

Situation . . . — 2 —

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), October 7, 1934

Our situation remains strange in the extreme, abnormal beyond measure, deviating in the ugliest possible way from everything familiar to countries governed by an organized, constitutional, democratic rule in the twentieth century.

Nothing has emerged to dispel this strangeness, or even soften it, or bring it any closer to seeming even remotely reasonable — indeed, whatever has emerged since yesterday seems only to have deepened its strangeness and abnormality, just as it has deepened its difficulty and complexity. As for the English, their activity never stops, never slackens, but continues without pause, growing more intense from one moment to the next. On Thursday, the Deputy High Commissioner inspected the police in their barracks and stations, then visited a former head of government and spent no small amount of time with him; in between, he visited the fire brigades, and visited the command of the occupying army — and all these movements together signal two grave matters: first, that he now openly involves himself in Egyptian affairs with no restraint and no caution whatsoever; second, that he is preparing for something we do not know, and wishes to be certain that, should he move forward with it, circumstances will favor him, and that he will hold — as the saying goes — the reins of the situation firmly in his own hand. Then, on Friday, the former head of government returned his visit in Alexandria, "between two trains," as the French say. Then, on Saturday, word reached the Council of Ministers that the Deputy High Commissioner intended to visit the Prime Minister; the visit was then postponed with no set date given; and then the visit finally took place that evening, at the Prime Minister's own residence — while, throughout all of this, people were saying that coded telegraphic dispatches were passing continually between the High Commissioner's residence and the British Foreign Office, and Sir Miles Lampson himself.

This, in addition to other varieties of activity — some known and openly discussed, some unknown, understood by none but those firmly grounded in privileged knowledge. As for the ministers, they meet and they part; some remain in Cairo for days on end, and if summoned to Alexandria, are slow to respond to that summons, until the summons becomes insistent.

The ministers meet individually and in groups, in their offices and in their homes, and the Superintendent of the Royal Household, and His Majesty the King's own private secretary, call upon the Prime Minister morning and evening alike, just as they call upon his other colleagues besides. As for the deputies, some of them ask about the High Commissioner's inspection of the police, and others ask about the government's silence and its utter immersion in that silence — and the government answers neither question. A group of deputies and senators then gathers, conferring together to consult one another and reach some decision — but the Director-General of Public Security remains wide awake, never asleep, granting his watchful eye not only to the University, the Faculty of Law, and certain student residences, but extending that same watchful eye to the parliament building itself, to see who comes and who goes, and who gathers within it. He then extends that same watchful eye to the newspapers, to see who visits them and who turns away from them, and then speaks with the newspaper proprietors themselves, asking them not to publish whatever petitions the deputies might send them intended to enlighten public opinion. Meanwhile, the train stations in Alexandria and Sidi Gaber are placed under watch, so that the government may learn who arrives at the port city and who leaves it; and the surveillance then intensifies still further around the residence of the head of the Wafd, around the Casino, and around the residences where those members of the Wafd currently staying in Alexandria are lodged.

This, precisely, is the official situation of Egypt. As for the situation of the public, it is exactly as we described it yesterday: a situation of anxiety and disorder — indeed, a situation thoroughly steeped in anxiety and disorder. People still ask one another, whenever they meet, what happened yesterday, what is happening today, and what will happen tomorrow — indeed, what happened this morning, what is happening this evening, and what will happen once night falls — while imagination runs off toward the furthest possible horizons, and tongues give voice to the strangest imaginable talk. And throughout all of this, the Council of Ministers suddenly convenes, and the assembled ministers then just as suddenly disperse, whereupon certain journalists ask the Prime Minister about this meeting, and he replies that it was merely an ordinary meeting, containing nothing whatsoever out of the ordinary.

Certain newspapers reported yesterday evening that the government sees no harm in issuing a bulletin meant to reassure the public regarding the health of His Majesty the King. Yet by this morning,

no such bulletin had appeared; the newspapers said only that one might yet be issued, and that those responsible for the matter remained undecided as to whether it should be issued by the Council of Ministers itself, or by the physicians actually attending the King. And so the public's insistent demand upon the government to issue medical bulletins has resulted, thus far, not in the issuing of any such bulletins, but merely in a promise that they will eventually be issued.

We believe we have now depicted, as precisely as possible in these present days, the situation of official Egypt, the situation of the public, and the situation of the English. And we would very much like to know, after all this, how these various situations can possibly be reconciled with one another, and how they can possibly be squared with the very system by which Egypt claims to be governed — namely, the democratic system. And who, exactly, decided that the affairs of the free and independent Egyptian people — their own private affairs, at the very least — should be confined entirely to the government, to the High Commissioner's residence, and to one or two senior officials at the Royal Palace? And how is one to understand that the life of fourteen million people should become a secret concealed from all these very millions — from their elite and their commoners alike, from their politicians and their educated classes, from their leaders and their statesmen — a secret known to no more than twelve men, who monopolize it entirely, who manage its affairs and dispose of it exactly as they see fit, without so much as informing these millions of a single word, or allowing their leaders and statesmen any share in it whatsoever?

And how, furthermore, is one to understand that Egypt should be, as it is said, an independent, sovereign state, governed by a constitutional, democratic rule — while the matter touching most directly upon her very existence remains a private partnership between the English and a mere twelve Egyptian men, with the Egyptian people themselves granted no voice worth hearing, and no opinion worth heeding?

This alone is a great deal to bear. And it is more still that the ministers should persist in it. And more still that the public should press the ministers so insistently to break this silence, only to find the ministers responding with nothing but ever-deeper immersion in that very silence. We believe the time has now come for the ministers to break their silence, and for Egyptians to learn exactly where they are being driven. And we believe the Egyptian people ought not to spare the government from insistent pressure and demand, at every moment and from every

quarter, until the government finally breaks free of this heavy silence, this profound slumber — or else resigns outright, if it proves genuinely incapable either of acting, or of speaking.