Crisis…

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), July 26, 1934

Most people long for it, because it would lift a heavy burden from their shoulders, while the fewest fear it, because it closes the doors of hope before them and cuts off their paths through life. Those who love it, and those steeped in it, speak of it at length: they ask when it will arise, they grope after the causes that might bring it forth, and no sooner do they hear that something has happened, or some report has been broadcast, than they set about uncovering whatever link it might have to the crisis, hoping that the days will make real what their dreams have only pictured. And these others ask, instead, when it will finally drop anchor: they cannot hear a rumor without their hearts churning, cannot have some report brought to them without their spirits taking flight, for they long for the days to erase what their dreams have pictured. Both sorts are anxious, and it is out of both sorts that the nation is composed, that the people are made up: a great anxious majority who want the cabinet to fall, and a slight anxious minority who want the cabinet to endure. We cannot imagine a political condition worse than this one, in which no Egyptian is free of anxiety, no Egyptian secure from fear, no Egyptian confident of tomorrow, no Egyptian left alone with himself without denying what has been, dreading what is to come, and begging of God some small thing he can only dream of and hardly dares hope for — and yet this, all the same, is the condition of the Egyptians.

Speak to whomever you like, and the conversation will open with the political crisis and close with the political crisis, touching in between, here and there, on the edges of other, different subjects, but always coming back in the end to the political crisis — as though people lived by the political crisis alone, as though their yesterday, their today, and their tomorrow had been created for nothing else.

And yet, for all that, those who established this blessed policy, and forced it upon the Egyptians by sheer force, never wanted this, nor sought it. They meant, rather, to turn the Egyptians away from politics — and instead find themselves driving them straight into it; they meant to make the Egyptians weary of politics — and instead find themselves making it more desirable to them than ever. If there is a failure the failed can take comfort in, a defeat the defeated can take comfort in, it is this failure and this very defeat. For the champions of this blessed era have

succeeded at nothing, have achieved nothing. They meant to distract the Egyptians from their rights, and instead ended up making the Egyptians more zealous in guarding those very rights. They meant to bring the Egyptians to submission and abasement, and instead ended up severing every possible link between the Egyptians and submission or abasement. And they meant, further, to return the Egyptians to a medieval way of life, one in which the people took no interest in politics at all, but left such matters to those in authority — and instead ended up with a people wholly absorbed in politics, believing with the sincerest conviction that they alone are the rightful masters of their own affairs, and that if anyone else concerns himself with politics, he ought to do so only as their delegate and their appointed agent, and nothing more.

Be that as it may, people have gone back to talking about the political crisis — or, to be precise, the cabinet crisis. Some insist it exists; others swear by God, with all the conviction they can muster, that it is nothing but an illusion among illusions, a fancy among fancies. The first look at the nature of things as they actually are; the second rely on wishes and hopes. But if you consult the plain facts, the crisis has existed ever since this cabinet rose to take up the burden of government — indeed, ever since this policy was forced upon the Egyptians by sheer force. The very imposition of this policy was itself a crisis from which the country has not yet been delivered. Every single event that took place in the days of Sidqi Pasha was enough, on its own, to have brought down a thousand cabinets and more, and yet Sidqi Pasha remained standing in his post, despite the people and despite events, for three years and part of a fourth, before finally falling one day, for a reason whose truth remains, at least so far, unknown to the people. And the rise of the present cabinet to power was itself a strange thing, and every single act of this cabinet since it rose to power has, on its own, been enough to bring down a cabinet. The cabinet that promised to reform economic life, only to make it nothing but worse, deserves to fall — and yet it remains! The cabinet that promised to settle the question of the public debt without negotiation, without departing in the least from the principle of payment and refusal — and then negotiated, and arrived at nothing — deserves to fall, and yet it remains! The cabinet that pledged itself, in the most solemn terms, to settle the affliction of mortgage debt once and for all, and then settled nothing of it whatsoever, deserves to fall, and yet it stands! The cabinet that announced its agreement with the Egyptian judges over their position in the Mixed Courts regarding the presidency of the chambers, and regarding the question of the Arabic language, and

then proved powerless to secure them anything at all, deserves to fall, and yet it stands! The cabinet that announced it would negotiate the matter of the Mixed Courts as befits a cabinet governing an independent country, and then would not take a single step in that direction except with English permission, deserves to fall, and yet it stands! And the cabinet whose very head left office denouncing Sidqi Pasha for the abuses and torture that had occurred, only to see abuses and torture occur under his own cabinet in turn — remedying none of it, restoring the people neither to safety nor to peace of mind, protecting their bodies from torment, nor granting their spirits freedom — deserves to fall, and yet it stands. Everything that surrounds this cabinet, everything this cabinet undertakes, is enough to provoke the sharpest cabinet crisis, and to end with the cabinet's fall — and yet the cabinet, all the same, remains standing, smiling at every crisis, and every crisis smiling back at it, as though some deep affection and alliance bound the two together. For all these crises can only bring cabinets down where those cabinets rest upon the people's will, and by the people's will — falling the moment the people no longer want them, no longer trust in their remaining. But where cabinets impose themselves, or circumstance imposes them upon the people, such crises carry neither weight nor danger. The one thing that does carry weight, that does carry danger, is something unknown — unknown to you, unknown to me. You cannot foresee it, nor can I. It is something that might descend from the sky, or spring up from the earth, or be borne in on the wind from some distant place, and suddenly there it is, bringing the cabinet down and sending its ministers home, even as the cabinet never once imagined its own fall, and the ministers never expected to find themselves settled back in their own houses. It is something like whatever it was that brought down Sidqi Pasha, at a time when Sidqi Pasha himself was declaring that he stood strong and firm, secure in the confidence of parliament. It is something that admits of no explanation and no interpretation. It is something beyond inquiry, something beyond discussion. It is something we must simply wait for, and expect to happen at any moment — whether expected or unexpected, whether foreseeable or not, whether hoped for or not, whether feared or not. So if people claim the crisis exists, they are telling the truth — though it is a crisis that avails nothing. And if people claim the crisis does not exist, they are equally telling the truth, because the cabinet's fate was never really hostage to these crises in the first place. And if Abd al-Fattah Yehia Pasha says the cabinet has never, at any moment, been stronger than it is now, he too speaks the truth — for the people are still being made to suffer, and misfortunes and cares are still pouring down upon

Egyptian heads. And if some report should suddenly spread, on no basis and against all expectation, that Abd al-Fattah Yehia Pasha has submitted his resignation to His Majesty the King, and that report should prove true, that too is entirely possible — the same thing happened less than a year ago. You may therefore believe anything at all, and you may just as well disbelieve anything at all — for we are living in an age in which neither belief nor disbelief carries any weight, nor the judgments of logic, nor the workings of reason. The only thing that carries any weight whatsoever in this age is chance — that thing which man has not yet managed to bring under the rule of law. So expect everything, and expect nothing, and be patient until God's decree makes itself known.