when the Prime Minister can no longer reconcile his own heart with his own lips, and must believe, along with everyone else, that the matter is neither ordinary nor routine at all, and that the political situation has reached the very furthest extremity of crisis.

Let us note, too, that the official government newspapers have been struck, since today, by a painful stupor and a profound bewilderment. *La Liberté* chose silence, and took refuge in it, saying nothing whatsoever about politics today, after having once said so much, at such length. *Al-Shaab* likewise chose silence, saying nothing about politics either, though it did hurl some abuse at the opposition. It is perfectly clear that the government's own tongues have not simply lost themselves — rather, events themselves have tied them; they have not fallen silent by choice, but circumstances themselves have forced silence upon them. But what, exactly, might the realities of this crisis actually be — a crisis whose existence and unity no longer admit any doubt? Everyone describes the English as demanding certain things of the government, yet no one possesses any definite, clear knowledge of what these things actually are; and those who do know their true nature are unable to state them, or unable to state them plainly and clearly — preferring silence, exactly like the ministers and those resembling them, or else resorting to hints and insinuations, stirring up more suspicion and doubt than silence itself would ever stir, and more than plain, open speech would ever stir.

It is perfectly clear, too, that this strange situation cannot possibly be reconciled, in any respect whatsoever, with the claim that this country is a free and independent nation, subject to a constitutional, democratic

system. There is nothing of freedom, nothing of independence, nothing of democracy, nothing of constitutionalism, in allowing a mere handful of individuals — scarcely more than ten in number — to monopolize the affairs of a people exceeding fourteen million, while leaving that very people bewildered, asking questions with no answer given, searching without ever arriving at anything at all. Stranger still, and more astonishing still, is that the ministers and their supporters should demand of this very people that it grant them aid and victory, singling them out for love and support, without ever once informing that people what, exactly, it is being asked to assist them toward, or against whom, exactly, it is being asked to grant them victory, or for what purpose, exactly, that victory is even sought. It is as though they genuinely believe the people rests entirely assured that they are infallible against every error, innocent of every fault, unerringly correct in every judgment — so that obedience to them is obligatory, support for them a religious duty, and any hesitation to grant them the obedience and support they demand amounts to a sin against Egypt herself, a betrayal of the very homeland!! If they genuinely believe all of this, or even part of it, then it is high time they awoke, came to their senses, and grew certain that the people hold no such view of them at all — not even in part — and perhaps hold, in fact, precisely the opposite view; and perhaps it is for this very reason that the people refuse, most emphatically, to grant them aid or single them out for support, without first knowing what, exactly, that aid is being sought for, and toward what purpose, exactly, that support is being sought.

They invoke foreign interference, and call upon Egyptians to resist it — yet they themselves know perfectly well that foreign interference already exists, thoroughly embedded throughout every aspect of Egyptian affairs, ever since their own government first took up the burdens of power. The English proceed with it, and find no resistance whatsoever from the government; and when they do not proceed with it on their own initiative, the government itself invites them to do so, actively encouraging them toward it. They involve themselves in the affairs of the ministries, and the ministers raise no objection to it whatsoever; and when the ministers grow slow in attending to certain matters themselves, the government actually enlists their help in those very matters, exactly as it enlisted their help in the public debt question, and in the question of the Mixed Courts.

So what, then, explains this — that foreign interference should be loved, welcomed, tolerated in silence, even actively desired, whenever it touches the interests and the very lives of the public, and the wealth and dignity of the state itself, and yet, the moment this same interference touches Zaki al-Ibrashi Pasha, or some other minister, or some official the ministers happen to favor, it suddenly becomes hateful, detestable, something the people must denounce, with the government earning the people's support precisely because it denounces and refuses it?

Foreign interference is hateful in its entirety, detestable in its entirety — the people must denounce it regardless of its target, and the ministers must denounce it regardless of its target as well, and the people will never begrudge its support to any government that holds this very view and follows this very course. But a government that accepts one variety of interference while rejecting another has no right whatsoever to expect any aid or support from the people at all.

The Egyptian people are far too noble to accept English interference even for the sake of rescuing them from those who oppress them and subject them to every variety of torment — but the Egyptian people are, above all, far too noble in their own eyes to accept that the ministers and those resembling them should treat them as mere mockery and sport, subjecting them to degradation, unleashing torment upon them, setting whips to work on their bodies and clubs upon their heads, aiming bullets straight at their very chests — only to turn around, the instant one of these very ministers finds his own post at risk, and tell this same people: hurry now to defend independence, for independence stands in danger, and rush to the defense of what is right, for what is right is on the verge of being lost!

No. If independence truly stands in danger, it is the government itself that has placed it in that danger, for it accepted English interference from the very moment it rose to its own posts. And if what is right truly stands on the verge of being lost, it is the government itself that has placed it on the verge of loss, for it whetted English appetites toward it in the first place. And the Egyptian people could never truly love men who have always treated them, and continue to treat them, as mere herds of cattle — monopolizing everything for themselves, at the people's own expense, and granting the people nothing whatsoever but humiliation and disgrace.

If independence truly stands in genuine danger, then these very gentlemen must withdraw from the field of struggle, for they are simply unfit for that field. And if what is right truly stands exposed to genuine loss, then these very gentlemen must abandon their posture of defending it, for they are simply incapable of defending it.

One does not harvest grapes from thorns. The Egyptian people have no business expecting any good whatsoever from men from whom they have met with nothing but harm. The Egyptian people have no business granting their own victory to men who have granted them nothing but betrayal and abandonment. Let these gentlemen, then, remain exactly where they stand until the storm itself sweeps them away, if that is what they wish; or let them spare themselves, if they dread the terror of that storm — for Egypt, praise be to God, still holds other men entirely capable of carrying the banner of struggle to triumph, and of defending what is right, fully equipped and utterly victorious.