The Great Injustice...

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), December 1, 1934

This is the wrong that fell yesterday upon all Egyptians together, when the royal decree was issued abolishing the hateful system. There is no doubt that Sidqi Pasha and his associates opened upon their nation a vast door of evil, poured upon it every different shade of oppression, and tried it with every varied form of affliction; but the greatest of these wrongs, and the heaviest, the most far-reaching of these wrongs, and the most all-encompassing, was this very wrong of the System — the sin the sinners committed not against one individual, nor against one community, nor against one class, but against the whole of the Egyptian people, against the whole of the Egyptian homeland, and against all the generations of Egypt, present and to come.

Yes — Sidqi Pasha and his associates did not sin, when they transgressed through the System, against a single individual, community, or generation; they sinned against Egypt eternal. It is not strange, then, that we should describe the wrong of the System as the Great Injustice. The dismissal of one official among officials, or the dismissal of one headman among headmen, or the imposition of a fine upon this man or that, or the arbitrary control of tax-collection, or the pouring of torment upon the safe, the peaceable, the innocent, or the confinement of the freedom of leaders and commanders and those who are neither leaders nor commanders, or the forbidding of assemblies by cruelty and violence, or the shedding of blood by spear and bullet — all of this is oppression, and all of it hideous, ugly oppression, and all of it sin that living consciences refuse, and that the justice of God and the justice of men abhor; yet all of it, for all that, is a lighter thing than the greater wrong that touches a whole nation in its present and its future, and a slighter thing than the greater sin that touches a whole homeland, in its right, its hope, and its highest ideal.

Sidqi Pasha and his associates may look back upon their lives and see in them nothing but evil, for this greater wrong which they committed, this greater sin which they perpetrated, this greater aggression from which they did not shrink — all of it has effaced their good deeds, if they ever did any good at all, and has turned the whole of their record into a dark and hateful evil, from whose burdens and traces they have no hope of freeing themselves, whatever they may put forward

or hold back, whatever they may say or do. The sin has settled upon them, never to be effaced; the sin has closed in around them, and they will find in it no outlet and no deliverance.

Woe to these men from their own souls, if they have souls; woe to them from their own consciences, if they have consciences; woe to them from their nation's opinion of them; woe to them from their nation's judgment upon them — if they hold their nation's opinion to carry any weight, or know their nation's judgment to hold any authority. But they hold nothing in esteem save themselves, and know nothing save their own interests, and feel nothing save these base pleasures and vile needs, these immediate ends for whose sake they sacrifice right and good, justice, fairness, and equality.

They went ahead with their great injustice giving no thought to the fact that they were thereby harming a people whom they ought never to have wronged, and inflicting it upon a nation that ought to have received from them nothing but devotion and faithfulness, nothing but sincerity and loyalty, nothing but true service, whatever effort and toil, whatever sacrifice of life and wealth, it might cost those who rendered it. They gave no thought to any of this; they thought only of appetites that had to be satisfied, needs that had to be met, ends that had to be attained — for they are men who deny the blessing of the homeland upon them, who repudiate the nation's right over them, and who are, besides all this, rebels against the constitutional order, violators of the law's sanctities, and who are, above even this, men who despise justice and right, who mock virtue and morals, and who fling themselves at the basest things men fling themselves at. How, then, would you have all this evil washed clean from its authors? How would you have this whole burden lifted from those who committed it? How would you have purity of intention return to men in whom intention can never be pure, or cleanliness of conscience return to men whose conscience can never be clean, or purity of heart return to men whose hearts can never be purified?

The wrong done to a single individual embitters the wrongdoer's whole life — how, then, of those who wrong an entire people? The trampling of a single individual's freedom exposes its perpetrator to the severest punishment — how, then, of those who trample the freedom of an entire nation? The transgression of the law against a single individual is a sin the law punishes, morals disown, and justice rejects — how, then, of those who transgress the law, and violate its sanctities, against all the generations together?

Yes — these men have committed wrong, and wrong in excess; they have laden themselves with heavy burdens, and dyed their hands with pure blood, and sent ahead of them pure souls that will call them to account, before God, for what was destroyed, and for the separation wrought between them and the helpless — sons and daughters, husbands and wives, mothers, kinsfolk, and friends.

They wrought corruption, and worked it to excess — how, then, could it be otherwise, when they had bound themselves by a covenant to bring this rising homeland back down into abasement after glory, into humiliation after pride, into submission and surrender after freedom, dignity, and independence? Yet for all the effort they expended, all the sin they committed, all the wrong they allowed themselves, all the sanctity they violated, they did not prosper, and did not succeed. This scheme of theirs has recoiled upon their own throats; this system of theirs was abolished yesterday, just as it was established a little over four years ago; this constitution of theirs has become mere paper — which, as the common folk say, they might as well soak and drink the water of. This pride of theirs has turned into lowliness, abasement, and humiliation; and all these sins of theirs now stand before the people, who seek in them a lesson, and look in them for a warning, and take them as a deterrent for whoever is tempted, in his own soul, to sin or oppress or tyrannize or transgress as these men did.

Yes — the present Ministry succeeded yesterday in lifting the Great Injustice, and the Egyptian people were able to look upon those who had wronged them with scorn, holding their wrong in contempt, counting up their misdeeds, resolved never to permit them, nor others like them, to return to sin again. So this present Ministry may set down for itself, and for the nation, this triumph that satisfies right and eases the conscience; and this present Ministry, now that it has lifted the Great Injustice, may go forward wisely with what it has undertaken — the lifting of the particular injustices still borne by individuals and communities.