

Resolute Promptness . . .

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

A phrase the Public Prosecutor coined at the very start of spring, or at the very end of winter, and which met with a stroke of fortune words seldom meet with these days: pens raced to take it up, tongues broke loose repeating it, and it stirred fear in the hearts of some people, while stirring a smile upon the lips of others.

The phrase is, in actual truth, a strange one — though there may be no real objection to it on purely linguistic grounds, and Sibawayh or al-Khalil themselves might not have found it half so troubling as they would have found some of the other words the Public Prosecutor tends to produce. But its strangeness arises from the fact that it stirs a certain pull toward interpretation, and toward an interpretation that keeps turning, continuously, round and round, never stopping until the very interpreters themselves grow weary. For ḥazm (resolve) is one verbal noun, and bidār (promptness) is another verbal noun entirely, and joining either of these two nouns to the other in genitive construction produces a delightful confusion of understanding and judgment, casting one noun's meaning loosely upon the other, with no fixed determination and no real certainty. "Ḥazm al-bidār" might be understood as "the resolute sort of promptness," or it might equally be understood as "the promptly-acting sort of resolve" — for in Arabic's genitive construction, the first term modifies the second, or the second modifies the first, or both modify their shared possessor, and one may spin endlessly between these two possible readings, casting first one meaning, then the other; or, should the spinning grow tiresome, one may simply rest and cast both meanings at once upon a single man — namely, His Excellency the Public Prosecutor himself, the very man who coined this phrase in the first place.

So: "resolute promptness," or "prompt resolve," or "the resolve that acts promptly," or "the promptness that acts resolutely," or the Public Prosecutor himself, who unites resolve and promptness together, so that he becomes resolute-and-prompt, and prompt-and-resolute, resolute whenever he acts promptly, and prompt whenever he acts resolutely. All of this fills hearts with a kind of awe and terror at once — and it would make a fitting entry for the Language Academy to adopt, or would at the very least be fitting on any account (we say this without the slightest jest or mockery) for the Public Prosecutor, His Excellency Labib Attiya Bey, to

be elevated to membership in that very Academy — though the Academy's own rules against coining redundant expressions, and against transitive verbs, might well turn back such a nomination with a firm reply of their own. Be that as it may, "resolute promptness" or "prompt resolve" has never, on any single day, been quite so pressing, so obligatory, so utterly inescapable a duty as it is in these very days — and it is a duty owed, by strict analogy, above all to the Public Prosecutor himself. Nor is there anything strange in this, for the Public Prosecutor himself invented "resolute promptness" and "prompt resolve," and it is only fitting that he should carry them both to their furthest possible extent, their most distant possible horizon. And "resolute promptness," or "prompt resolve," does not consist merely in finding oneself resolute-and-prompt, or prompt-and-resolute, whenever one wishes to hold other people to whatever right, justice, and law require of them alone — rather, "resolute promptness" and "prompt resolve" consist, above all else and before all else, in holding oneself to that very same standard, before holding anyone else to it at all.

The Public Prosecutor knows perfectly well that certain matters have been attributed to him — among them, that he involved himself in a political affair, and that the result of his involvement was that the judiciary became entangled in politics, or that politics became entangled in the judiciary, or that the judiciary was made an instrument for resolving a political crisis between the government and the English. And the Public Prosecutor kept silent about this when it was first attributed to him, and though he denied it, his denial was a faint one — he never denied it outright and unambiguously until the matter grew truly serious, and its consequences began to show themselves and occupy the official bureaus. "Resolute promptness," or "prompt resolve," ought surely to have obliged the Public Prosecutor to deny this matter at once, and to make that denial a truthful, categorical one, leaving no possible room for doubt. But he neglected "resolute promptness," and turned away from "prompt resolve," and left the newspapers to say what they would, and the public to speculate as it pleased. And when he finally did deny it, days later, Al-Siyasa came forward this very day to challenge him in a peculiar sort of way, demanding of Al-Ahram, and adjuring it by its own honor and integrity, to state plainly whether the man who first brought it this news was, in fact, the Public Prosecutor himself. Al-Siyasa, in other words, refuses to accept the Public Prosecutor's own denial of what was reported concerning his involvement in politics and his entangling of the judiciary in it, or his entangling of politics in the judiciary. Indeed, it

wants the public to understand something considerably beyond this — something every reader of Al-Siyasa's own question to Al-Ahram will readily understand for himself.

Among these very matters attributed to the Public Prosecutor is what the eminent Mr. al-Hilbawi Bey himself has reported — a matter people had already been discussing over the summer, and which Al-Siyasa published on Thursday morning. "Resolute promptness," or "prompt resolve," ought surely to have obliged the Public Prosecutor to deny this by Thursday evening at the very latest, and not to stop merely at denial, but to press further still into a genuine investigation of this matter, and of the other matter published on Tuesday as well. But the Public Prosecutor neglected "resolute promptness," and turned away from "prompt resolve," for the whole of Thursday, and the whole of Friday besides, until the two judicial advisers finally withdrew from hearing the case on Saturday morning. And the Public Prosecutor could, had he chosen "resolute promptness" or "prompt resolve," have spared these two esteemed advisers this very embarrassment. But he did not do so — and, strangely enough, it was another man entirely, not the Public Prosecutor himself, who ended up practicing "resolute promptness" and "prompt resolve": namely, the editor-in-chief of Al-Wadi, who on Saturday, with a truly resolute promptness, or a truly prompt resolve, demanded that the Public Prosecutor either resign, or have his own delegation to the public prosecution revoked outright. And only after all of this had come out, and after our friend al-Zayyat had written what he wrote, did the Public Prosecutor finally recall "resolute promptness" and "prompt resolve," and denied, in Al-Ahram yesterday morning, what Mr. al-Hilbawi Bey had attributed to him regarding this whole affair. He denied it — yet Mr. al-Hilbawi Bey insists on the truth of what he said, and reaffirms it most emphatically, confirming it to Al-Wadi's own correspondent yesterday morning, and confirming it again, at greater length and in fuller detail, to Al-Siyasa this very morning. And the entire public now finds itself standing, with regard to the Public Prosecutor and those who have attributed these things to him, in this very strange position — a position the trustee of the public case ought, by rights, to rise entirely above.

The Public Prosecutor denies having involved himself in any political affair, and Al-Siyasa challenges him on it; the Public Prosecutor denies having said to the two judicial advisers what has been attributed to him, and Mr. al-Hilbawi Bey challenges him on that as well. We believe, then,

that "resolute promptness," or "prompt resolve," now compels the Public Prosecutor, the Minister of Justice, and the Prime Minister alike, to clarify for the public where the truth genuinely lies in these two affairs, in a manner decisive and conclusive enough to leave no possible room for doubt in anyone's mind.

And we believe that the very first thing "resolute promptness," or "prompt resolve," demands of the Public Prosecutor is that he step aside from the trust of the public prosecution until the truth of the matter has become clear and manifest to all. And if "resolute promptness" has indeed been so thoroughly neglected that the public itself has come to complain of that very neglect, then it might well be both right and reasonable for the Public Prosecutor, the Minister of Justice, and the Prime Minister to show "resolute promptness" some measure of kindness at last, and to restore to it some small portion of the consideration it deserves.