Postponement

And the spectators departed from the arena laughing and wondering. There had been much in the spectacle to amuse and distract them, and much as well to provoke questions and compel expectation: hints of resignation followed by open declaration, bold movement toward resignation followed by retreat, insistence upon resignation followed by hesitation, appeals to illness and invocations of doctors, then complete reversal and renewed settlement upon the ministerial chair as though there had never been hint or declaration, advance or retreat, challenge or resistance, determination or hesitation—as though matters continued exactly as they had on the day when the Prime Minister departed, resolved to govern whether absent or present, ill or healthy. All this amused the spectators and occupied their attention. And all this led them to ask themselves: has the curtain fallen upon the final act? Or will it rise again upon another act, another story? And will the wait for that next act be long or short? No matter how many supplements the government newspaper publishes in the darkness of night, no matter how loudly the tongues of the ministers begin to speak after having long remained silent, and no matter how energetically those tongues now move after being tied, there remain in the atmosphere dense clouds piling one upon another and following closely behind each other. All of them cry out to the spectators: “Do not disperse! Behind the curtain there is still something more, and the lifting of the curtain is not far away.” And these clouds that pile upon one another do not arise from a single direction. They come from many directions and diverse regions. They come from beyond the sea, where one envoy is transferred and another dispatched. They come from northern Egypt, where disagreement follows reconciliation, where opportunities are seized and circles of intrigue lie in wait, where smiles conceal grimness and apparent joy conceals hidden despair. They come from Egypt itself, where men’s spirits have grown utterly constricted and hearts have reached the limits of suffocation. And they come from France and Italy, where there remains firm insistence that Egypt’s debts and interest be repaid in gold rather than paper currency. All these clouds pile upon one another and follow behind each other, crying to the spectators: “Wait! Behind the curtain there is something new.” And they cry to the Prime Minister: “You clung to power after pretending to renounce it. Very well then—if you are truly courageous, govern! Solve the problems and difficulties, bear the burdens and responsibilities, and confront the terrors and dangers now as you claimed to confront them in years past.” The people will wait, the Prime Minister will advance, and the people will discover that their waiting will not be long. The Prime Minister too will discover that his advance cannot continue far. He will realize that affairs have slipped beyond his control until they can no longer be gathered together except by a man possessing a strength, vigor, patience, steadfastness, and political ability that the Prime Minister simply does not possess. Yesterday Al-Ahram told us a story which astonished us and which we refused to believe possible as an accurate account of what the Prime Minister had actually said. We

waited for an emphatic denial in the evening edition, but no denial came. We said that if this report were not erased through direct contradiction, then the resignation of the Ministry would become unavoidable and beyond doubt. Yet the report has still not been denied. The government newspaper merely rejected it timidly and with embarrassment. The Prime Minister did not resign yesterday; he merely announced that he had abandoned the idea of resignation. Yet if anyone tells you that the crisis has passed, that everything surrounding the Ministry has stabilized, and that affairs will henceforth proceed as before, do not believe him and do not trust him. Be certain that he is either deceiving others or deceiving himself. For things possess a logic of their own. Political circumstances and temporary conditions may corrupt this logic for a time, but in the end it always prevails and triumphs. And the logic of things does not permit resigning ministers to indicate their successors before consultation, nor to propose the names of those who shall inherit authority after them, nor to divide the powers of government between themselves and their chosen allies, reserving half for themselves while surrendering the other half to their favorites. Either the report confirmed by Al-Ahram is true—in which case its inevitable consequence is the resignation of the Prime Minister tomorrow or the day after—or else the report is fabricated and entirely false, in which case it must be denied firmly, decisively, and publicly, and Al-Ahram must bear responsibility for publishing claims that cause people to doubt matters which ought never to be exposed to doubt or suspicion. The Prime Minister’s silence regarding this report, together with the embarrassed manner in which his newspaper denied it, strongly suggests that Al-Ahram reflected carefully before publishing what it spread among the public. And now they say that the present Ministry remains in office, untouched by alteration or modification. We, however, say that its survival will not be long—perhaps far shorter than its supporters and allies imagine, and shorter even than its fearful defenders hope. Yet since the Prime Minister has announced his determination to remain in power, the people have the right to demand from him what they need to demand, and indeed they have much to demand and every reason to demand it urgently. For this Minister of the Interior is utterly incapable of maintaining security and preserving public order, whether because he has been ill too long and too severely, or because maintaining security requires abilities beyond his own. The Prime Minister perhaps knows that while he advanced one step and retreated another, extending one hand toward resignation and then withdrawing it, appearing at one moment resolved to resign and at another determined to remain, public security itself deteriorated disastrously. Perhaps the Prime Minister has already been informed that on the very Friday when he abandoned resignation, two grave events occurred—events more serious and dangerous than either his remaining in office or leaving it. One occurred in the district of al-Saff near Cairo, where four Egyptians were killed and more than twenty wounded. The other occurred in Upper Egypt near Luxor, where the temples and monuments of the Pharaohs stand and where thousands of foreigners travel to visit antiquities. Two villages clashed violently in a marketplace there, producing a terrible battle. This

morning’s newspapers report twenty-five Egyptians dead, among them men responsible for public security, while the number of wounded has not yet even been counted. Let the Prime Minister ask himself and his conscience: is this matter worthy of attention, or does it not even deserve reflection? Let him ask himself which deserves Egypt’s concern more: these political maneuvers conducted behind curtains, whose secrets people scarcely understand, or these Egyptian lives openly spilled in blood, this black hand of death reaping twenty-nine Egyptians in a single day? Surely there must be a divine wisdom beyond human understanding: while some men in Alexandria maneuver and intrigue in order either to remain in power or abandon it, other men oppress one another and force each other to drink the cups of death. We ask the Prime Minister to ask himself: which is more beneficial for Egypt—that people’s blood remain within their veins and that the life God granted them be preserved, or that a powerless Ministry remain in office though incapable even of protecting Egyptians from one another or providing them with the simplest degree of security and order? The Prime Minister has declared that he remains in power for the sake of Egypt’s welfare and that he sacrifices his health in order to do so. Very well then: let him look upon this blood being spilled and stop it. Let him look upon these lives being extinguished and protect them. Let him prove that he truly chose to remain in power because he is genuinely capable of governing. For power is not an end in itself, nor should it ever become one. The nation does not rejoice merely because the Prime Minister remains in office. What the nation asks of the Prime Minister—so long as he imposes himself upon it—is only the simplest duty owed by ministers to peoples: that he preserve their lives and property and protect them from the recklessness of aggressors and wrongdoers. We hope that the Prime Minister possesses enough health, vigor, and ability to preserve security and shield the nation from death and destruction during these few remaining days in which his Ministry continues to monopolize power and control public affairs.