Death Throes . . .

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), November 4, 1934

Long and heavy was this death-agony, whose pains the cabinet went on suffering, whose throes it went on enduring — not for a day or two, not for a week or two, but for weeks on end.

Nor was the length of this death-agony the result of any strength in the cabinet, any great share of life in it, any power to overcome death and resist extinction — its condition was far slighter and frailer than that; it was too weak to withstand even a passing breeze, let alone the buffeting of a storm, let alone the crash of thunder. Rather, circumstances deliberately prolonged its dying, because it was, and remained, bewildered and unsettled, not knowing how to resolve this crisis, not knowing how to free itself from the troubles stirred up by the collapse of this vanishing era. The length of this death-agony may in itself have been heavy, hateful, wearisome, charged with danger to the public interest — yet it was not without its uses, nor free of some benefit: to the people, on the one hand; to the English, on another; and to the ministers themselves, on a third. As for the people, this long contemplation of the heavy death-agony, and of the decay and corruption surrounding it, and the spread of its effects, only carried them from one degree of faith to a firmer one, from one degree of certainty to a surer one, from one degree of trust to a deeper one. They saw how regimes collapse when they do not rest on the people's will, do not lean on the people's trust, do not draw their strength from the people's strength, and are no reflection of the people's hopes and highest ideals. They saw how cabinets unsupported by the people become playthings of circumstance, unable to conclude anything or annul anything, unable to act or to speak, capable of nothing but surrender, disgrace, and submission. And then they saw how a people that believes in itself, that guards its own right, that holds fast to its own dignity, can stand firm against calamities until it overcomes them, and can pass through accumulated trials as an arrow passes through its mark — strong, unsullied, hard, steady, bold, beyond the reach of anything, its affairs spoiled by no scheme, untouched by ordeal or terror. As for the English, they too gained something from the length of this death-agony, for they saw that the people contesting and resisting them was an honorable people, not swayed by passion, not toyed with by appetite; a shrewd people, not deceived by wishful hopes, not lured by falsehoods; a hard people, unbent by calamity, not turned from its purpose by events; a

people utterly in earnest, utterly resolute, that had not risen playfully, nor stirred capriciously, nor demanded its rights while ready to compromise on them. The English saw this people, and saw in it how upright it was in dispute, how honorable in struggle, how discerning — knowing what to embrace and what to let go. Had it been a vain, feeble people, swept along by every passing whim, the two contending parties would have divided it between them: the English taking one half, al-Ibrashi Pasha and his associates the other. The one would deceive it by claiming to save it from harm and expose it to no danger; the other would deceive it by claiming to defend its independence and its rights. But the shrewd, watchful, wary Egyptian people was deceived by neither — for it is not deceived by an adversary, however honorable he may seem, nor was it deceived by al-Ibrashi Pasha and his associates, for it is not deceived by those who have trespassed on its rights and squandered its authority, and sought to govern it as one governs a herd. It was deceived by neither the one nor the other; instead it stood, noble, honorable, impartial, between the one and the other, watching each side's cunning toward the other, each side's scheming against the other. It set down against both what they said and what they did, and waited, believing, confident, for the hour of triumph — the hour in which falsehood is defeated and truth prevails, and its freedom is restored to it whole, its right undiminished.

As for the ministers, this long death-agony pained them, and its heavy throes weighed upon them; yet for all that they too gained something from it, if they were capable of gaining; they too drew a lesson from it, if they were capable of drawing one. They saw that authority is meaningless unless it issues from the people; that standing is false unless it reflects the people's love; they saw that God's justice is real, even when it seems slow to men at times; and they saw that those who tyrannize over the people and usurp their rights always end as Sidqi Pasha ended a year ago, and as they themselves are ending today — swept by the wind, tossed about by events, finding no fortress to shelter in, for they had squandered their true fortress, which is the people's love, and no shield to trust in, for they had squandered their true shield, which is the people's approval — until, once authority slipped away from them and their supporters scattered, they looked at themselves and found they weighed nothing, amounted to nothing; found hearts turned from them and spirits set against them, and eyes that would look on them with nothing but a pity full of reproach.

Long and heavy, then, was this death-agony to which the cabinet submitted for weeks on end — and here we are, watching it now give up its spirit and breathe its last, looking about itself to find no grief, no sorrow, but only averted eyes and indifference, and a people watching it depart as all things depart, perish as all things perish, saying only: so let it fall, the cabinet that never drew its strength from the people, and never rested its rule upon the people.

Taha Hussein

Al-Wadi, November 4, 1934.