Confessions . . .

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), October 19, 1934

Should anyone ever claim to you that the good-natured man enjoys peace of mind, ease of heart, and freedom from worry — that he sleeps soundly through the night and laughs freely through the day — do not believe him, and pay no heed to what he says. For the Prime Minister stands about as far as any man could stand from peace of mind; he is a stranger, utterly, to ease of heart; he is deprived, entirely, of that very freedom from worry he so loves. And it is not the ordinary run of problems that spoils his days and keeps him awake at night — for the man has lived alongside such problems ever since the reins of government were first placed in his hands, and he has lived alongside them the way one friend lives alongside another: an existence of pure harmony and affection, undisturbed by tedium or fatigue, unspoiled by irritation or distress. Perhaps the Prime Minister has never actually arrived at any solution to these problems simply because he has grown so accustomed to living with them, finding in their constant company a pleasure and an enjoyment all its own — not because he is incapable of solving them at all. For the man is good-natured, yes, but he is also clever; the man is good-natured, yes, but he is also strong — and had he genuinely wished to solve these problems, nothing would have stood in his way. He has simply chosen to preserve them, lest his entire life become too easy, too smooth, too thoroughly paved. What occupies his mind, then, is not these ordinary problems at all, since ordinary problems hardly trouble him in the least — it is, rather, those sudden problems people first began speaking of at the very start of summer, then gradually pressed their talk of, more and more, as summer wore on, until the Egyptian atmosphere finally filled to overflowing with them, from the very moment the Deputy High Commissioner arrived. Rumors spread, diverged, and collided violently with one another, until they occupied the public's entire attention throughout these past weeks — and the Prime Minister proved himself brave, resilient, resolute, and bold: he stood firm against these rumors, resisting them with a deep and unbroken silence, then abandoned mere resistance for open counterattack, speaking out, and speaking a great deal more still. The government's newspapers followed his lead, attacking exactly as he attacked, speaking exactly as he spoke, persisting in denial and refutation exactly as the good-natured man himself persisted in denial and refutation. But the rumors, it seems,

simply refuse to be frightened, refuse even to acknowledge the concept of fear, refuse to flee, and refuse even to consider fleeing — standing their ground against the Prime Minister exactly as firmly as the Prime Minister stands his ground against them. The rumors, for their part, chose to fall silent for a few days, granting the Prime Minister and his supporters the opportunity to empty their entire quiver, and to say absolutely everything they had to say. Then, once that opportunity had passed, the rumors returned once more to motion and activity, to spreading and pressing their case anew. And this very Al-Muqattam, which had been denying so thoroughly, refuting so extravagantly, exceeding all bounds in its denials, and even pressing poetry itself into service as a vehicle for denial and refutation, returned only yesterday to record some of the very rumors it had once denied — reporting that certain English quarters have expressed certain wishes meant to reach a certain Egyptian party, and reporting the talk that the headship of the Royal Cabinet, vacant for so long now, may soon be entrusted to someone at last. And no sooner had the public read Al-Muqattam, understood it, and grasped exactly what Al-Muqattam meant to signal, than this very morning dawned to reveal a French-language government newspaper publishing a most peculiar piece — utterly unlike anything it had ever written before, and nothing anyone could have expected of it — praising the entirety of the Egyptian press, and praising the opposition press in particular, even lavishing praise upon the very editors-in-chief of the opposition papers whom it had, only last Sunday, been urging to break their pens and take up the trade of fashion instead, and whom it had, only days before that, been branding cowards and weaklings.

Yes — it now praises the opposition papers and their editors, because these very papers, it claims, have forgotten whatever rancor and resentment once filled the hearts of their proprietors and their parties, have set aside every internal quarrel entirely, and have agreed with the loyalist papers on one single point demanded by true and sincere patriotism: the protection of independence, and resistance to foreign interference in Egypt's own private affairs. It is certainly true that the opposition papers responded today exactly as they have always responded, and will always respond, to the call of genuine patriotism, and resisted, as they will always resist, every foreign interference in Egypt's private affairs — for they were founded for no other purpose, and understand life through no other lens. But certain other people, whom this very newspaper knows perfectly well, are extremely skilled at plugging their own ears the moment genuine patriotism calls them to

protect independence, to denounce foreign interference in Egyptian affairs, to protest the High Commissioner's deputy carrying out inspections of the police, and to demand satisfaction for Egypt and for Egyptians over the assault British soldiers committed against the sons of this nation — an assault whose consequences included death itself.

These very people treat patriotism as a mere trade, taking refuge in it whenever they see, in its shelter, some hope of survival, and turning away from it whenever they see, in that same shelter, some exposure to danger instead. Be that as it may, this government newspaper now records, exactly as Al-Muqattam recorded yesterday, that the political situation is delicate, that Egyptian independence stands exposed to danger, and that the nation stands in need of unity among its own sons. There is, then, something genuinely happening — and something genuinely serious happening — in the air. And this very same newspaper, only a day or two ago, was denying outright that anything at all was happening in the air, exactly as Al-Muqattam was denying it too. So has some new development actually occurred? Has some incident taken place that the public did not know of before, and still does not know of even now? And the Prime Minister's own newspaper records this very morning that something is indeed in the air — cursing the opposition, as it has grown accustomed to doing, yet also speaking of a fearsome hour at hand, and noting that the government cannot afford to spare any time for the opposition, since it now bears a duty of the gravest importance: saving the nation. Saving the nation from what, exactly? Everything, in the government's own view, and in the view of its newspapers, was perfectly calm right up until yesterday — so has something actually happened since yesterday? And what, precisely, might that something be?

No — nothing was ever calm at all. Rather, everything was in the most severe disorder throughout — but the ministers and the government's supporters forced themselves to resist that reality, until they finally found themselves overcome by their own inability to keep up the resistance, and their newspapers began acknowledging a portion of the truth. It will not be many days now before these very papers, and the ministers along with them, acknowledge the entire truth — before the public knows with absolute certainty that these rumors that had been reaching them about the crisis were never lies at all, but told them nothing but the plain, unquestionable truth. Had the ministers only appreciated the full weight of the responsibility they bear before their

own nation, they would never have hesitated for a moment to show Egypt whatever could genuinely be shown of this crisis, and would never have left this entire nation in such bewilderment, such disorder. But they granted themselves an infallibility they do not actually possess, monopolizing the people's own affairs without the people's own consent, imagining themselves capable of bearing these burdens entirely alone — only to find themselves, before long, overcome by their own incapacity, discovering themselves far too weak to bear such responsibilities after all. And here they now stand, seeking the people's own aid and support — and the people would never begrudge them that aid and support, but only if extended to men the people actually loves, and who love the people in turn; men the people trusts, and who trust the people in turn; men the people feels at ease with, and who feel at ease with the people in turn. And the ministers know perfectly well their own true standing in the people's love, trust, and confidence — and we believe they know perfectly well, too, that their national duty obliges them, in these very trying days, to resign, and to yield their place to other men, men who might find, in the people's own support and backing, sufficient strength to secure for the nation whatever rights are rightfully hers.

The people will never fall short in discharging what duty demands of them toward themselves and toward their own homeland — but the people will never grow lax, either, in demanding what rightfully belongs to them. Those who look to the people's support are duty-bound to satisfy the people first. Those who rely upon the people's love are duty-bound to understand that peoples are never loved by compulsion, but only ever by genuine consent. And the Egyptian people love only those who fully acknowledge their complete right to liberty, dignity, pride, and independence. Those who wish this people to support them and champion their cause must, before anything else, cede to this people its own freedom, safeguard its dignity and pride, and acknowledge that the people's own affairs must be managed by agents of the people bound to it by consent and love — never by force and violence.