

Ending

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), 1 November 1934

The present ministry may well be in its final moments, even as I dictate this piece, and its head may be submitting his resignation to His Majesty the King this very hour, should he have the honour of an audience with him in an hour or two.

Or the ministry may be in its final days, if hope toys with the Prime Minister's spirit and he delays his resignation a day, two days, or several days, to see the outcome of the mediation it is said Ziwar Pasha will attempt between the ministry and the High Commissioner's residence. But the one thing beyond doubt is that we are witnessing a wretched ending to a wretched era, witnessing a painful, agonizing death-throe for a painful, agonizing era. And we shall witness an end steeped entirely in sorrow and grief, for an era that was, from first to last, nothing but sorrow and grief.

An era founded on debasing the ministry's authority before the foreigner, and on this same authority finding, in the humiliation of the noble, wretched Egyptian people, the very measure of its own strength, its might, and its violence — a violence with no limit but the pleasure or the anger of the English.

An era founded on the old Arabic proverb: "A lion before me, but an ostrich in war." Its men were lions, skilled at roaring, skilled at preying upon their own kind, virtuosos at both when they faced their fellow countrymen — yet masters of flight, experts in retreat, virtuosos at submission, servility, and surrender when they faced the English.

An era one can describe, at the very least, as never having brought Egypt honour in a single one of its moments, but only disgrace and shame, branding her before the civilized world with a mark of abasement and humiliation no noble man would wish branded upon his homeland; an era that never brought honour to its responsible men in a single one of its moments — for when did you ever see aggression toward the weak, and servility toward the strong, bring honour to a man, or raise his standing, or place him among the noble of mankind?

An era that began in sin and ends in sin: it began by seizing power without the consent of parliament, then by altering the constitution

without regard for constitutional principle, then by extending its hands over the very lives of the innocent — snuffing them out, wearing them down — and over the wealth of the innocent — squandering it, wasting it — and over the interests of the innocent — toying with them, playing with them — with contempt for right, for justice, and for law. Then evil and sin ran through every one of its moments, the way tainted blood runs through a tainted body, savaging the moral order, corrupting consciences utterly,

severing the bonds between people, teaching sons the undutifulness of fathers, teaching fathers the ingratitude of sons, teaching the young and the old alike how to sever what God commanded be joined, and corrupt what God commanded be set right; how to sell their principles for a paltry price, and content themselves with baseness in their conduct, in their dignity, and in their public national life; how to adopt for themselves ends no cultured man — a man who feels that he owes something to himself, and that his homeland is owed something by him — would ever adopt: namely, the satisfaction of personal ambition and appetite, the securing of immediate self-interest, and the slaking of that base thirst for whatever might quench the ignoble cravings that reduce a human being to the meanest rank of the animal.

In this manner did this era begin, and in this manner did this era's life unfold; and in resisting this comprehensive, ugly corruption, blood was shed, lives were snuffed out, and people bore hardships they ought never to have had to bear in this age, and endured toil they ought never to have had to endure in an age said to be an age of freedom and security, an age of dignity and honour, an age of guidance and light.

Yes — in this outrageous manner did this era begin, and in this outrageous manner did this era's course unfold; and in resisting this outrageous manner of corruption, millions of Egyptians suffered a heavy, dark, all-enveloping misery for more than four years. And here these very millions of Egyptians now witness, today, the collapse of an edifice that was never built on piety, never raised upon love of the people, never erected upon devotion to the homeland; and these millions might well have been expected to rejoice at the end of an era that was, from first to last, nothing but evil and wrong, and to take heart at the collapse of an edifice founded on tyranny, injustice, and the service of particular men. But the spirits of Egyptians are dejected, not delighted; sorrowful, not glad — for they see that this era, which began with one painful tragedy, is ending with another painful tragedy no less evil, no less shameful: it

began with an assault upon the rights of the people, with contempt for the people's sovereignty, with the monopolizing of power at the people's expense; and it ends with surrender to the foreigner, with the squandering of the people's rights, and with a preference for clinging to power over preserving for the people their right to even the barest outward signs of dignity, honour, and independence.

The English say to the Prime Minister: remove two of your colleagues, and sever their participation with you in governing — and he displays a hesitation that deceives no one, feigns a resistance that deceives no one, until, when the matter grows truly serious, and the man realizes the English are not joking, he hastens to do exactly what the English want: he accepts his two colleagues' resignations and travels to Alexandria to submit his own to His Majesty the King, in the hope that His Majesty might accept it, and yet confirm him and his remaining colleagues in a government they are neither fit for nor capable of. Do you know of a tragedy worse than this tragedy? Do you know of a country that calls itself independent, that claims to be subject to a constitutional democratic system, that claims to be free in the conduct of its own affairs — do you know of a country that says all this, and then watches the head of its own government submit to the foreigner's command, unconditionally, without reservation, seeking nothing but the foreigner's acceptance of this very submission, so that the foreigner might restore to him the approval once withheld, and give back to him the support once denied? Call this whatever names you like, describe it however you please, say of it whatever you are able to say — but you will be compelled, however deep the regret, however sharp the pain, however bitter the sorrow, to admit that this is a position built on disgrace and shame, a position that cannot be described as anything less than a squandering of what is right, a contempt for dignity, and a surrender of independence.

What is this? These jurists of state advise this man, who wishes to cling to power though he has no right to cling to it, not to exhaust himself pleasing the English — not to let this exhaustion become a means, even, of corrupting mere appearances and forms — since removing his two colleagues from office demolishes independence outright; and they counsel him to resign, and then form another ministry, if he has no choice but to remain in office.

Will he, then, have listened to the jurists' counsel and accepted their advice, submitting his resignation to His Majesty the King? Or will it turn

out that he consulted them just as he consulted the Deputy High Commissioner — and, once they offered their counsel, found in himself no courage to accept it, nor even to preserve the mere outward form of independence?

All this will become clear by this afternoon. And who knows — perhaps this man will deny having consulted the jurists at all, just as he denied having consulted the Deputy High Commissioner. Whether or not he submits his resignation to His Majesty the King today, his departure from office, and his return to whatever useful work he might do with his life, has become a foregone conclusion — decided not by the will of the Egyptian people, for the Prime Minister has, to this day, paid that will no heed whatsoever, but by circumstances that stand above both his will and the will of the people.

His departure from office is a foregone conclusion. Let the Egyptians take heart in this — for we know of not a single one among them who would be glad to see corruption persist and disorder continue, who would be content to see Egyptians disgraced and ashamed of themselves, or who would fail to feel shame at having to say to himself that at the head of the Egyptian government stands a man who does not hesitate to remove his own two colleagues from office simply because the English wanted it so, and forced it upon him by sheer compulsion.

Yes — this era began with the tragedy of an assault on Egypt's internal rights, and ends with the tragedy of a surrender of Egypt's external rights. God, exalted and glorified, wishes to test the Egyptians in every respect, and to make this era evil through and through: evil at its beginning, evil in its course, evil at its end. But God, exalted and glorified, wishes also to refine the Egyptians through this trial, and to reveal them as the noble men they have always been accustomed to be; to raise up from their steadfastness, their patience, their endurance, and their refusal to accept injustice, the clearest and brightest proof to the English that the Egyptians were not being frivolous when they rose in revolt, were not playing games when they swore their oath of loyalty to the old constitution, and were not jesting or trifling when they pledged themselves to boycott this era until their rights were restored to them in full, and until the constitution they will accept no substitute for was returned to them — whatever trials might come, whatever calamities might arise, however dire the circumstances might grow.

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