Concealment...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), August 21, 1934

Minds are baffled trying to understand it, and even the most skillful people at solving riddles, the most capable at uncovering secrets and lifting veils, are powerless to explain it, however much effort and time they spend on the task, however much hardship and toil they endure in pursuit of it.

For it was only yesterday that this delightful, curious, bold, and altogether innocent decision reached Professor al-Sanhuri — the decision issued by the cabinet dismissing him from his post at the Faculty of Law — and this strange and peculiar decision, it turns out, had actually been issued on Saturday, the eleventh of this month, with the public learning nothing whatsoever of it, neither on that Saturday nor in the five days that followed. Then, on Friday, Al-Jihad reported that a rumor was circulating, that reports were being broadcast, that the cabinet wished to dismiss Professor al-Sanhuri — and Al-Jihad expressed the sincere hope, as a genuine well-wisher to both the cabinet and the university, that these reports would prove untrue.

By noon that same day, private word reached us from certain well-established scholarly sources that what Al-Jihad had published as mere rumor was, in fact, no rumor at all, but an accomplished fact, already settled and concluded. We contacted some of these well-established sources ourselves, to ask them about the reports attributed to them, and they denied these reports outright — a denial strong in appearance, weak underneath — and we came away from our conversation with them full of suspicion. Then evening came, and we searched various sources for word of these reports — were they true, or untrue? Did they represent what the cabinet had already done, or merely what the cabinet intended to do? We could arrive at nothing conclusive; the whole matter remained doubt piled upon doubt, confusion compounding confusion.

Then Saturday morning came, and there was Al-Ahram publishing the news as an accurate account of what had actually happened, reporting that the cabinet had issued a decision that had never been made public. Then the wind carried word to us, and the coastal train carried word to us, that the matter had been kept secret, that those responsible for it had gone to great lengths to keep it secret, and that it

had seemed fitting for it to remain secret until the decision could be formally communicated to the professor — or until the decision could be reconsidered, after it had become apparent to the Prime Minister that some scheme was afoot, that certain talk did not represent the truth, that an injustice had been done requiring redress — had it not been for someone with inside knowledge of the affair, who wished to confront the government with a fait accompli, and so leaked the matter to whoever passed it on to Al-Ahram.

All of this indicates that the cabinet took its decision on the eleventh day of this month, and that this decision was kept secret for a full week — or six full days, to be precise. And we do not think we exaggerate in saying that this matter was concealed not only from the newspapers, nor only from the newspaper-reading public, but from certain other people as well, whose position is such that news of this kind ought never to escape them. It is only natural, then, that we should ask ourselves, ask the public, and ask the ministers themselves, about the source of this strange concealment of this strange decision. And it is certain that fear was not the source of this concealment — for our cabinet, praise God, enjoys a courage unmatched by any other courage, a strength unrivaled by any other strength, a boldness with no equal anywhere in East or West; it fears no one at all, though everyone may well fear it; it fears nothing at all, though everything may well fear it. And what, in any case, could the cabinet possibly have to fear from announcing this decision, which amounts to no more than dismissing one university professor, not yet forty years old, against whom the cabinet has established no proven violation of any law, any regulation, or any established principle whatsoever? It was merely told something, and it listened; certain reports were passed along to it, and it believed them. It did not investigate, did not inquire, did not trouble itself to establish the truth. And this is the very least one can expect from strong cabinets in an era as blessed as this one. Nor is there any doubt that the cabinet did not fear the anger of the university community. For the academics of our university have, praise God, become people who neither fear nor tremble; their hearts are calm, their dispositions untroubled, their consciences at ease, their tongues inclined to silence, and their pens resting from the summer heat. They place their faith entirely in the cabinet, believing whatever it says, obeying whatever it commands, being affected however it acts; they trust that the cabinet is infallible, that it never speaks from mere caprice, never acts in error, never entangles itself in anything unseemly — and so they repose in it the fullest confidence. The proof of this is that a

colleague of theirs has been dismissed outright, without investigation or inquiry, and they have raised no objection whatsoever — and who knows, perhaps they never even learned of it at all. It is perfectly clear that an event of this kind, had it occurred in a country where universities command any self-respect, would have thrown academic life into serious turmoil. But in Egypt, the university sleeps, and will not wake until summer has passed. Two years ago, or a little more, the university would have taken such matters somewhat more seriously — history records, and people still recall, that an incident occurred at the university more than two years ago that threw academic life into severe turmoil, and it is said that the university's rector resigned over it. But now the university has grown accustomed to such incidents, and receives them with patience and steadfastness, seeking refuge in God from Satan the accursed, and awaiting the relief that may yet spare professors from dismissal or transfer without inquiry or investigation. The university wishes simply to live, and dreads having its livelihood cut off in these days when people can find nothing to spend. And so it remains content with what has been, with what is, and with whatever is yet to come. The cabinet, then, did not conceal its decision out of any fear of the university and its protests, nor of the academics and their insistent objections. Nor did the cabinet dread the students. For the students have been scattered across the face of the earth since summer began, and even had they been gathered together, the cabinet would hardly have dreaded them — for what, after all, could the cabinet possibly fear from students, armed as it is with laws and regulations that permit it to dismiss them, wholesale or piecemeal, and backed as it is by the police and the army, both well practiced in wielding sticks and whips and opening fire, should the need for earnest measures ever arise?

Nor did the cabinet fear the press — and since when has the cabinet troubled itself over the press, or taken it into account, or hoped for its respect? Had the press ever been capable of stirring fear in the hearts of ministers, certain things now happening would never have happened, and the cabinet would never have remained in power for more days than a handful.

Nor did the cabinet fear the people — and since when has the cabinet feared the people, when it is, praise God, quite capable of making the people bear whatever it wishes, whether they want it or not? It possesses a strength that cannot be turned back, a might that cannot be borne. So then, what was the cabinet afraid of? What was it so intent on

concealing? Why did it imprison this poor, wretched decision, denying it its natural right to air, to light, to the free and open existence that decisions ordinarily enjoy the moment they are issued by the cabinet?

Some say the cabinet feared itself, dreaded its own shadow, was troubled by its own conscience — that it issued this decision reluctantly, hesitant even as it issued it, wishing to think the matter over and weigh it carefully, to take its time and deliberate, in the hope that it might either grow settled in its resolve or reverse itself entirely. Others say, rather, that the cabinet was intent on this concealment precisely so that certain people then in Egypt, and certain others who make no scruple of meddling in what does not concern them and asking about what they ought not to ask about, might first leave the country; and once those who had left had left, and those who were away were away, the veils were lifted, the decision drew its first breath, took wing, and flew, arriving finally, yesterday, at Professor al-Sanhuri's door. As for us, we do not believe the cabinet feared itself, for no one compelled it to issue this decision; nor do we believe the cabinet feared anyone else, for the cabinet fears no one, present or absent — and if the cabinet does not fear the entire Egyptian people, then it is surely too great, too courageous, to stand in awe of any single individual or any single group.

So then, what is the true source of this concealment, and what is the secret behind this cover-up? It seems to us a riddle destined to remain forever hidden, one for which people will grope after every manner of explanation and interpretation without ever arriving at a solution.

Nor is this strange in itself, for the universe and life abound with riddles that baffle the mind and defeat even the most brilliant of thinkers to explain. Be that as it may, our cabinet has succeeded in adding one obscure mystery to the mysteries of higher philosophy — one that will exhaust the philosophers in their attempts to lift its veil: namely, the source of this concealment of a decision that gave no cause whatsoever for concealment. Might the cabinet, then, lift the covering for them, and reveal to them this hidden wisdom that kept it silent for a full week about something no cabinet ought ever to keep silent about for even a single day, let alone part of one?