A Private Meeting

Kawkab al-Sharq, 13 December 1933

If people only knew what the day actually brings them, once it dawns, and what the night actually conceals for them, once it darkens, their own eagerness for the day's dawning would be no less than their own dread of the night's own darkness — or, put differently, they would grow more measured in loving what they love of it, and hating what they hate. But people are weak, easily deceived by their own vanity: they imagine themselves capable, when they are powerless; they promise themselves permanence, and nourish that promise with boundless hope.

And events and trials come seeking them out, whether upon these very rays of light — the sun's own rays — or hidden away within the folds of this dense darkness, the darkness of night.

Had Sidqi Pasha known, that very first time he met privately with the High Commissioner, that this meeting — for all the outstretched hope it carried, the unwholesome expectation, the confidence in the days ahead, the surrender to dreams — would end, for himself and his companion alike, in this same private meeting granted them yesterday, with all its own dark despair, its bitter hopelessness, its wakefulness heavy upon the heart, hateful to the soul, its own doubt about the days ahead, driving one to loathe life itself, and grow weary of living — had Sidqi Pasha known that this smiling, hopeful private meeting of his would end in this frowning, despairing private meeting of his, he would never have entered into it, never have desired it; he would, instead, have fled from it entirely, refused it entirely, preferring safety and well-being, together with rest and calm, to those false appearances that had taken hold of his own heart, stolen away his own reason, plunged him wholly into wrongdoing, and finally brought him to the wretched state he now finds himself in.

Yesterday, Sidqi Pasha met privately with his own friend the High Commissioner, in a gloomy, uneasy private meeting — one he could not bring himself to smile at, nor could it bring itself to smile at him — seeking, from his own weakened self, whatever strength he could find to bear it, and shoulder its own burdens, however much he genuinely desired it, and however eagerly he genuinely sought it. The High Commissioner's own gloom was, most likely, no less than his dear friend's own gloom — but the difference between the two men was genuinely

vast. Sidqi Pasha's own gloom was the gloom of complete, total, profound misery, boundless, with no way out of it whatsoever; Sir Percy Loraine's own gloom, by contrast, was a more complicated gloom, containing a real irritation at his own lack of success, and real distress at the failure that had befallen him — but containing, too, a helpless pity, and a mercy that accomplished nothing.

For the High Commissioner, whatever failure and helplessness may befall him, can still say to himself that he has secured, for his own nation, genuinely significant benefits within Egypt, ones with far-reaching effects on her own life, and on the life of Egyptians — he has secured for her these countless material benefits, benefits that will prove of use tomorrow, and the day after, whether Egyptians are pleased with them or not.

The English recognized this in him: they neither rejected him, nor cast him aside, nor came to hate him. They simply judged him unsuited to continue working in Egypt, and so transferred him to Turkey — refusing, all the while, to transfer him without preserving, for him, exactly those outward appearances that declare to the world, truthfully or not, that they harbour no resentment against him, no indignation toward him. They made him an ambassador, made him a member of the King's own council, and returned him to Egypt, after his own transfer and removal from it, to spend a month there, surrounded by exactly the same appearances that had once surrounded him, and that will one day surround his own successor as well. Whether he stands in their favour or their disfavour, then, his own nation still cares for him, still honours him — knowing he served her, and never fell short in that service; knowing, too, that if he failed, he was driven to that failure by necessity, forced into it, since he never learned how to conduct himself in Egypt, nor how to reconcile his own policy with Egyptians' own love of independence, Egyptians' own insistence on their own rights, and Egyptians' own capacity for resistance. He is, in his own people's eyes, simply a man mistaken, a man of ill fortune — nothing more, nothing less. If this stirs any grief in his own heart, it is the grief of a man who stumbled, a man who wanted one thing, while circumstances wanted something else entirely.

As for Sidqi Pasha, his own case is an entirely different one, his own condition an entirely different condition, his own fate an entirely different fate. He stands rejected by his own entire nation — rejected by the majority of it, the moment he leapt to power against its own will; rejected

still more thoroughly, once he mismanaged that same power; rejected, then, by his own supporters and followers, once he was removed from power; and rejected, finally, by his own closest confidants and allies, once he set himself against those into whose hands power had subsequently passed.

Should he return to his own nation, it would send him back abandoned, defeated, never even sparing him that same pitying, compassionate glance any stumbling man might hope for; should he return to his own supporters and followers, they would flee from him the way the healthy flee from the plague-stricken, too occupied with their own affairs, too diverted toward their own advantage to spare him a thought; should he return to his own closest allies and confidants, they would grant him nothing but those same sickly, forced smiles that tell him, plainly and clearly: I must bear with you, but you know full well how difficult bearing with you truly is, how tired I have grown of it, and how much I wish I might finally be rid of it.

He cannot say to his own nation: I have done well by you — for he never once did well by her, and did her every harm within his own power instead. He cannot say to his own supporters and followers: I have granted you favour, and offered you kindness — for they would answer him: we granted you our own assistance, offered you our own support, and it was you yourself who then severed the ties between us. He cannot remind his own closest allies and confidants of any old love, or pure affection — since the turns of life, its own circumstances, its own advantages and disadvantages, hold far greater sway over these people's own hearts than affection, love, or any feeling of devotion and loyalty. And he cannot — worst of all — even turn back to his own self, take refuge in it, lean upon it, console himself with whatever good he once did, and take shelter in that same peace of mind and clear conscience the truly sincere take shelter in — since his own mind knows no rest, and his own conscience knows neither contentment nor peace.

He can find refuge in no one at all — not even in himself; he can take shelter with no one — not even with himself; rejected by all people, even by his own self. Where, then, does that leave him with his own close companion and ally, Sir Percy Loraine? Their own friendship had once been pure, their own ties genuinely firm; they had exchanged, between them, whatever assistance and support brought misery upon Egypt for three whole years — and now the two of them part ways, everything they once built together having collapsed, everything they once raised

together having crumbled.

The English looked, and found their own man could no longer remain in Egypt, and so transferred him; the Egyptians looked, and found their own man could no longer remain in control of affairs, and so cast him aside. And it is worth recalling that those very days that once smiled upon the two of them were themselves deceptive, showing them a brightness with darkness hidden behind it, an advance with retreat hidden behind it. But Sir Percy Loraine, should he speak of this, or reflect upon it, can recall that he will visit countries other than Egypt, work alongside people other than Egyptians, and spend a calm, contented life, not without its own genuine worth. Sidqi Pasha, by contrast, can recall nothing of the kind, for he remains a prisoner — a solitary prisoner, unable to leave Egypt except by condemning himself to exile, and unable to remain in Egypt except by condemning himself to unceasing torment.

And while these two gloomy friends drank their own tea mixed with the bitterness of pain and the sting of despair, the People's Party men were clamouring and stirring, managing their own affairs between themselves and their brother party, their own management proving genuinely defective, their own reconciliation proving genuinely beyond reach — since their own affairs had already turned corrupt, their own inclinations had already diverged, and since they had lost that very man who alone could once have brought them back together whenever they scattered, back into harmony whenever they fell into disagreement.

The Prime Minister puts certain names before them, and they show hesitation, then show obedience, then disperse, each secretly harbouring disagreement, each secretly pursuing it, each insisting he will hold his own ground, and never submit to whatever decision the party has taken — and each knowing full well he will submit regardless, once Parliament convenes: he will nominate whomever the government has instructed him to nominate, and vote for whomever the government has instructed him to vote for. Life, after all, carries burdens that must be borne, and obedience to ministers is simply one of those burdens.

What a sorrowful evening this was — the evening that fell upon the men of yesterday's own official politics! As for the two men who once built the very foundation of this policy, they sat gloomy together, sharing a gloomy cup of tea, exchanging a gloomy farewell; as for their own successors among the People's Party men, they remained in genuine turmoil, clamouring among themselves, declaring one thing openly while

concealing a great deal else, rushing headlong toward this same evening, bound, inevitably, to fall upon them too, exactly as yesterday evening fell upon these two gloomy men, in that gloomy private meeting, over that gloomy cup of tea.