The Patient

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Kawkab al-Sharq, 20 December 1933

1 It is not Sidqi Pasha; for Sidqi Pasha's illness no longer concerns us now that he has left power and become one of the common run of men. Sidqi Pasha's illness was something worth pausing over when the great dictator monopolized the affairs of government, was wholly incapable of conducting them, delighted in the pleasures of power, was wholly incapable of bearing what these pleasures demanded in service to the country, savored his enormous salary, was wholly incapable of rendering anything in return for that enormous salary, and seized the chance his monopoly of power gave him to summer in Europe at the state's expense, to bring his retinue at the state's expense, to buy motorcars in Paris at the state's expense, and to live in France and Switzerland at the state's expense, the life of the pampered great, without the state being able to draw from him anything equal or even close to all the privileges of every kind it granted him.

2 At that time, Sidqi Pasha's illness was something worth pausing over and speaking of; for at that time Sidqi Pasha committed a strange moral act, a flagrant deviation from the principles of right and justice, of clean hands and an untainted conscience. There was no way to avoid drawing attention to it, pointing it out, and calling on people to see how their rights were being squandered, how their interests were being wasted, how their intelligence was being mocked and made sport of — for no reason but that one man among men did not wish to resign.

3 But now that Sidqi Pasha has become an ordinary man bearing little or nothing of the burdens of state, speaking of his illness, and dwelling on it at length, is no longer a matter that concerns politics or the debate politics calls for. And speaking of his illness at such length may well depart from what taste and courtesy require, and from what a man of standing ought to hold to in rising above petty things, and from what does not suit the forms of refined social life.

4 This is why we objected some time ago to the prime minister's alluding to his rival's illness, and his insistence on that allusion, when he delivered his speech in Heliopolis. And this is why we object today to the prime minister's returning to mention that illness and denounce it when

he spoke to Al-Muqattam yesterday. For we would have liked the prime minister, being the good man people say cares for refinement not only in dress and appearance but in speech and social conduct as well, to have avoided that note he struck yesterday. Whatever the case, we would have preferred that the tone the prime minister took yesterday not be the one whose inspiration descends upon certain newspapers, so that they overreach in setting it to music and drawing out its tune, until they describe Sidqi Pasha as mentally disturbed, in something resembling madness if not madness itself. But the prime minister and his newspapers are free to choose for themselves whatever weapon they prefer in fighting Sidqi Pasha, and free to choose for themselves whether to raise the contest to where it ought to stand or lower it to where it ought not.

5 Whatever the case, the patient we wish to speak of today is not Sidqi Pasha, nor is it any individual, nor any body of men, but rather a meaning among meanings, an art among arts. This may make you laugh! You cannot imagine that meanings fall ill and recover, and you cannot imagine that arts sicken and grow well, yet I shall speak to you nonetheless of an ailing meaning and a sickly style. I see no harm in your laughing and amusing yourself, for I do not like to make readers weep, except when there is no escaping their tears. So laugh if you wish, and be amused if you like, and it is enough for me that you should not finish reading this piece before agreeing with me that Egypt now harbors an ailing meaning and a sickly art. This ailing meaning and this sickly art is the very doctrine on which our affairs are run these days, the very style by which the business of government proceeds among us in this happy age. It is enough to look at these events, on which the sun rises and the night falls, to know that our official politics has been struck by a grave malady no less dangerous to it than Sidqi Pasha's illness was to Sidqi Pasha's health, when that illness lay heavy and pressing upon him.

6 And it seems most likely that this malady which has struck our official politics will grow more pressing, and its weight will grow heavier day by day, until this politics dissolves entirely, or until circumstances finish it off outright, releasing it from itself and releasing people from it. You might ask the physicians to diagnose this malady and determine its nature, and the physicians would differ in that determination and that diagnosis; some hold that official politics is ill with Sidqi Pasha, unable to free itself of him and unable to swallow him, digest him, or bear him! And how should it wish to free itself of him, when he resides in Egypt and has no wish to travel from it north or south, and neither the old Egyptian

constitution nor the new permits the exile of Egyptians from the land or their expulsion from their homes against their will? It is therefore compelled to accept, however reluctantly, Sidqi Pasha's remaining in Egypt. And remain he does, yet he has no wish to retire from politics nor to shake the dust of it from his hands; rather, he loves official politics and is infatuated with it as cancer loves the body of a man or an animal. Medicine has found a cure, indeed many kinds of cure, for various maladies, but cancer has defeated the physicians to this day, just as folly has defeated philosophers and moralists to this day. And Sidqi Pasha preys upon this sickly body, the body of official politics, as cancer preys upon the body of the afflicted: it grows heavy, intensifies, and spreads until it drives official politics to cry out and press its complaint, mustering physicians and summoning nurses from every province. Then it shrinks, diminishes, and hides itself until the patient feels as though cured of the illness, and breathes with full lungs, and speaks with a full mouth, and looks with wide eyes, and hears with keen ears, and believes he has won from the days a covenant of safety, security, and long life. And even as he is at that, the strange, migrating cancer appears suddenly in another part of his body, and begins to strengthen, grow, and intensify until it embitters the patient's sleep by night and his waking by day. And the physicians say: this malady will not leave official politics until it has drained from it the last drop of life. But other physicians say: there is no doubt that official politics is ill with Sidqi Pasha. But Sidqi Pasha alone is not everything, and although cancer is a grave disease that has defeated the physicians, those afflicted with cancer live on with it for years and years. Official politics, however, is ill with something else besides, having been afflicted since its birth with a general weakness spread through its whole constitution, which has left it incapable of resistance and unfit to withstand treatment. Look at it from every side, and you will find in it a plain weakness that escapes no one, however simple-minded, let alone the physicians. Had it not been weak on the side of the ministry, Sidqi Pasha could never have played this strange, unbroken game with it. It is said that the believer is not bitten twice from the same hole, and yet the ministry has been bitten from Sidqi Pasha's hole more than once! Then look at it from the side of the parties, and you will find it truly weak. Does the People's Party exist or does it not exist? Is it strong or weak? Is it loyal to the prime minister or does it disown him? Is it faithful to Sidqi Pasha or does it betray him?

7 These are questions you may put, and you will win, on putting them, some curious answers. For the People's Party exists and does not

exist; it exists when Sidqi Pasha and Abd al-Fattah Pasha come to odds, so that interests and ambitions come into view, and the shades of hope and expectation loom up; and it does not exist when force appears and bares its fangs. It is likewise both strong and weak, likewise both loyal and disowning, likewise both faithful and treacherous.

8 Then look at it again from this other side, the side of the relation between the ministry and parliament, and you will find a most plain illness, one that has grown so notorious that its report has spread to the horizons, and the English papers have published and dwelt upon it. Have you not read what the Daily Telegraph published — the Daily Telegraph, friend of the present ministry, having been friend of the fallen ministry, and destined, God willing, to be friend of the ministry to come? The Daily Telegraph says that the present ministry is strong, gripping the reins of affairs, for in its hand lies a decisive weapon: the threat to dissolve the Chamber of Deputies. Have you ever seen a parliamentary life spoken of in these terms by the foreign press? Have you seen a strong ministry, strong because it threatens to dissolve the Chamber, and strong deputies, confident in the ministry, because the ministry threatens them with dissolution and dispersal? And yet this is what the Daily Telegraph, friend of the ministry, published, after Egyptian papers loyal to the ministry had already published it. And the strange thing is that the prime minister denies what has been attributed to him, that the minister of tradition denies what has been attributed to him, that the interior minister denies what has been attributed to him, while deputies go to Sidqi Pasha, and to others besides Sidqi Pasha, insisting that the prime minister did say what has been attributed to him, that the minister of tradition did say what has been attributed to him, and that the interior minister did say what has been attributed to him. And the strange thing is that a group of deputies are preparing an interpellation on this subject, and refuse to believe the ministers when they deny it, and demand an inquiry. I do not know how such an inquiry would proceed. Would it be held while the ministry still stands in power, or after the ministry resigns, or while the ministry hangs suspended between survival and extinction, its rule held in abeyance? Most likely this is all mere talk, and it is entirely possible that the interpellation itself will prove to be nothing more than talk.

9 And more curious and amusing than all of this is that one of the deputies claimed to people that he would put a question to the prime minister, and would tell him in the Chamber, in the presence of all his fellow deputies, that he had heard from him these very words he now

denies. This deputy was saying this yesterday before noon or thereabouts, claiming his question was urgent, and that he would put it that same night; but when night came and the Chamber convened, this deputy was found among those excusing themselves.

10 Do you see all this? Do you imagine that all this proceeds from a sound, innocent politics, strong of constitution, capable of resistance and endurance? Not at all; it is a truly ailing politics, ailing to the utmost degree of illness. It is enough to recall that the Chamber of Deputies met yesterday and could not rouse itself to elect the committee to draft the reply to the speech from the throne, but instead lightened itself of that election by leaving it to its bureau, then adjourned to rest along with the Senate until Monday. And it is excused; fasting by day and politics by night is too much to ask, especially of a man weary and worn out, afflicted by this new malady the physicians call Sidqi Pasha.

11 Our official politics, then, is ill just as Sidqi Pasha was ill, though it may be said that he has since recovered; or rather, it is more gravely ill than Sidqi Pasha ever was, bearing this illness and burdening people with a distress beyond measure. Do you not agree with me that it would be good and merciful, both for our own sake and for the sake of this wretched politics, to ask God, by the blessing of the fasting month, to hasten for it a relief from this distress?