

Ending ...

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Kawkab al-Sharq, 20 February 1934

It is an ending and a beginning at once: the ending of an amusing story, and the beginning of a new one. We do not know whether this new story will reach the same degree of amusement the finished story reached, or fall short of it, or exceed it, but it will be a story not without its pleasure, sweet or bitter in any case. As for the amusing story that ended yesterday, it is the story of the disagreement that arose between the new High Commissioner and the head of our ministry, the good man. As for the new story, which began yesterday, it is the story of the orderly relationship that will now exist between the two men, now that visits have been exchanged. The truth is that the story of that disagreement was not without a wit that stirs admiration and brings a smile; it combined a pleasant comedy with a frightening earnestness, and then ended as it ought to have ended, or rather as it ought to have begun. And people asked themselves: what was all that activity and agitation for? What was all that protest and wrangling for? What were those pursed lips, and furrowed brows, and that borrowed dark veil of sullenness, all for?

The story ended with what it ought to have ended with: the head of the ministry began by visiting the High Commissioner. And the story ended with what it ought to have begun with; for the prime minister ought to have visited the High Commissioner's residence before expecting the High Commissioner to come to him. What, then, was all that back-and-forth for? What was all that pushing and pulling for? What were those blazing articles and agitated columns, published in the newspapers and broadcast among the people — criticizing the High Commissioner's conduct, backing the good man's stance, defending Egypt's independence, and denying the privilege the English claim for their representative — all for? What was the revival of old history for, and the publishing of what had been kept hidden from the records of the Chamber of Deputies during the coalition period? What was the demand that the High Commissioner be treated like other political representatives — received by no one upon his arrival, visited by no one until he himself made the first visit — all for? What was the insistence that the High Commissioner present his credentials to His Majesty the King, as other political representatives present theirs, all for? And then what was the troubling of our minister plenipotentiary in London, and the

stirring of discussion between him and the British Foreign Office, until people supposed that a sharp political crisis had arisen between Cairo and the British capital, one liable to prove far-reaching, all for? What was all of this for, so long as the matter has ended where it ought to have ended, and so long as the matter has ended with what it ought to have begun with? You may raise these questions, and raise other questions beyond these, but you will win no answer.

As for those who rushed to back the ministry, and asked the Egyptians not to be stingy with it in their support, and pressed the Egyptians to shield its back and strengthen its resolve in what it had set out to do — demanding its right, preserving its dignity, defending independence, and achieving parity between the English representative and the representatives of other nations in Egypt — these people will answer you with a firm silence, an eloquent quiet; they will forget this whole story entirely, and will speak to you of other things, things you may or may not enjoy hearing them speak of, but they will speak of them in any case, for their newspapers must be published, and must be published full, not empty; and they cannot say anything about this story, now that God has turned its harm away from the ministry, and now that God has spared our prime minister, the good man, the trouble it was costing him. But should another disagreement arise between the good man and the High Commissioner, and should the good man need support, or something resembling support, these newspapers will be able, God willing, to attack the English, and recall their aggression and their tyranny, and deny the privilege they claim over other foreigners; and they will be able, God willing, to leaf through the records of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate from the days of the coalition, or the days of Wafd rule, to find some stance among those stances in which Egypt demanded its dignity, and in which Egypt held fast to its right; and they will be able, God willing, to publish whatever of that has been kept hidden, and to ask the Egyptians to support the prime minister.

And should the disagreement end in submission, contentment, and acceptance of God's decree, as yesterday's disagreement ended, then these newspapers will be able, God willing, to retreat into silence, and to shut its doors behind them as firmly as doors can be shut. And so people toy with people's minds, and people mock people, and people play with national sentiment as children play with those little balls they fashion from stone or glass.

As for the other newspapers, those that had been embarrassed and shamefaced, mentioning this disagreement only reluctantly, and pausing on it only briefly — until matters grew intense, and the strain grew severe, and it was said that the prime minister had resigned — these papers defended the prime minister's resignation, and claimed it was an honorable resignation, one that holds the head high, clears the name, improves the reputation, and immortalizes the prime minister's name in history. As for these newspapers, they know how to answer, and indeed have already shown how they answer; they published their answer this morning, visible to whoever God grants some measure of courage to read al-Sha'b newspaper. This answer is a slight thing, no less amusing than the story itself: al-Sha'b is pleased, content; al-Sha'b is delighted, joyful, because God has lifted the harm of this disagreement from the ministry. Al-Sha'b is not satisfied with contentment, nor content with pleasure alone, but stretches its hope further still, opening doors of expectation for the ministry, and finding every manner of confidence in a bright, flourishing future. For the reconciliation reached yesterday is, in al-Sha'b's eyes, and in the eyes of the ministry's supporters, of course, clear proof that the means of life are extended to the ministry, and that the doors of hope stand open to the prime minister. How much, then, did the opposition deceive themselves, how far did they rush into hope, how deeply did they indulge in expectation — and how severely, then, did disappointment, and the bitterness of despair and desolation, befall them!

And so the prime minister's anger at the High Commissioner was honorable yesterday, and the prime minister's contentment with what the High Commissioner asked for became honorable today; and so the prime minister was right when he grew angry, and the prime minister was right when he grew content; and so the prime minister was well-advised when he refused to go to the High Commissioner, and well-advised when he accepted going to the High Commissioner. And there is no harm in this for al-Sha'b newspaper, for the prime minister is a good man, and every good man is an infallible man, and every infallible man is a well-advised man, right when he refuses, and right when he accepts, doing well when he holds back, and doing well when he advances — no harm can come to him from anything, and no harm can come to anything from him.

And yet what did the English want from the prime minister? They wanted him to go and visit the High Commissioner so that the High Commissioner could then come to him; the prime minister refused this, and persisted in his refusal, and was loath to make the journey twice,

saying: "I went to the station, so I will not go to the residence." In this, the prime minister was, by the English account, breaking with custom, and, by the ministry's supporters' account, defending independence. Then what did the prime minister do? He went to the High Commissioner's residence, just as the English had asked of him, and then received the High Commissioner, just as the English had proposed to him.

So what did he do? And what did he leave undone? What did he accept? And what did he refuse? He did nothing, and left nothing undone! He accepted nothing, and refused nothing! He merely followed the course of his fellow prime ministers, except that he showed reluctance at first, and was then compelled to accept — would that he had not been reluctant, since he accepted in the end; or would that he had not accepted, since he was reluctant at first. But what would you have? This is how good men behave; as for other prime ministers, they accept without reluctance, because they are not good men, or they remain reluctant without ever accepting, because they are not good men either.

And yet, for all this, our prime minister deserves congratulation, and is worthy of praise being offered him; and we are not stingy with congratulation, when he deserves it, nor grudging with praise, when he merits it; and he is, without doubt, deserving of congratulation, worthy of praise, this time.

They were saying that he had resigned, or that he wanted to resign, and we denied this, and advised the prime minister against taking that step; for it was not fitting that the head of the ministry resign merely because he was at odds with the High Commissioner, and if one of the two disputing parties had to leave the field to the other, it was not the prime minister who ought to have left it; and we have never seen a prime minister resign because he was angry with a foreign political representative. Our prime minister accepted this advice, and was content with this opinion, and remained in his post, and made, for that, a sacrifice difficult and hard upon himself: he agreed to be the one to make the first visit to the High Commissioner, though he had, as was said, resolved not to. It is only right that we commend the prime minister for accepting the advice we offered him, and for endorsing the opinion we put before him. It is only right that we commend the prime minister for setting himself aside for Egypt's sake, for sacrificing private considerations to public ones, and for taking on what he neither liked nor wanted, so that it might not be said that a disagreement between the English and Egypt's prime

minister had forced the ministry to resign. And in this way, that amusing story came to the end it ought to have come to, and ended with what it ought to have begun with.

And yesterday another story began, which we do not know how will unfold; but we hope the prime minister will not accept or refuse anything without thinking, and thinking at length, and without asking and seeking counsel; for that is apt to protect him from becoming entangled, as he became entangled, in the matter of who should pay the first visit, and it may protect him from matters from which there may be no way out except by leaving the seat of government. The prime minister knows full well that nothing would be harder for Egypt, or more harmful to it, than for him to resign, leaving the seats of government empty of a ministry like his — a ministry founded on firmness and resolve, on preserving dignity, and on defending independence, by the blessing of that goodness which fills the hearts of good men.