

Motives

Kawkab al-Sharq (Hadith al-Massa), 30 March 1934.

A very simple story, on the face of it, is this one now occupying the newspapers, in which argument and counter-argument abound over pensions, the commutation of pensions, and those who profited from this affair, or benefited others, or exchanged benefits with one another.

A story simple on its face, which resolves itself, if you wish to analyze it, into this: that suspicions and doubts were raised around a number of officials touching the commutation of pensions, so the Ministry set about investigating these suspicions and scrutinizing these doubts, and it emerged that two officials had become entangled in violations that cannot be reconciled with remaining entangled in them while also discharging the state's business; and so it was decided to dismiss them from service and retire them on pension, as they say.

How many simple stories there are in this life, and how readily people accept them, and rest content in their simplicity and ease, and interpret them just as the surface of things interprets them! But not all people possess such naivety, soundness of taste, and straightness of logic that they always understand matters at face value, and interpret them as the nature of things itself would interpret them. Rather, there exist among them the obstinate and the contrarian, those who go to excess in analysis and explanation, who seek the shade at the fourteenth hour, and who split a single hair into quarters, fifths, and sixths. These people call themselves philosophers at times, and investigators at other times, and they complicate matters, make the easy difficult, and corrupt the logic of things in any case.

These complicators were alarmed by the story of the pensions and their commutation, and refused to accept that the state's rights should be so lightly regarded, that the state's own servants should trifle with its funds and benefits, and hoard for themselves of these funds and benefits as much as hoarding allowed them. They further refused to accept that dismissal from one's post should be the whole of the penalty meted out to one who trifles with the state's funds, and is excessive with its rights and benefits, and they asked themselves, and asked the Ministry, and asked the people: why was discipline legislated? Why were disciplinary councils established? Why was the judiciary instituted, and the courts and the public prosecution established? And while they were thus denying and

reflecting, seeking solutions to these problems and explanations for these dilemmas, behold, matters grew exceedingly complicated of their own accord, and talk multiplied in the newspapers, and long and short columns were published, which no doubt were not written idly, nor published in vain, but were rather handed down by a revelation from certain sources from which revelation descends to certain newspapers. And in these long and short columns, which revelation presses upon the newspapers and which the newspapers press to publish and broadcast, there is innuendo and insinuation, exposure of the hidden, and an extension beyond these two officials to others — to Sidqi Pasha, for instance? — and an announcement that this story very nearly was neglected, and would have met the neglect and disregard that befits it, had Sidqi Pasha not spoken by telephone to the Undersecretary of Finance, ordering him to complete the deal and prepare the contract.

And that this other story very nearly was rejected, had it not been for another telephone conversation from Sidqi Pasha, ordering its acceptance, so it was accepted; and no sooner is this talk published than Sidqi Pasha concerns himself with it and takes it to heart, and gets in touch with one of the newspapers, speaking to it by telephone, denying part of the matter and confirming another part, advancing then holding back, still then moving, denying then affirming, circling in any case as he is accustomed to circle.

Then the two officials rise to answer and defend themselves, attempting to set matters in their proper place, and their responses do not spare the reader insinuation and allusion, symbol and innuendo. And it is not long before this story takes on the shape of a great scandal, at which souls are alarmed and hearts troubled, over which talk multiplies, for which journalists grow active, and which occupies people — or very nearly occupies them — to the exclusion of other matters that had their own importance, and were the concern of those interested in affairs of state, near or far.

And perhaps you will agree with me that our life has proceeded in this manner ever since the standing Ministry took up the burdens of government: scarcely a week passes without a scandal, or two scandals, or several scandals appearing, over which people grow agitated, and by which public opinion is occupied. Then another scandal, or other scandals, appear, until our political thinking has become, or very nearly become, confined to recognizing and understanding these scandals, and to predicting what they will produce on the one hand, and what will

appear after them on the other.

Say what you will — we, and the people, and the leaders of this happy era themselves, have exhausted our confidence that these continuous scandals are glaring proof that this era was not an era of good, nor is it to be expected to become an era of good, and that no country possessing any measure of civilization and any share of dignity ought to rest easy with it or rely upon it to realize the hopes it aspires to, or to manage the benefits and facilities it needs. But the one thing we have not exhausted, and it appears we shall not exhaust until we have exhausted this happy era itself, is that the truth, it seems, is not what is sought in the uncovering and stirring up of these scandals; rather, it is these hidden political motives, astir behind a curtain, interacting in the dark, because one group makes war on another, because one faction schemes against another, because some set of men incite another against it, and because one party wishes to take revenge upon another.

And this is what causes Sidqi Pasha's name to recur whenever a scandal appears, and this is what makes people feel that this scandal has appeared precisely in order to touch Sidqi Pasha and his associates, near or far. And this is what makes Sidqi Pasha so acutely sensitive, so intensely active, so finely perceptive, never attacked but that he returns the attack, never alluded to but that he answers the allusion with an open statement, never hinted at but that he meets hint with hint in turn.

Sidqi Pasha and his adversaries among the present political men are, to us, equally the same — all of them, to us, men who ought never to have taken up Egypt's affairs, nor presided over their conduct; all of them, to us, men whom Egypt has tried, and from whose trial she has reaped no good, but only evil and vileness. But what we wish to draw people's attention to is that Sidqi Pasha and his adversaries wish nothing more than to pursue their mutual quarrel, and their various kinds of scheming. As you see, they plot against one another, and incite one another against each other, and their vices emerge from within the folds of this incitement and this plotting; so how would it be, were there a ministry that thought neither of Sidqi Pasha nor of his adversaries, but thought of Egypt, and only of Egypt, and thought of the right, and only of the right, and thought of reform, and only of reform? Then indeed you would see wonders, and then indeed you would witness, among scandals and vices, what would make these scandals and vices that now fill the Egyptian air with corruption and vileness in these days seem nothing by comparison.

And this is what explains this strange position, or these strange positions, that we now witness. For the story of the commutation of pensions is not confined to these two officials who were removed from the government — why, then, did the Ministry concern itself with them first, before any others? Why did the Ministry not concern itself with others before it concerned itself with them? Why did the Ministry not refer them to disciplinary councils, so that investigation and trial might bring to light what ought not to remain hidden? And then why do the sources of revelation pursue them with these long and short columns, full of defamation and vilification, full of innuendo and insinuation, forcing them to answer column with column, and attack with attack — and perhaps forcing them to divulge what we ourselves would wish to see divulged, and what some would rather not be divulged at all?

Would it not have been better than all this for the Ministry to have taken, toward them and toward others in this shameful story, a position of candor, truth, firmness, and preference for the public good — bringing to trial everyone around whom suspicion and doubt had been raised?!

Nor is the story of the pensions and their commutation everything; for there is the story of the contracting works connected to the Jabal al-Awliya dam — why has the Ministry not investigated it, and made the plain truth of it clear to the people? And the story of the Corniche, and the story of the clearing of the courtyards, and the story of those who evade taxes, and the story of those, not officials, whom it was wished to favor with state land, and the story of cotton, and the story of the former minister whom the present minister accused — and all these stories, which it is no longer possible to enumerate — why has the Ministry not confronted them with candor and firmness, and revealed to Egypt the plain, clear face of truth in them?!

Yet these vices and scandals have another aspect, truly painful, which touches not the state's funds, nor the people's benefits and facilities, but rather the morals of these heroes who have taken part, or go on taking part, in them.

For the least these stories indicate is that a group of Egyptians love scheming and are intent upon it, are accustomed to informing and devoted to it, and excel in a category of conduct from which honorable, free men ought to be absolved; they obey this minister so long as circumstances favor him and power is gathered to him, until, when he weakens, they turn to plotting and scheming against him, until, when he

falls, they become his enemies and adversaries, conspiring against him and inciting others against him — when it would have been better for them and for their nation had they been truly men, and had refused to obey the former minister in violating the law, and refused to obey the present minister in violating the law, understanding that they are servants of Egypt, not of the ministers, that they are paid by Egypt, not by the ministers, and that they owe fidelity, sincerity, and truthfulness in word and deed to Egypt, not to the ministers; and that those who work in the posts of the state are not paid so that they may submit today and rebel tomorrow, obey today and scheme tomorrow — rather, they are paid to serve Egypt faithfully, whether the ministers are pleased or displeased.

This strange exchange, stirred up in these days between Sidqi Pasha and one of his undersecretaries in the Ministry of Finance, reveals a truly bad moral state. For is it true that this undersecretary testified against Sidqi Pasha that he ordered the deal completed? If so, how did Sidqi Pasha consent to complete a deal he himself regarded as a trifling with the state's rights? And why did he not disobey Sidqi Pasha, and why did he not counsel his nation, and why did he not bear what a counselor of his nation ought to bear by way of sacrifice? Or did this undersecretary not testify, and did not say what is attributed to him?! If so, why does he not give the lie to those who thrust him into this affair by force, and say against him what is not true, and display him before the people in this strange, suspicious light?! And if he did testify, is it true that Sidqi Pasha did not order him? If so, then woe to morals! Or is it true that Sidqi Pasha did order him? If so, why does he not answer Sidqi Pasha's statement, and make clear to the people that in his testimony he said nothing but what his conscience commanded him to say?! And you may go to all the ministries and bureaus, and you will see many officials, senior and junior alike, carrying out their superiors' orders in violation of the law, neither denying it nor protesting it — until, when the days turn and conditions change, they turn against these very superiors in open war.

Have you considered these two grave matters that these stories call upon us to reflect on: that the motives stirring up these stories and the scandals within them are not Egypt's interests at all, but rather personal rivalries between individuals, and that morals have corrupted in this era, truly and hideously, until it has become difficult for the upright man to know how his conscience might find any rest or ease beyond what is done and said in the government bureaus?!

Everything has been corrupted, everything has been thrown into confusion, and it has become a trial for any ministry that comes after this era to attempt reform, or anything resembling reform. How heavy are the burdens borne by Sidqi Pasha's own conscience, for he is the source of all this! But the strange thing is that Sidqi Pasha's conscience bears all of this without hardship or strain!