

Harmony...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), September 18, 1934

I do not know why people take it upon themselves to invent rumors and broadcast them, to promote them and exaggerate their importance, pressing the matter with such insistence that they fill the very air with them, occupy people's minds with them, and give anyone who hears them, or is spoken to by them, the impression that everything has gone entirely to ruin — that no hope of improvement remains to be awaited, no good remains to be hoped for — when in fact things are as sound as things could possibly be, as settled as things could possibly be, as stable as things could possibly be.

Nor do I know — though perhaps the philosophers know — where this pleasure comes from, which people find in fabricating and inventing news out of whole cloth, when there is nothing whatsoever to call for such fabrication and invention. Whether this grave social malady is easy or difficult to explain, it is, at any rate, an established and undeniable fact, one that afflicts all peoples alike — though the Egyptians' share of it is greater than that of any other people. You will never find the Egyptians except with the air around them thick with rumors, invented for them by inventors, fabricated for them by fabricators, and promoted among them by promoters.

And the Egyptians are especially enamored of fabricating and broadcasting rumors about cabinets and ministers — as though Egyptians had been made by nature to chafe against any cabinet and any minister, and to long for the fall of every cabinet and the resignation of every minister; and when they find themselves unable to bring cabinets down in fact, or drive ministers to resign in fact, they content themselves with wishing for it, and then with expecting it. And then it seems to them that it is happening today, or, in their firmest estimation, that it will happen tomorrow, or, beyond any shadow of doubt, the day after tomorrow.

And then they talk of it, and grow quite absorbed in talking of it, and make excuses for it, and grow quite inventive in their excuse-making; and when the day passes and what they had wished for has not come to pass, this does not discourage them from expecting it still, does not turn them away from continuing to wait for it, and does not stop them from talking of it and dwelling upon it further.

And in just this fashion, they have filled the air these past days with rumors about the present cabinet, claiming that it has grown terribly weak, that some wasting sickness has so thinned it that it has become little more than a shadow of itself — even though it has never, at any moment, been stronger than it is now; even though it has never, at any moment, been bulkier or more fully packed than it is now; and even though this wasting, this thinning — if any wasting or thinning exists at all — has never afflicted it, and could never afflict it, but has afflicted other people entirely.

For when did you ever see wasting or thinning afflict a cabinet so calm, so untroubled, whose provision comes to it in abundance from every direction, which enjoys what no other cabinet on the face of the earth enjoys — rest in the hours of labor, happiness in the hours of hardship, luxury in days of privation, and peace of mind in days of anxiety and turmoil?

And how could this cabinet possibly waste away, or thinness overtake it, when it sits settled in Alexandria, going out each morning to its offices calm and smiling, and returning each evening to its residences or its palaces content and at ease, while grave events unfold all around it and heavy calamities descend, and none of it ever quite reaches it, none of it ever alters its habits, none of it ever disturbs its comfort — while it simply carries on with what it is engaged in: going out smiling to its offices, returning at ease to its residences and palaces, and then repairing to its evenings of pleasant company, conversation, and wit, once evening falls, or night comes on?

And when the weight of events grows too heavy, and the press of calamities too insistent, and it becomes unavoidable for the cabinet to show some measure of concern for these events and calamities — if only so that people should not say it is asleep, or distracted, at a moment when neither sleep nor distraction is fitting — it takes up just the lightest possible share of that concern, and puts itself to the very least possible trouble on its account, so that its members emerge from their complete and total rest into a rest that is very nearly complete and total. They visit towns and villages — but aboard luxurious, comfortable ships, upon the beautiful back of the Nile; or they set off for Cairo — but in private compartments, and once they arrive, remain only just long enough to turn around and return to where they may rest, in our own beautiful port city.

A cabinet that lives this life, that enjoys this abundance, that puts itself to this slight and trifling effort, cannot possibly be overtaken by weakness, cannot possibly be afflicted by wasting, cannot possibly be touched by thinness; what is possible, what is only reasonable, is that it should grow ever stronger, ever bulkier, ever more fully packed. And yet people persist, all the same, in claiming that it is sick, that it is wasted, that it is thin. They imagine that it undertakes the same labor and exertion that they themselves undertake when they work, and so must suffer the same weakness and exhaustion that they themselves suffer. And they forget that God created them for hardship, and created this cabinet for happiness and abundance.

And people spread the rumor about the cabinet that it is divided, its members at odds in their sympathies, that its ministers are quarreling and at each other's throats, agreeing on nothing, meeting on no common ground, never gathering without discord among them, never parting without scheming between them. And they exaggerate all this in the most hideous, most grotesque fashion, and then declare flatly that it must end, beyond any doubt, in the cabinet's resignation, or its fall, should it refuse to resign. Yet you may search for the reasons that might drive ministers to disagree or quarrel, and you will find no path to any. For people only disagree when they are working, when they are striving hard at labor, when they are bearing burdens and shouldering weights, when they are confronting hardships and solving problems. But if their life is nothing but rest, happiness, and abundance, free of both toil and offense; if they spend the greater part of the day at ease in their offices, and the last part of the day and the first part of the evening in comfort at their homes and their clubs — then over what could disagreement possibly arise? Over what could quarreling possibly occur? Around what could any dispute possibly grow heated?

As for our great foreign problems, the English have taken charge of those, and told the cabinet: have no fear on that score. And as for our great domestic problems, they have taken charge of themselves, and are doing their best to resolve themselves without wearing out the ministers, achieving what they can and falling short of what they cannot — but never, in any case, imposing upon our ministers the slightest hardship or exertion.

So then, over what could the ministers possibly disagree, and over what could they possibly quarrel? True, prolonged rest may grow tiresome, and may stir up a certain irritation and restlessness that leads

to some small friction — but it is the slightest of frictions, and soon passes, and matters afterward return to just what they were before. So when people hear that there is some disagreement between the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister, or between the Minister of Finance and his colleagues, let them not exaggerate the weight of this disagreement — for it is nothing more than a light matter, no more than a variety of good-natured banter among close friends and loyal companions.

For that reason, I found nothing to object to in the statement published this morning by a pro-government newspaper, attributed to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister declared, in a tone as firm and decisive as the Minister of Finance's own tone when he addresses the press, that the ministers enjoy the very best of harmony and accord one could hope for, and are laboring in the service of Egypt, and that everything being broadcast about disagreement among them is a falsehood with no basis whatsoever.

The Prime Minister spoke the truth: there is no disagreement among the ministers, nor anything resembling disagreement, since there is nothing at all that would call for any disagreement to arise between them. And the Prime Minister spoke the truth in saying the cabinet labors in Egypt's service — for what labor could be more beneficial to Egypt, more advantageous to her, more deserving of improving her reputation, than for the ministers to rest, and for the people to see them safe, calm, comfortable, and untroubled — proof enough that Egypt is well; for had she not been well, the ministers would never have found calm, nor found rest.

Believe me, dear reader: Egypt cannot possibly be served better than she is being served now by her ministers, through this beautiful life they lead in our beautiful port city — even as we ourselves live the ugliest of lives, in a capital that was once beautiful and has become drab, where life was once tranquil and has become anxious, haunted at every moment by the specters of sickness and death.