Tidings

(“Anbā’” — Kawkab al-Sharq, 25 April 1933)

Taha Hussein

The foes and friends of the Prime Minister alike must acknowledge that he is a man of endurance — long of endurance, patient and long of patience, unmoved by despair or hope, unaffected by despondency or expectation. His sole concern is power, and power alone; he desired it and won it, and once settled in it he swore to cling to it for as long as his hand could grasp the reins and hold the bridle. However much the motives for resignation press upon him, he will not heed them; and however much the inducements to retirement bear down upon him, he will pay them no mind!

And he has kept his oath: he stands in his place and will not budge. Everything around him in Egypt falls to ruin, yet he does not flinch; everything in England rebounds against him, yet he does not care. Warnings come to him from every quarter, as though nothing had reached him, as though no warning had arrived! He had scarcely settled into power before he attempted negotiations; he was told: not until the nation grants you its confidence and appoints you its spokesman, speaking on its behalf.

He strove to win that confidence, but found no way to it! Then came the story of the elections — and what will convey to you the story of the elections? Once the conditions were prepared and the Senate and the Deputies were assembled, the man set about negotiating, and the English began to defer him from month to month, and from year to year; until, when he had carried his importuning to excess and gone too far in his insistence, they deferred him indefinitely, offering at times the excuse of their heavy workload, and at other times the wretched state of affairs on our side. And they made clear to him at every turn — and he understood them, yet behaved as though he did not — that there was no way to negotiate with him; for he did not represent Egypt, nor could he speak on its behalf, nor could he bind it if he gave undertakings, nor could he compel it to carry out whatever treaty he might accept or execute whatever agreement he might sign. But the Prime Minister is clever and astute: he understands as though he has not understood, and hears as though he has not heard!

So the English refuse, and he requests and renews the request; the English decline, and he insists and carries his insistence to excess! And they remain in their refusal, and he remains in his insistence, until his strength wanes and his resources are exhausted. And now he is ill and unable to work, yet even so he manages to call for negotiations, and to pursue the call, and to draft proposals which he submits to the High Commissioner, and with which this Commissioner travels to London to present them to his superiors at the Foreign Office.

Those close to the Prime Minister urge him to give his health and well-being precedence, and to leave power to someone capable of shouldering it. But between the Prime Minister and London there are threads of hope that lead him not to heed the counsel of counselors, and to remain in power — in the hope that his proposals may be accepted, that he may sign a treaty with the English, that he may leave power with a good exit, and that he may record in the letter of his resignation that he completed his mission, having given the country a new system and concluded an agreement with the English for the country.

But his proposals are rejected in London, and the Foreign Office announces — as the correspondent of al-Ahram informs us this morning — that the report of negotiations with Sidqi Pasha has absolutely no basis. And the correspondent of al-Ahram interprets this announcement to mean that the Foreign Office has rejected Sidqi Pasha’s proposals with courtesy and tact, as has always been its custom!

And it is only right that the Foreign Office, for the sake of its ailing friend, should be gentle with him and show him kindness, not rebuffing him harshly, but rather granting what he wishes and announcing that no negotiations whatsoever have taken place between them. Be that as it may, the Prime Minister has failed in his desire to negotiate with the English for the seventh or the eighth time — or the tenth, if you like! And there remains for him no hope of trying again, of renewing his request, or of looking to the near or distant future; for everything now stands between him and hope.

His political position in Egypt has weakened as it has never weakened before, and his health — regrettably — does not allow him to attempt to strengthen his position and recover his political power. Everything has slipped from his grasp, everything has escaped his hand,

and his remaining in power has become idle talk and a kind of farce. In all likelihood he remains in power only until matters are arranged for those who were supporting him yesterday, that they may bring forth someone to succeed him today or tomorrow.

Whatever the friends of the Prime Minister may say, and whatever his trumpets may sound, no one will be able to deceive the Egyptians into thinking that Sidqi Pasha's remaining in power is anything more than a pretense. This pretense may last days, it may stretch to weeks, or it may vanish suddenly; but the departure of the Prime Minister from power in the near future is something inevitable and inescapable, because it is the ordained consequence that accords with the nature of things in Egypt and in the land of the English.

Everything is in turmoil around the Prime Minister in Egypt. The people have been turned away from him since he assumed power, but the people's turning away has intensified until it has reached its utmost. The proof of it is that his ministry takes fright at everything, and mobilizes the army and the police in readiness for the slightest and least dangerous matters. And the English have washed their hands of him, and confirmed that they will not negotiate with him, and confirmed once more that they will prepare for negotiation — but with the ministry that represents Egypt, expresses its will, speaks on its behalf, and when it pledges, Egypt carries out what has been pledged.

And so the business of the present ministry is settled, despite what the entourage of Sidqi Pasha will say tomorrow and the day after, and until the Prime Minister submits his resignation to His Majesty the King. Every day of the coming days is one in which a door is apt to close and another to open, a page to be folded and another to be spread. The Egyptians will bid farewell, tomorrow or the day after, to a ministry that has made them taste all manner of pain and every kind of ordeal. They will remember, and they will forget; but in any case they will fold the page of yesterday and look to the page of tomorrow. They will bid farewell to one era and welcome another.

And if reminding is useful, then warning is no less so.

In all likelihood, this report broadcast by al-Ahram this morning will awaken dormant hopes and renew an energy that had flagged somewhat. Dreams will prepare themselves and put on their finery, and take shapes

that differ in the most extreme fashion — yet are enticing in the most extreme fashion, in any case. These dreams will visit certain houses and appear before certain souls. Some will prepare themselves for a ministry even if it has not yet sought them out, and some will ready themselves for power even if power has not yet summoned them. Talk will multiply, and debate will intensify.

It is right that we should remind the Egyptians, right that we should warn them, and incumbent upon the Egyptians themselves to beware. However great their vexation with the present ministry, and however heavy their burden of enduring it, they owe it to themselves not to hasten the passing of one evil only to fall into another that may be more wicked in nature and more noxious in effect. Better for them that the ordeal should continue in all its present weakness, feebleness, and disorder, than that they should be led to imagine it has passed when it only renews itself, or that it has cleared when it only resumes its activity, strong and violent.

The Egyptians must remember what they object to in the ministry of Sidqi Pasha, and they must know what they want when they wish this ministry to resign. They object to the present ministry’s alteration of the constitution, and they want this constitution restored. They object to the present ministry’s trampling of liberty — and we do not mean the liberty of individuals alone; we mean the liberty of the entire nation. We mean parliamentary liberty; we mean the whole representative life. And they want these chains and fetters lifted from liberty, and their political life restored to what it was on the day the Prime Minister rose and formed his ministry.

The Egyptians must remember all this, and not be beguiled by the hope that the ordeal is ending, and not be distracted by talk and wishful thinking. Al-Ahram has once again broadcast the English consideration of a national ministry, and has begun to speak of it, declaring that it does not wish at this time to call for one — because, while believing it to be a necessity of Egyptian life today, it dislikes embellishing it and promoting it after having done so once before, which aroused suspicions. This is a kind of call for the national ministry that has some skill and some tact, and some caution and some bashfulness.

It is certain that other newspapers will mention the national ministry, and will call for it, and will insist on mentioning it and calling for it. And it is certain that no one will refuse this national ministry — but on the condition that it be the result of the nation’s will, free and unshackled, and not a condition dictated by the English to alter the political situation in which we find ourselves.

No one will refuse the idea of a national ministry if the nation is consulted and endorses it, if the nation is called to it and answers. But if this national ministry is imposed upon the nation from any quarter, or any club, or any party, then no one will smile upon it, no one will respond to it, and no one will accept it save those who are thinking of it and calling for it.

The Egyptians must remember that they are not the ones who created this existing political crisis; others created it, and it is therefore those who created it who must resolve it. And there is no solution for it except that matters be restored to what they were on the day Sidqi Pasha assumed the burdens of power. There, and only there, can Egypt be consulted about the national ministry, and can the business of this national ministry proceed according to the rule of the constitution, not according to anything else.

We think that there is no ambiguity or obscurity in these words, and we believe — with a conviction beyond all doubt — that they faithfully depict the view of the majority of Egyptians to whom the whole matter will be referred, today or tomorrow.