

A Situation...

Al-Wadi, 6 October 1934

A situation among the strangest of situations, and the most genuinely extreme, in its own peculiarity — this same situation Egypt has been forcibly driven into, these very days, thanks to the present cabinet, and her own evident, glaring incapacity, to shoulder weighty matters, to stand firm before pressing calamities, and to meet emergencies, and sudden developments, competently.

A situation genuinely, thoroughly strange, genuinely, extremely peculiar — no Egyptian, whatever his own level of culture, whatever his own social standing, genuinely needs anyone to point it out to him, or draw his own attention to it. You could wander through clubs, join their own gatherings, in cafés, and homes; you could listen to ordinary people, speaking among themselves, throughout their own daily work; you could board the tram, the buses carrying people, through Cairo, or the trains carrying people, between Cairo and the suburbs, or between Cairo and the provinces — and you would see something not seen, a month, or two months, ago: you would see a genuinely evident anxiety, a genuinely clear turmoil, and an imagination given free rein, racing forward, twisting around nothing, stopping at nothing, seizing every rumour, and exploiting it, to the very furthest degree of exploitation — inventing events, fabricating news, constructing hypotheses, recounting what has already happened, depicting what now exists, and predicting what is yet to come.

Tongues then loosen, with whatever this same imagination suggests, one already gripped by something genuinely resembling fever — never calming, never settling, never ceasing its own motion, and production. No sooner does talk land, in one place, than it flies from there, to other places, then flies from these same places, to others still — and, wherever it lands, it stirs anxiety, spreads turmoil, activates imagination, and loosens tongues further still, until Egyptians no longer doubt whatsoever, that their own public life stands exposed, to some genuinely significant new event. They search for exactly this same event, wishing to know it, precisely, or approximately, inferring it, from whatever events actually occur, whatever news is actually published, and whatever movements the great, and the ministers, actually make — spending their own days, at this same task, while working, spending their own nights, at this same task too, while conversing — some among them, perhaps, even dreaming

of it, once sleep finally overtakes them. Yet it remains, in any case, the very first thing that occurs to them, the very first thing they think of, the moment they greet each new day, alongside the morning's own newspapers.

This, then, is exactly what Egyptians' own life amounts to, these very days: a continuous anxiety, only growing, from time to time; a persistent dread, only intensifying, from moment to moment; and an unceasing conversation, about politics, and politics' own secrets, and whatever these same secrets might yet reveal.

It seems most likely, though, that the cabinet herself remains no less genuinely troubled, no less genuinely anxious, than the people themselves — perhaps knowing, of political affairs, only a little more than the people know, and the people know nothing whatsoever, or scarcely anything at all — while the ministers themselves engage, meanwhile, in movements admitting of no genuine interpretation, save one entirely devoid of calm composure, reassured hearts, and a settled conscience. They meet, and they part; they exchange visits genuinely charged with meaning; they receive other visits, no less charged with meaning, than these same visits they exchange among themselves. They speak, to certain of their own contacts; they inquire, at times, after the latest news. An anxious people, and an anxious cabinet. As for the English, though, they display a genuinely strange activity, one never displayed before — involving themselves, in matters they were never accustomed to involve themselves in, taking up matters they were never accustomed to take up, doing things they hardly ought to do. It suffices merely to observe the Deputy High Commissioner's own activity alone, these past few days: inspecting the police, in Alexandria; flying to Cairo, to inspect the barracks, then certain police stations, then the fire brigades; dining, then, with the occupying army's own commander; visiting, then, one of Egypt's own former prime ministers; visiting, then, certain Englishmen; then flying back to Alexandria — scarcely settling, twenty-four hours, before that same Egyptian, that same former prime minister, returns his own visit.

He travels, for this same visit, around noon, and returns from this same visit, by evening — and the newspapers claim this same visit carries genuine consequence, another visit perhaps soon to follow. People read these same reports, in the newspapers, hear them, in clubs, told the cabinet remains genuinely bewildered, told the cabinet may well resign — and they genuinely wish to understand, yet how could they possibly

understand? They genuinely wish to discern, yet how could they possibly discern anything? A cabinet drowning in silence, when she ought genuinely to speak; drowning in inertia, when she ought genuinely to act; drowning in riddles, when she ought genuinely to be clear; insisting on remaining in power, when she ought genuinely to relinquish it, having already become evident, to herself, and to the people, that she is unfit for it, incapable of bearing it — especially under these same circumstances, whose own precariousness, danger, and gravity, admit of no genuine doubt whatsoever.

The newspapers now stand entirely united, in demanding the cabinet issue regular bulletins, on His Majesty the King's own health — no one retaining any real doubt whatsoever, that His Majesty's own health has already declined, once news of it arrived, from Europe. And it ought genuinely to have been known, by people in Egypt, before it was ever known, in Europe.

This, moreover, after the royal journey was already postponed, after it was already announced that His Majesty would receive no visitors, this year, on his own Accession Day feast, and after a physician was already summoned, from Cairo, followed by a physician, or more than one physician, summoned from abroad.

People already know, then, that His Majesty the King's own health falls far short of the genuine well-being they themselves would wish for him — and they genuinely wish to know more, and it remains their own genuine right to know more. It remains the government's own genuine duty, too, to keep them informed, of their own king's own condition, from day to day — indeed, from morning to evening.

Yet the cabinet says nothing whatsoever, on this same matter, exactly as she says nothing whatsoever, on any other matter besides. We would genuinely like to know, then, exactly what these same ministers actually do — and what is even the point of their own remaining, in their own posts, should they fall short, even in the most sacred of duties, neither reassuring the people, about their own king's own health, nor informing the people, of exactly what this same strange activity, the English themselves now display, actually means?

One of two things, then, must genuinely be true: either the ministers themselves are genuinely fulfilling their own duties, in which case, one ought genuinely to see the effects, of exactly this same fulfilment — the ministers themselves already knowing, with perfect knowledge, that they

remain no genuine guardians, over some legally incompetent people, but mere civil servants, for a genuinely capable, mature people, entitled to conceal nothing whatsoever, from them, entitled to monopolize nothing, to their own exclusion, touching their own life so directly. Or else the ministers remain, in their own posts, merely to frequent government offices, and enjoy the cabinet's own prestige, and its own outward trappings of authority — in which case, they ought genuinely to know that ministers are never chosen for this same purpose, but for something else entirely.

That said, we genuinely wish to believe these same ministers will genuinely consult their own conscience, and genuinely, fully know that peoples themselves may well encounter, in their own lives, certain times admitting of no genuine levity, no genuine negligence, no genuine forgiveness for any shortcoming — and that these same ministers genuinely reckon with all of this, aligning it, with their own conduct, these very days: either acting, speaking, and genuinely convincing Egyptians they remain true ministers indeed, genuinely capable of meeting emergencies, standing firm before events, and emerging safely, from calamity — or else restoring the people's own affairs, to the people themselves, and relinquishing governance, to those genuinely more fitting for it, more capable of it, especially under these very same circumstances.