

Heroes of the Regime . . .

Al-Wadi (Hadith al-Wadi), November 10, 1934

Refined, exacting taste, and a scrupulous regard for propriety in word and deed, are the defining marks of the present regime's heroes. And these heroes are numerous, thank God — they may number four, they may number five, but we do not think they exceed that count.

First among them is the regime's founder, Sidqi Pasha — an educated man, no doubt of that, but a man, too, of exacting taste and refined sensibility, who knows what is fitting and what is not, from his frequent mingling with distinguished foreign circles of refinement. For this reason his every deed, word, and gesture is a mirror of unclouded, impeccable taste. It need not follow, of course, that Sidqi Pasha's political taste matches yours or mine — we belong to a class of people who do not mingle in refined circles, nor associate with distinguished foreigners.

You, I, and our kind do not drag His Majesty the King's name into political disputes; we do not rush to record on His Majesty a particular partisan political stance and thank him for taking it; we do not send telegrams to the palace to praise His Majesty's devotion to the present regime, his support for it, his adherence to it — because we know this is an error unbecoming to those who work in politics or understand the first principles of the constitution and the law, and because we know this is a departure from taste, a transgression of propriety, a deviation from what is owed in keeping kings above passions and appetites. But Sidqi Pasha — that distinguished, cultivated man, connected to foreign circles of culture and refinement — sees no harm in it, feels no discomfort in it; he ventures upon it undaunted, presses on in it unafraid — either because he knows principles of taste that ordinary people do not know, or because he sacrifices taste and its principles for the sake of immediate advantage, whether real or imagined. Sidqi Pasha is a capable man who loves sacrifice and does not hesitate at it, whatever the circumstances. He sacrifices the people's rights for the sake of leaping into power; he sacrifices the people's morals for the sake of holding onto power; he sacrifices the people's dignity for the sake of monopolizing authority; he sacrifices the people's money for the sake of enjoying prestige; he sacrifices the people's blood, at times, for the sake of humiliating his adversaries and terrifying those who resist him; and then, in the end, he sacrifices taste itself for the sake of something unknown — for we do not

imagine he still hopes to win al-Ibrashi Pasha's approval.

Nor do we imagine he hopes to reach power in these days; but he is compelled to bestir himself, and to speak, so that people may think him a leader whose word carries weight, who commands followers and allies — and that is something for which Sidqi Pasha considers it well worth sacrificing taste, dragging His Majesty's name into politics, and recording on His Majesty that he prefers one regime to another, supports the minority of the nation over its majority, and takes sides with one faction or party among the rest. Had things in Egypt run as they run in other countries, Sidqi Pasha would have been called to account for this sacrifice of taste — but Sidqi Pasha was never called to account for squandering rights, violating sanctities, and trifling with lives and money.

Here is one hero of the present regime, delivered by his own great head — which he now wishes to protect with his formidable cunning.

The present regime has another hero, older than Sidqi Pasha by a day or two, and so, as the ghouls say in the old wives' tales, knowing a year or two more than Sidqi Pasha. This is the President of the Senate, Yehia Pasha Ibrahim, who, like Sidqi Pasha, does not hesitate to sacrifice taste for the sake of preserving the regime, nor hesitate to testify before all the people that His Majesty prefers one regime to another, one party to another, a minority to a majority — and who, like Sidqi Pasha, would deserve to be called to account for squandering taste, if people in Egypt were called to account for everything they do.

Yehia Pasha Ibrahim is a great man possessed of the kind of courage that disarms one's adversaries, as the French say — for he casts his memory back to the past and informs people that it was he who secured the promulgation of the old constitution and signed it into law when he was Prime Minister in 1923; then he went on to serve under the new constitution, which he neither promulgated nor signed — and yet he prefers the new constitution, finding it far better suited to the country's interests.

Yehia Pasha Ibrahim did not merely promulgate the old constitution — he served under its shadow as well, and swore an oath of fidelity to it as well. And yet, for all that, he felt no more compunction than Sidqi Pasha about breaking one oath and swearing another, about preferring a new constitution to an old one, and about sacrificing decorum and taste for the sake of this new constitution.

The third of these heroes — the most capable in contest, the most skilled in combat, the sharpest in battle, and the most eloquent in speech — is His Excellency Dr. Tawfiq Rifaat Pasha (let us not forget the "Doctor"), President of the present Chamber of Deputies, naturally, and President of the Academy of the Arabic Language. His Excellency draws his taste, in all likelihood, from dictionaries of the language, books of letters, volumes of poetry, and the works of writers and orators — for he is the peerless poet, the singular man of letters, the orator none can match; only the ignorant would doubt it.

His Excellency's taste is old-fashioned and classical, just as Sidqi Pasha's is modern — and yet the two agree that dragging His Majesty the King's name into politics is permissible, and that recording political positions upon His Majesty is a harmless thing, indeed one that may prove quite useful, that may help preserve a regime bent on collapse, and prop up a structure bent on ruin. His Excellency's taste ought by rights to subject its possessor to inquiry, questioning, and grave matters indeed — were it not that certain Egyptians stand above inquiry, questioning, and grave matters.

His Excellency had been silent; but once the President of the Senate had spoken, he could do nothing but speak in turn — and speak he did, at length, to his own full satisfaction. For Al-Muqattam reported to us yesterday that he informs people His Majesty the King is devoted to the present regime, and that His Majesty spoke to him on the matter of al-Ibrashi Pasha, saying he was free to order his own household as he pleased. Oh, what taste! What delicacy! What propriety! What reverence for the occupant of the throne! What deference to the dignity of the King! And suppose he did say this to you — how could you permit yourself to broadcast it among the people? How could you permit yourself to portray His Majesty the King defending his own private freedom to order his own household? And who allows any such matter to be raised at all, any such conversation to be aired, concerning what freedom His Majesty ought to have in ordering his own household? Oh, what taste! Since when have culture, politics, and high office licensed people to speak of reigning kings with such vulgarity, and to permit its publication in the newspapers? And yet Al-Muqattam attributes all this to Rifaat Pasha, President of the Chamber of Deputies, President of the Academy of the Arabic Language, and holder of a doctorate in law — an honorary doctorate, of course.

These are men who cannot tell the difference between the conversation of kings and the conversation of the marketplace: honored with an audience with the King, they go and relate whatever exchange passed between His Majesty and themselves — exactly as, meeting you, they would broadcast whatever passed between you and them. These are the guardians of the regime, the custodians of the new constitution; these are the men it is announced the cabinet may be divided among, along with a group of their like, should it be withdrawn from His Excellency Tawfiq Nessim Pasha. Tell me, then, of a regime protected by such men; tell me of a government conducted by such men; tell me of a constitution defended by such men — and then tell the English, afterward, to rejoice, take heart, and rest easy, for Abdel Fattah Yehia has departed from them, and one of these men — who honor no taste, keep no secret, and cannot tell marketplace talk from royal talk — may well be sent to them in his place.

And tell the English to rejoice and take heart, for among these men they will find one capable of forming a cabinet they will be glad to deal with, since it combines competence, integrity, and capability all at once. As for satisfying the people — you need only look, for the people do not consider these men worthy of either approval or resentment; they simply disregard them entirely, and if they speak of them at all, it is only in idle jest, nothing more.

For the rest, we suspect this crisis has dragged on too long, that the affairs of government are on the verge of falling into disorder, and that the official Egyptians who have so far handled the resolution of this crisis have shown neither seriousness nor resolve, neither skill nor courage to bear responsibility — showing instead only hesitation, confusion, and disorder in word and deed, and provoking a great deal of laughter. Official Egypt ought, perhaps, to show some measure of seriousness; the people's affairs ought not to remain a game without limit.

The people's will is plain and clear; the people must be told whether the time has come for their will to be respected, or whether it is still to be disregarded, as it has been disregarded these past four years.

Taha Hussein

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