Catastrophe ...

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The heedless must take notice, the distracted must come to their senses, the sleeping must wake, and Egyptians must be on their guard; for the catastrophe is drawing near to them, or they are drawing near to it, and the span between them and it has grown short, so short that its harsh voice already reaches the ears, its hideous, frightful shape already wounds the eyes, its choking wind already fouls the air, and its stirring already obliges every Egyptian to prepare to turn it back, to make ready to resist it, and to be certain that heedlessness has become a crime, that vigilance has become an obligation, that sleep has become a sin, and that wakefulness has become an inescapable duty.

Egyptians must take notice; for the ordeal Sidqi Pasha put them through for three years, indeed for more than three years, has begun to reveal its ugly consequences, and to bring forth its dark effects, and if Egyptians do not take notice now, and do not distinguish clearly, they may take notice when noticing no longer helps, and may regret it when regret no longer helps, and may end up bearing burdens and hardships they could still, even now, guard against.

The ordeal Sidqi Pasha put them through for more than three years has come to what was bound to come; it corrupted the administration until officials were accused in their integrity and their conscience, until their trustworthiness became a matter of suspicion and their probity a matter of inquiry, until the sincere Egyptian began to feel shame, for himself and for his country, at these disgraces the leaders of government now hurl at one another these days. This one stirs up the Corniche scandal, and that one stirs up the cotton scandal; this one defends himself and accuses a sitting minister; this sitting minister defends himself and accuses the resigned prime minister; this sitting minister slanders a former minister; this former minister submits and cowers, holds his tongue, prefers flight, and takes refuge in silence; this deputy accuses the governors of trying to bend deputies to the ministry's wishes; that other deputy accuses the interior minister of wishing to bend deputies to the ministry's wishes; this newspaper accuses one minister of refusing to pay his taxes, and accuses another minister of colluding in this and lifting the seizure on his property against what the law requires; this deputy

questions the finance minister about the story and receives no answer; this newspaper accuses a senior official of using government instruments to improve his own property; this newspaper accuses the minister of education of openly breaking the law in university affairs, and of writing a memorandum to the cabinet that does not sit well with the truth. And the ministry is in turmoil and confusion, not knowing what to do, not knowing what to say.

So Sidqi Pasha's ordeal corrupted the administration until corruption showed itself from every side and ill words spread everywhere, until people's opinion of their rulers turned sour, and people's trust in the authority of the state departed; and from all this followed a hideous corruption of morals, so that scheming and intrigue multiplied, informing and denunciation spread, hypocrisy and falsehood became general, and one Egyptian, meeting another, could speak of nothing but these disgraces, and one official, meeting another, could argue of nothing but these evils, and people came to distrust one another, to feel no ease with one another, and a man, speaking to another man, could not be sure he was not being reported on, or spied upon. And the affairs of Egyptians ended in a corrupt, poisoned life, in which sound effort bears no fruit, and inclination toward the good avails nothing, but rather blue-eyed, black-faced demons bare mourning fangs and stretch out sinful, unjust hands, driving people relentlessly toward evil, with no respite and no relief from it, so that they sink lower and lower, and are on the verge of reaching the very bottom.

Sidqi Pasha's ordeal corrupted matters of administration and of morals, and corrupted matters of politics too, so that people became preoccupied with their today at the expense of their tomorrow, preoccupied with their morning at the expense of their evening, preoccupied with seeking their daily bread at the expense of independence; and the foreigner's opinion of these people, whose every affair had grown corrupt, whose every affair had grown disordered, whose petty concerns had distracted them from their great ones, and whose pursuit of immediate advantage had turned them away from thinking about the nation's hopes, grew correspondingly poor.

And when would the English ever think of negotiating with a people whose affairs have fallen into this state of corruption?

Sidqi Pasha's ordeal corrupted matters of administration, of morals, and of politics. As for economic affairs, say what you like of their

corruption, and no one will be able to argue with you or dispute it, even though the finance minister insists on claiming to the Egyptian Gazette that economic affairs are fine, even though the finance minister insists on announcing to the Egyptian Gazette that he will not help debtors, and will not restrain the banks' hand against them, until they have paid some part of what they owe.

Everything has grown corrupt, and this corruption has reached a disturbing, frightening stage, and after all this there was no escaping that the English should show themselves from behind the curtain, that the English should step out of their false, illusory neutrality, and everything now indicates that they wish to act, or are about to act, or have already begun to act.

These are items of news broadcast in today's papers that people pass over quickly, though it is their right to pause over them and linger long; people read them in haste, though it is their right to read them slowly and deliberately; people shake their heads over them and shrug their shoulders, though it is their right to weigh them and weigh them thoroughly, to think them over and think them over at length, to gauge their consequences and guard against those consequences, for they are nothing less, and nothing more, than plain disaster.

Here is the prime minister, going yesterday to meet the High Commissioner, and spending two hours with him in the morning; and here is the leader of the People's Party, going yesterday to meet the High Commissioner, and spending an hour with him in the evening. Can we make sense of this strange coincidence, can we account for this astonishing surprise? Two men locked in the fiercest disagreement, the fiercest dispute, over which of them will win the majority within the People's Party; their supporters hurling at one another the most disgraceful accusations, the ugliest scandals; then mediators striving between them for reconciliation, only for matters to grow yet more corrupt; then news of an inquiry is broadcast, and people talk of what the inquiry might uncover; and then, in the midst of all this, the papers announce that one of them met the High Commissioner in the morning, and that the other met him in the evening!

Was it mere coincidence that this evening visit followed that morning visit, or has the High Commissioner become an arbiter between the two disputing men? And who made him an arbiter? Was it the two disputants themselves? What a disgrace, beyond which there can be no

greater disgrace! Or has the High Commissioner himself grown weary of neutrality, and imposed himself by force, or volunteered his efforts to erase the discord and set harmony in its place?

Nor does the matter stop there, for Al-Ahram does not hesitate to inform us that the prime minister spoke to the High Commissioner yesterday morning about reshuffling the ministry, about transferring the finance minister to the foreign ministry, and transferring himself to the finance ministry.

What is this? Where are we, and in what age are we living? Have we come to the point where such matters are laid out in the newspapers in this manner? Is it true that the prime minister spoke to the High Commissioner about transferring a minister from one ministry to another? And if this is true, did the prime minister open this conversation to lay the matter before the High Commissioner, or did the High Commissioner open this conversation to impose the matter upon the prime minister, or to suggest it to him? And how did it come to circulate in the papers that the prime minister spoke of such a thing to the High Commissioner at all? Are we before the war, or after it? Are we in the days of occupation, or in the days of independence? The prime minister must say something on this, indeed something plain and clear, that removes the ambiguity, erases the obscurity, and preserves our dignity; for it would seem that Egyptian dignity is wounded by such news even if it is not true — how much more so if it is true!

And Al-Ahram claims that matters grew so strained between the finance minister and the men of his ministry, Egyptian and foreign alike, that cooperation between them and him broke down entirely, and that there was no escaping the minister's transfer. What is this? Where are we? Who is transferred when a dispute arises between him and a minister — the official answerable to the minister, or the minister answerable to parliament? And who decides a dispute that arises between a minister and his officials — the cabinet, or the High Commissioner?

Do Egyptians hear this? Do Egyptians understand this? Do Egyptians see where the affairs of their government have come to?

Nor does the matter stop even there, for Al-Siyasa informs us this morning that the finance under-secretary, His Excellency Ahmed Abdel Wahab Pasha, met the financial adviser yesterday, and spent a long time with him. Then it informs us, immediately after, that the finance under-secretary has not resigned, and has not thought of resigning,

despite the disagreement between him and the finance minister — the finance under-secretary has not resigned! And the reshuffle the prime minister discussed with the High Commissioner yesterday, and which he will present to His Majesty the King tomorrow — according to Al-Ahram — will spare him further thought on the matter, restoring the finance ministry's affairs to him just as they were before.

And the finance minister himself speaks to the Egyptian Gazette, and to no other Arabic paper, saying that he has reminded the officials of the finance ministry that they have a minister at their head — and had the officials forgotten they had a minister? And who made them forget they had a minister?

And did the minister do well, or did he do wrong, in reminding the officials that he exists? And did the minister accept, or did he not accept, what is being said of his transfer to the foreign ministry? And is this the outcome of that grave financial revolution the papers spoke of, at home and abroad, concerning the finance minister, before he rose to his post of authority? And are we meant to understand, from all these events, that the English are convinced, or have convinced themselves, that Egyptians should not be left to themselves, nor allowed to slip free of England's meticulous control over their affairs great and small? And will Egyptians be content to see the relationship between themselves and the English return to what it was before independence was declared?

Egyptians must take notice; for the catastrophe is drawing near to them, or they are drawing near to it, and their efforts and their sacrifices are on the verge of being lost.