

Mercy

Taha Hussein

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1 We ought not despair of the hearts of men; for these hearts may harden until they are as stone, or harder still, and then a wing of goodness and piety, of tenderness and compassion, brushes against them, and behold, they soften and melt until they seem the gentlest breeze, or the clearest, sweetest water.

2 Nor ought we despair of the souls of men; for they may grow rough and coarse, and then, having reached the furthest extreme of roughness and the farthest bound of coarseness, that same magical wing brushes against them, and behold, they turn smooth, clear, and sweet, like the fine honey the poets of old once sang of.

3 We ought not despair of anything; for anything is possible, even that Sidqi Pasha's heart should soften after severity, that his temper should grow mild after harshness, that his disposition should turn clear after coarseness, and that this formidable tyrant should become an angel of sweet manners, generous of spirit, merciful of heart, tender toward people and gentle with them, pitying them so deeply that he bears hardship for their sake and braves terrors on their behalf. And what is there to deny in this, when you see Sidqi Pasha grow tender toward parliamentary life, overflowing with mercy for the deputies, with affection for them, and with fear lest the government touch them with something they dislike, or lest dissolution return them to where they stood before they were summoned to the dome of parliament, so that he breaks his silence, frees himself of his calm and stillness, sheds his seclusion, sacrifices his rest, and writes to the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies withdrawing his resignation from it?

4 This may strike you as strange and curious, but strange things do happen, and curious things do occur, and it is not beyond God to turn things into their opposites, to reverse the course of men into its contrary, and to make of Sidqi Pasha a tender, merciful man who pities the deputies at the mere touch of a breeze, after he had shown no pity for the people at the touch of fire and iron.

5 Yes; Sidqi Pasha showed no pity for those Egyptians whose lives the bullets mowed down, whose bodies the bayonets tore to pieces,

whose bones the clubs shattered.

6 Sidqi Pasha showed pity for not one of these; rather, Sidqi Pasha would look upon them and upon what befell them, and what he saw would swell him with pride, and what he heard would delight him, and he would announce to those who spoke with him that he had come to fear nothing now but death.

7 But once he was set apart from power and cast out of the fray, and forced to resign his seat in the Chamber of Deputies, mercy returned to his heart, and composure came back to his soul, and no sooner had he sensed the government's warning yesterday that it would dissolve the Chamber if it did not accept his resignation, than he hastened to this resignation and withdrew it outright, swallowed it whole, out of mercy for the deputies, out of protection for the present order, and out of safeguarding for constitutional tradition.

8 Do you not agree with me that the jest falls flat, that the pleasantry is feeble, and that the contrivance is wholly innocent of artistic skill, entirely bereft of the grace and dexterity people once knew in the great dictator, in the days when he was strong and bold and feared nothing but death?

9 Indeed; and there is no doubt that the prime minister did not err when he painted Sidqi Pasha's stance yesterday in its true colors, declaring that he had only reclaimed his resignation once he had grown certain the Chamber would accept it, and had despaired of anyone coming to his defense or standing partisan for him; for Sidqi Pasha knows his companions better than anyone, is harsher than anyone, and is the shrewdest at testing what lies within them and probing the limits of their strength.

10 He saw desertion in them, and so resigned, that he might not be defeated before Dr. Raafat Pasha; then he saw desertion in them again, and so reclaimed his resignation yesterday, that the deputies might not accept it unanimously, or by something resembling unanimity. And everything points to the prime minister having been right in this portrayal; for the ministry's candidate for deputy speaker won yesterday about a hundred votes, having won only fifty-four the previous Thursday, and so the warning had already worked its effect and reached its conclusion, and the angry glances cast by the good man, by the old minister of tradition, and by the new minister of tradition had reached their aim, and the deputies' hearts warmed to what the ministry desired,

so that had the dictator's resignation been put forward yesterday, it would have been accepted without the slightest contest, as the old proverb has it.

11 Sidqi Pasha, then, showed no pity for the deputies, nor for parliamentary life, from the discord between the legislative and executive bodies over his own imposing person; rather, he pitied himself from the agreement between the two bodies upon that person. And perhaps he pitied the deputies and parliamentary life from having to accept his resignation; for had the deputies accepted it, and there was no escaping that they would, they would have set it down against themselves that they had heard the warning and feared it, and were driven to obedience and submission.

12 And Sidqi Pasha is a man who loves the deputies, who wishes them nothing but good, who would ransom them with his own life and fortune, and who does not wish to expose them either to the rejection of his resignation and the dissolution that would follow, or to its acceptance and the ill talk that would follow that. He is, in any case, a hero of sacrifice, and the deputies would do well to acknowledge this deed of his and thank him for this kindness; but Sidqi Pasha has now become a philosopher, one who knows people and expects of them no more than they can bear; and Sidqi Pasha has now become, by nature, a doer of good, offering kindness, and treating friends and rivals alike with generosity, seeking neither reward nor gratitude for it, and wishing by it nothing but the face of God, and service to the homeland purely for the sake of God and of the homeland. This may seem strange, but strange things do happen, and curious things do occur.

13 And you ask me, after all this, for the true explanation of this curious stance Sidqi Pasha took yesterday; the knowledge of that explanation lies with God, and perhaps with the cups of tea that witnessed his private meeting with the former high commissioner on Tuesday evening. For you will agree with me that it is strange that Sidqi Pasha should retire with Sir Percy Loraine on Tuesday evening and sit for his photograph, and that then, on Wednesday evening, Sidqi Pasha should return to the newspapers and speak to Al-Ahram, and that then, on Thursday, the government's candidate for deputy speaker should fall, and its other candidate should nearly touch bottom, and that then, on Friday morning, a newspaper should appear speaking in Sidqi Pasha's defense and with his tongue, and that then, on Saturday and Sunday, talk should multiply and rumors spread, and people should say that Sidqi

Pasha had partisans who might refuse to accept his resignation, forcing the two allied parties to take precautions against it, so that the prime minister said what he said, and the minister of tradition said what he said, and the interior minister said what he said, and that then, yesterday evening, Sidqi Pasha should suddenly reappear on the field, reclaim his resignation, and return to the fold in the Chamber of Deputies.

14 Say what you will; for this succession of events is not without its significance, and say what you will of that significance, for it is enough to drive a weak man like Sidqi Pasha to be seized once more by false hopes, so that he resumes activity, reclaims his resignation from the Chamber of Deputies, and returns to where he opposes his rival, the good man, the prime minister.

15 Many a gentleness is worse than harshness, and many a mercy is worse than violence; does Sidqi Pasha know that he was harsher toward the deputies yesterday than the prime minister, and rougher and more violent with them than the interior minister and the minister of tradition? For he sets it down against them that the prime minister warned them, and he sets it down against them that he reclaimed his resignation to protect parliamentary life — meaning that they themselves were incapable of protecting parliamentary life, and of defending themselves and preserving their own dignity.

16 Was Sidqi Pasha sincere in what he said? Had his contempt for the deputies' competence, and for their capacity to rise to their duty toward themselves and toward parliamentary life, reached such a pitch? Was Sidqi Pasha toying with them in what he said? Had his disdain for the intelligence of deputies and ministers reached such a pitch? Or does Sidqi Pasha wish to share with the prime minister the recording of a failure beyond which there is no further failure, upon the politics of these days?

17 The prime minister warns of dissolving the Chamber if the deputies do not submit to what the government wants, and Sidqi Pasha reclaims his resignation for fear that the Chamber will be dissolved; and what are the deputies to do between these two men? One drives them, and the other meets them; one frightens them, and the other protects them. And the meaning of all this is that parliamentary life in Egypt is strong, stable, sound, with nothing to fear for it, nothing amiss in it, and no corruption within it. Is this not laughable? Is this not amusing for those who fast? Is this not a help in bearing the burdens of the fast?

Indeed it is; but it is, at the same time, painful and bitter; for the affairs of official politics have degenerated into a cheap sort of trifling, devoid of skill, grace, or art, and Egypt's official business has become a kind of pastime that men contrive in their clubs and gatherings — no more, no less.

18 Has God not decreed for this country that its affairs should return to some measure of earnestness, and that its politics should not be corrupted between two men who quarrel only to end up playing?