A Resignation

Kawkab al-Sharq, 9 July 1933

The Prime Minister has not submitted it, nor is it fitting that he should. His health — praise be to God — is flourishing, and recovery — praise be to God — is advancing toward him in long, swift strides. Nor would it be fitting for the Prime Minister to submit a resignation even if his health were so weakened and enfeebled that it no longer permitted him to shoulder those heavy burdens they call the burdens of governance. For the Prime Minister's name is sufficient in place of his health; the Prime Minister's name is enough to make the ministers rise and bear the weights of governance, absorbing its toil and conducting its affairs as well as toil can be absorbed and affairs conducted!

In the Prime Minister's name there is a power before which mountains crumble and the earth trembles. In the Prime Minister's name there is a blessing by which barrenness turns to fertility, crisis becomes abundance, and misery and wretchedness are transformed into happiness and bliss. If, in the Prime Minister's name, the Ministry has gathered the most solid and potent of all the conditions for life and blessing, then it has gathered the most solid and potent of all conditions for life and long continuance. The Prime Minister, therefore, is not the one who has submitted a resignation — for he has no need to submit one, and he is entirely confident, as we are entirely confident alongside him, that he will serve Egypt in health and in illness, will serve Egypt near and far, and will save Egypt whether or not he is formally participating in government. Were the Prime Minister to resolve to submit his resignation to His Majesty the King — on grounds of illness, or on grounds of absence abroad — all of Egypt would rush to him with urgent entreaties, imploring him to withhold his resignation or withdraw it. For Egypt holds the Prime Minister dear! Egypt is captivated by the Prime Minister! It loves him as a devoted, tender mother loves her loyal and only son. Egypt has tasted, under the Prime Minister's rule, such varieties of happiness and bliss as it savours and cherishes and is utterly determined should last and continue. Had Egypt ever tasted the sweetness of freedom before the Prime Minister? Had Egypt ever enjoyed honour and dignity before the Prime Minister? Had Egypt ever known prosperity and wealth before the Prime Minister? Had Egypt ever complained of too much money, to the point of nearly being overwhelmed by it, before the Prime Minister? How then could Egypt wish to be parted from the Prime Minister, or allow the Prime Minister to resign? Never — the Prime Minister will not resign, and Egypt will not permit it! Nor will there be any doubt that should the Prime Minister submit his resignation or suggest doing so, he would do so only under compulsion and necessity — forced upon him by those English who do not love Egypt and do not wish it well, who make a show of supporting the Prime Minister while secretly plotting against him and earnestly backing the Wafdists. Egypt must turn the English's plotting back upon them,

ward off their evil from itself, surround its Prime Minister with hearts and souls, and forestall any English attempt to compel him to resign. That is no business of the English; it is the business of Egypt alone. The Prime Minister set Egypt an example of honour and dignity, of pride and refusal to bow, that it will never forget — the day he silenced Mr MacDonald and put him in his place when MacDonald sought to meddle in Egypt's foreign affairs. Egypt has benefited from that example and learned from that lesson, and will say to the English on the day they seek to push its Prime Minister into resigning: Stay where you are — do not advance, step back. And if you insist, Egypt — strong and proud — will not permit you to lay a harmful hand on its Prime Minister — strong and proud!

The Prime Minister, then, has not submitted the resignation that serves as the title of this piece. The one who submitted it is a different man altogether — one who carries nothing like the Prime Minister's weight, and could never carry anything like it. He is simply a man like any other, sharing with the Prime Minister in two things only: the Ministry, and illness.

He is the Foreign Minister, just as the Prime Minister is the Finance Minister; and he is ill, just as the Prime Minister is ill. But events have shown that the Prime Minister made a mistake — and which of us does not make mistakes, and are not the greatest men the most prone to mistakes — when he chose Nakhla Pasha al-Muṭīʿī to be his colleague in the Ministry and partner in governance. He made a mistake because no sooner did illness befall the Foreign Minister than he resigned, or spoke of resigning. Those who had dealings with him came forward to advise him that resignation was unbecoming of ministers in this era, being a weakness of soul and a feebleness of character. He accepted the advice and abandoned talk of resignation — then his illness persisted somewhat and he returned to the same talk, and his advisers returned to reminding him that resignation was a failing from which the ministers of this blessed era had been cured. The man fell silent with ill-concealed reluctance, then his illness wore on and he was compelled to break his silence and speak of resignation once again. Experience showed that advice did him no good and counsel meant nothing to him, and that he was not among the men suited to this era — he was a man of the old era, in which ministers resigned when they fell ill and sickness came upon them as a heavy, unwelcome guest.

There are those of a cunning and tenacious disposition — even in their propaganda — who claim that the Foreign Minister did not resign in the first instance, but rather proved himself a man of this era, capable like the Prime Minister of combining illness and governance in a single scabbard. But he wished to travel abroad to convalesce, as the Prime Minister had travelled to convalesce, and sought leave to do so — and leave was not granted him. He was angered for his dignity and angered for his health, and so he resigned. If this account is accurate, it too demonstrates that the Foreign Minister was not a man of this era but

a man of the old era — one of those who grew angry when they sought leave and were refused it, or asked for something and were not given it, and who resigned when the Prime Minister — whether acting in his own right or through his deputy — declined some portion of what they sought.

The Foreign Minister has shown himself to belong to that old delicate breed that falls ill and resigns. And what a danger Egypt would face if all its ministers were of that old delicate breed — resigning for illness, resigning for anger. Yet prior examples were available before the Foreign Minister's time, and he ought to have learned from ministers before him who grew angry, persisted in their anger, and yet did not resign — men who held their positions until the Prime Minister himself resigned and removed them from government, knowingly or unknowingly. Then when the Prime Minister formed his second ministry he did not bring them back into government, whether they wished it or not. It is remarkable that the Foreign Minister was not even fortunate in his illness: he shared this illness with the Prime Minister, but wished to take this partnership to its furthest limits, imagining that he too could travel to Europe like the Prime Minister, and that what is permitted to ministers is rest when they are weary — though still healthy — just as the Minister of Customs will shortly take his rest because he is tired, not because he is sick. In any case, Nakhla Pasha al-Muṭīʿī's passage through the Ministry was a lesson that, if it has not benefited him, may yet benefit his colleagues — and may benefit the minister who will succeed him at the Foreign Ministry. The lesson, in sum, is this: a minister who thinks of measuring himself against the Prime Minister is unfit for ministerial office. The minister who is truly fit for office is the one whom the Prime Minister places in his seat and who does not stir from it until the Prime Minister physically pushes him out of it. The minister who is truly fit for office is the one who knows that people have their stations, and that the minister's station is elevated relative to his subordinates — but that it ought not, in any case, to aspire to what lies above it, or to presume to rival the station of the Prime Minister.

Perhaps the Egyptians will join the ministers and ministerial aspirants in profiting from this valuable political lesson that our happy circumstances in this happy era are imparting to them.