Defeat (I)

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1 This is not Sidqi Pasha's defeat; people are done with Sidqi Pasha now, and perhaps Sidqi Pasha himself is done with himself for a while. This is rather the defeat of those men whom he gathered around him, and claimed for himself, and claimed to them, to be a political party, firm in its pillars, solid in its structure, one that ministries could lean upon, indeed one the whole order could lean upon.

2 It is these men, and the defeat that has befallen them, that we wish to speak of today, for they still claim a political existence, still claim they can prop up the ministry and steady the order; and perhaps, when they are alone with themselves, or speak to one another, they do not hide from themselves that they are performers — performing not only for other people, but performing for themselves before they perform for other people.

3 A man's share of intelligence and shrewdness may be great or slight, but it never sinks so low, on any day, as to make him imagine he is being serious when he plays, sincere when he dissembles, truthful when he lies — and these are the men whom Sidqi Pasha built up only to have them tear him down, brought to life only to have them put him to death, sheltered only to have them cast him out. These men know full well that when the sun rises upon them, and morning breathes over their handsome faces, they put on politics for themselves as one puts on clothes; and when night falls and its fearsome, dreadful darkness envelops them, they take off these clothes, and see themselves as they truly are — caring nothing for politics or politicians, thinking of neither, but caring only for the daily life they must endure, and thinking only of the immediate advantages they must secure.

4 And so they put on politics with the morning and take it off with the night; they take up politics to face other people with it, not to face themselves with it; politics, to them, is a mere symptom among symptoms, a device among devices, no more and no less. They know full well that Sidqi Pasha told them the old constitution was harmful, and they believed him, and told them the new constitution was beneficial, and they believed him; they know full well that had Sidqi Pasha remained in power

and then told them the old constitution was wholly good, they would have believed him, and had he told them the new constitution was wholly evil, they would have believed him; and they know full well that had the present prime minister called them to love the old order and hate the new, they would have answered him at once, and had he called them to hate both orders equally, and to prefer a life without any constitution at all, they would not have hesitated to obey him and heed him.

5 They know this full well, and they say as much when they are alone with themselves, and they say as much when they gather with one another; and yet, in spite of all this, they find pens that claim for them a party, and find tongues that broadcast of them that they hold principles and opinions. And they take pleasure in this broadcasting as they take pleasure in everything, and are delighted by this talk as they are delighted by everything; for God has granted them such ease of mind, such breadth and pliancy of conscience, as leaves them content with everything, and distracted from everything, so long as they secure whatever their bodies need of these fleeting, passing pleasures, and satisfy these material needs that master certain souls and make them forget that behind matter there lies something else, that behind food and drink there lie other pleasures, in which noble souls take delight, toward which generous hearts aspire, in which living consciences find happiness, and without which the finest of people cannot live.

6 Only months ago, Sidqi Pasha was, in the eyes of these men, a genius the world had never known the like of in any age; he was the pillar of political life in Egypt, the pillar of the present order, the savior of Egypt from chaos, the one who led her out of darkness into light, her radiant face, her shining lamp.

7 He was all of this, and now he has become an outstanding man indeed, but not for genius — for deficiency; superior indeed, but not in good — in harm; and it has become clear that he was not the pillar of political life, but its corrupter, that he was not the pillar of the order, but its squanderer, that he was not a glory to Egypt, but a stain upon her, that he was not a guide leading Egypt toward progress and prosperity, but a wrecker driving her toward decline and misery — and every one of those dazzling qualities once bestowed on Sidqi Pasha has now been draped upon the present prime minister, Abd al-Fattah Yahya Pasha.

8 So he has become the peerless genius, become the pillar of politics and the cornerstone of the order, become the radiant face and the

shining lamp, become Egypt's man, without whom Egypt cannot live. And only months ago the present prime minister was an ordinary man, distinguished by nothing, outstanding in nothing; he entered the ministry, and the People's Party men bore with him because Sidqi Pasha had brought him into the ministry, and he left the ministry, and the People's Party men forgot him because Sidqi Pasha had put him out of the ministry.

9 And suppose circumstances turn against Abd al-Fattah Yahya Pasha — as they will, no doubt — the People's Party men will turn against him along with circumstances; and suppose circumstances smile upon Allam Pasha, and raise him to the head of the ministry, the People's Party men will throw themselves at Allam Pasha, and drape upon him every quality they draped yesterday upon Sidqi Pasha, and drape today upon Abd al-Fattah Yahya Pasha.

10 And these are the men who bear the burdens of Egyptian politics, these are the men hoped for to resolve dilemmas and remove difficulties, these are the men on whom the ministry depends. No — the ministry does not depend on them, and pays them no heed; rather, they are the ones who depend on the ministry, who live for the ministry and by the ministry. They lived for Sidqi Pasha and by him only months ago, and they live for Abd al-Fattah Pasha and by him these days.

11 And should circumstances one day grant them the chance to live for Allam Pasha and by him, they would be delighted beyond measure, overjoyed beyond measure. They do not live for themselves, and they do not live by themselves; they are followers of whoever cries out, supporters of whoever calls for support, listeners to whoever commands, and answerers to whoever summons.

12 No, Sidqi Pasha never depended on them for a single day; he only deceived himself with them, deceived other people with them, and made them imagine they were his supporters and his partisans, and they believed this and were reassured by it. Then Abd al-Fattah Yahya Pasha came, and showed them that Sidqi Pasha had been either a deceiver or deceived, and that they had not been created for Sidqi, but had been created for Abd al-Fattah, and they believed this too, and were reassured by it. Otherwise, tell me — how could these men strip Sidqi Pasha of their support, when they had believed in no one but him, and confirm Abd al-Fattah Pasha in his place, when they had once risen up against no one but him?

13 How were these men able to profess obedience to the present prime minister, when only days ago they had rained upon him a downpour of questions accusing his ministry of corrupting parliamentary life, assaulting the deputies' consciences, neglecting the public interest, and favoring private interests? How were these men able to forget these questions, and submit to the ministry they had once blamed to excess, accused beyond all measure, when the ministry never troubled itself to answer a single one of their questions, and never defended itself against a single one of the accusations they leveled against it?

14 How, then, did they change their view? How did they come to be convinced that this is a ministry of justice and fairness, a ministry of righteousness and care for the public interest, a ministry of integrity and purity, in secret as in the open? They changed their view only because they found it advantageous to change it; they were convinced only because they found no way not to be convinced. These men are content with themselves, pleased with themselves, boasting of themselves and vying with one another over it — but what is strange is that a man like Abd al-Fattah Yahya Pasha should place his trust in men such as these, and that a man like Abd al-Fattah Yahya Pasha should imagine he has triumphed over his rival by wresting these men away from him.

15 And stranger still that this performance should go on, that this game should continue, and that non-Egyptians should believe that these men have any weight in Egyptian politics, or any influence on the conduct of affairs; and stranger still than either is that some people should trouble themselves over the disagreements and rivalries between these groups over this post or that office, as they would trouble themselves over a serious matter, when the whole affair amounts to nothing but a jest, from its beginning to its coming end before long — a jest, no more and no less, but one containing a bitterness that tears at hearts and fills them with anguish and grief, since it has cost Egypt years of her life, and let slip from Egypt many of her interests and her rights.

16 And who ever claimed that nations can amuse themselves without paying a price for their amusement? And who ever claimed that nations can walk their path toward freedom and independence, toward progress and elevated standing, without stumbling along this path over the likes of Sidqi Pasha, and over those opportunists and self-seekers who take refuge in him and in men like him?

17 Sidqi Pasha was not defeated alone; had Sidqi Pasha alone been defeated, no one would have paid it any heed. The true significance of his defeat lies in its being a general defeat, one that extends beyond his person to his whole policy, whoever might carry out that policy, be it himself or any other man whatsoever. And the true significance of this defeat lies in its having come from the fact that this policy did not rest on what a policy fit to endure must rest on, one able to aspire to victory and win it, and to remain proof against disappointment and desertion — namely, the nation's love, its support, and its trust.

18 This policy, which Sidqi Pasha built at the furthest possible remove from the Egyptians' love, their support, and their trust, stood suspended in thin air, exposed to being swept away by the wind at any moment. And the wind did sweep it away, casting Sidqi Pasha down to the depths, and laying bare, among his own men, secrets and points of weakness such that they can no longer withstand the first storm that comes upon them from any direction whatsoever — and the onset of that storm is not far off.