Irony...

Kawkab al-Sharq, 6 November 1933

Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik had wronged his nephew al-Walid ibn Yazid beyond measure. Al-Walid was his heir, yet Hisham drove him out of the caliphal seat and forced him to live in the desert like an outlaw and a fugitive, accompanied only by a few of his servants and clients, whom Hisham had allowed to go with him after much difficulty.

Hisham had kept the heir on a very meagre allowance, and had beaten his supporters and partisans and thrown them into the depths of prison, so that al-Walid's ordeal, in himself and in his closest companions, was harsh and shameful.

When Hisham fell into the illness of which he died, and it grew heavy on him, he asked for something from the state treasuries. The treasurer would not give him what he asked, and Hisham said: "It is as though we had been treasurers for al-Walid."

Then Hisham died, and the affairs and wealth of the state were handed to al-Walid. They did not stay in his hands long, for power was taken from him in that tragedy everyone knows.

So Hisham spent years upon years persecuting al-Walid, overburdening him, and preparing to transfer the succession to his own son. He achieved nothing by it, and death did not reach him before he felt the sting of disappointment and the pain of failure, and knew he had been no more than a treasurer for al-Walid.

Sidqi Pasha was harsh and severe with his colleague Abdel Fattah Yehia Pasha. He turned away from his advice, would not listen to his opinion, cared nothing for his help, and did not value his place beside him in the cabinet. When he tired of Abdel Fattah Pasha's disagreement and self-assurance, he pushed him out of the cabinet, and paid no attention to his resignation from the People's Party when he resigned from it. Then the days made a short turn, not even a year, and Sidqi Pasha was removed from the cabinet, while Abdel Fattah Yehia Pasha rose to head it.

Only a few more days passed before Sidqi Pasha asked the party's members for something he wanted, and they refused him and turned away from him. He felt the sting of disappointment and the regret of

failure, and said to himself and to his closest companions: "It is as though we had been building for Abdel Fattah Yehia Pasha."

Then the humiliation dragged on, the burden grew heavier, and matters went bad in secret and in public. Some party members swore that "the mightier would drive out the meaner," and the affair ended with Sidqi Pasha going to Abdel Fattah Yehia Pasha to tell him he would resign the leadership of the People's Party, then leaving him. He called the party's board, told them what had passed between him and his deputy, and announced that he was resigning; and the oath of those who had sworn that the mightier would drive out the meaner was fulfilled. The man went home, laid down his staff, and settled where the road had brought him, after a very long, very hard journey along a very difficult, very tortuous road that he had reckoned would end in victory, honour and glory, but which ended in disappointment, humiliation and disgrace, even among the people nearest him and kindest to him.

The stubborn tyrant who had leapt up one day to defy an entire people became a small, insignificant man no one cared about, no one thought of, no one took into account. I know of no political career that ended worse than this man's: he abolished one constitution and set up another, dissolved one parliament and convened another, and imposed himself, one man, on a people of millions for more than three years.

In the end he reached the point where he called and no one answered, gave orders and no one obeyed, forbade and met only shaking heads and shrugged shoulders. He moved about not knowing whether he was setting his feet on firm, safe ground or on ground that shook and heaved and was about to give way. He woke to hear nothing but desertion, disobedience, scheming and plotting, and slept to dream of nothing else: terrifying phantoms that woke him when he slept and taunted him when he was awake, until he fell into a heavy, agonizing sleep with no rest and no calm in it.

So vanity ends for the vain, so tyranny ends for tyrants, so aggression closes the story of aggressors. So the days teach this man and others like him, weak and strong alike, the most eloquent and harshest lessons, telling them that an individual is weak however far he pushes his strength, however deep he plunges into violence, however hard he presses his aggression, because he is an individual, no more and no less; and that a people is strong however much rulers dominate it, dignified however much humiliators try to abase it, because it is a people, and that

is enough. Its life is longer than an individual's, its life is wider than an individual's, its strength outlasts an individual's strength, because it is joined to the history that has passed and to the history that is coming, and gathers what the past, present and future hold of the means of life, strength and survival.

So the days teach this man and other tyrants and cruel men the most eloquent lessons and soundest warnings, telling them that those who wrong peoples harm themselves more than they harm their nations. For a people's survival and strength, its hope for the future and pride in the past, give it the power to endure and to resist and assure it victory, while wrongdoers find no comfort in their past, no hope in their future, and in their present no shield against this violent, general, all-embracing anger of the people, which is one manifestation of God's anger.

How well people might send their minds to where Sidqi Pasha sits in his house, after everything has abandoned him and he has abandoned everything, after he built what he built and raised what he raised, then gave up what he built and raised, or what he built and raised gave him up, to see what this man is thinking and what thoughts stir in his gloomy, grieving soul. Souls have strong, sharp glances that pierce veils and curtains and reach the depths of consciences and the bottoms of hearts, and people who sent their minds to where Sidqi Pasha lives would see in his soul dark, murky things, like figures of grief, despair and remorse.

He thinks of his failed hopes, and his own mind tells him he alone is responsible for the disappointment he has met: he coveted what could not rightly be coveted and strove for what could never be obtained. He thinks of people he was kind to who wronged him, whom he treated gently who were harsh to him, to whom he did favours who repaid him with ingratitude, and his own mind tells him he alone is responsible for the ingratitude he has met, because he led these companions of his to wrong people who had done them good and to deny people who had shown them kindness. It was he who taught them to do what he now suffers from them.

He thinks of men who took office with dignity and left office with dignity, who stood firm against every kind of injustice, oppression, violence and tyranny, and whose trials, however relentless and severe, only added to their honour, dignity and standing. Their parties did not abandon them, nor did they abandon their parties; people did not turn away from them, nor did they turn away from people. They felt love and

support from their parties, and respect and reverence from the people, so they went on their way, unwilling to accept wrong, defenders of honour, eager to serve the people, happy in the people's trust in them and support for them, and in the people's readiness to ransom them with lives and wealth.

So his mind tells him he alone is responsible for the sting of pain, the regret of desertion and the bitterness of isolation that he feels, and for the sense that no one thinks of him and that he can think of no one, because he took a road peoples do not love or accept, and followed a course nations do not trust and whose followers they do not believe. He left no man who deserved loyalty and gratitude without treating him in a way that invited neither loyalty nor gratitude, and left no man who deserved ingratitude and disloyalty without doing him kindness and favour. He believed in himself more than people ought to believe in themselves, trusted others more than people ought to trust others, trusted the foreigner more than people ought to trust the foreigner, and gave himself over to luck more than people ought to give themselves over to luck.

He deserves to reap what he reaped and to end where he ended. He can blame only himself if he formed a party whose pillar was power and that party abandoned him when power abandoned him. He can blame only himself if he came to power as an opponent of the people and the people paid him no heed when power turned away from him. He can blame only himself if he built his political life on scheming and manoeuvring, on selfishness and self-love, and so came, through the schemes and manoeuvres, to helplessness and isolation, and through the selfishness and self-love to the loss of people's love and sympathy.

How well people might send their minds to where this man lives, to see what he is thinking, how he suffers, and how he reaps the fruit of what he prepared for himself and his fellow citizens!

All of this holds a lesson if people would learn, and a warning if people would take heed. But men like Sidqi Pasha are many among people: vanity deceives them, adventure calls them, and they rush into it without thought or reckoning until it brings them to this harsh end.

Strangely, men like Sidqi Pasha never learn or take heed. Each of them advances as though the days had taught no lessons and given no warnings, as though tyrants had never met the end of tyranny and the vain never borne the consequences of vanity. Only peoples benefit from

these lessons and profit from these warnings, because they look and see that they are stronger than any individual, more able to resist, to survive and to prevail, however great his power and however much circumstances favour him.

Seeing this, a people takes pride in it and finds comfort, and adds to its faith in itself, its attachment to its rights, and its resistance to tyrants and wrongdoers. And if men like Sidqi Pasha among the Egyptians do not take heed of Sidqi Pasha's lesson, the Egyptian nation as a whole has taken heed of it, and stands ready to defy those who will follow Sidqi Pasha's course, as it defied Sidqi before them, confident it will prevail over them as it has now prevailed over Sidqi Pasha.