Lapse ...

Sawt al-Umma, 30 October 1946.

1 Sidqi Pasha would never have fallen into this lapse had he not been a man advanced in years, pressed hard by illness, weighed down by cares, and long awaiting this great day on which he might bring about some momentous event in Egyptian politics, and play, as the men of the theater say, a role of consequence. For Sidqi Pasha has been courting the hope, for more than a quarter of a century, of occupying in Egyptian politics a position resembling that of a group of his friends, his contemporaries, and his peers.

2 And he spends toward this end efforts that know neither fatigue nor weariness nor flagging, and he undertakes toward it heavy ordeals that have exposed him to many trials.

3 All Egyptians remember his positions in Paris, when the Egyptian delegation was trying to make contact with the Peace Conference; his positions in London, when Adly Pasha was negotiating there; and his positions in Cairo, when Tharwat Pasha was working toward the declaration of 28 February.

4 And Egyptians remember these desperate attempts he made when he was Prime Minister, to reach the British Foreign Secretary: when he could not meet him in London, he contrived to meet him in Geneva instead — and still came away with nothing.

5 It is, then, a craving within him, and a natural craving; and there is no reason his share of it should be less than the share of those Egyptians who negotiated in Cairo, or in cities other than Cairo, the world over.

6 And it was perhaps this sharp, pressing craving that drove Sidqi Pasha to hasten toward power, so that once power appeared within his reach, he did not hesitate out of regard for his health, did not hesitate out of regard for his long record, did not hesitate out of regard for what people thought of him, nor out of their misgivings about him and their suspicion of everything he does or says — he hesitated over none of this, because the opportunity he had awaited and pursued — indeed, striven toward for more than a quarter of a century — had at last presented itself. He said to himself: this opportunity must not be allowed to slip away, for it has been granted to Sidqi Pasha, as it was granted to Adly,

Tharwat, Saad, Muhammad, Mahmoud, and al-Nahhas, to be the head of the body that negotiates with the English.

7 And Sidqi Pasha might well have contented himself, for his personal triumph, with this much alone — negotiating with the English in Cairo and Alexandria, as other Egyptians before him had negotiated. If it were granted him to win the Egyptians their rights, then the whole triumph would be his; and if he were barred from these rights, he could simply break off the negotiations, and content himself with having been no less than the other politicians of his time.

8 And Sidqi Pasha might well have said to himself: if I break off the negotiations, then better men than I have broken them off — Adly, Saad, and Tharwat broke them off; and if I succeed in the negotiations, then better men than I have succeeded in them — al-Nahhas succeeded in them, after breaking them off once and resuming them a second time, and success was granted him.

9 But Sidqi Pasha knows neither moderation nor contentment, cannot govern himself, nor bring his will back to anything resembling patience and deliberation; he is headstrong, impulsive, answering to his own craving, riding his own willfulness in everything he undertakes — he is violent, and calls his violence firmness; he is reckless, and calls his recklessness courage; he is cunning, and calls his cunning skill and shrewdness.

10 And for this reason, no sooner had he come to head the negotiating body than he was made to feel that everything had been smoothed for him, and that triumph had been decreed for him. And lo, he becomes the first negotiator (let us note in passing that none of those who preceded him in heading the negotiations ever bestowed this title upon himself), and then, lo, he monopolizes these negotiations apart from his colleagues, until he has pressed hard upon their hearts and burdened them grievously in their own affair. Then, lo, he complains of his Egyptian colleagues to the English negotiators, until he forces a party of the negotiators to doubt him with every kind of doubt, to suspect him with every kind of suspicion, and he drives them to situations full of embarrassment, and forces the negotiations out from secrecy into the open, from concealment into declaration, seeking the aid of public opinion against him after every stratagem against him had been exhausted, and after they had been barred from following him along the devious paths he preferred to tread.

11 And lo, his own English negotiators themselves declare this very doubt and this very suspicion in the statement they issued before returning to their homeland, their spokesman saying: we have learned, of the matter of the negotiations and of the views of the negotiators, something — or several things — other than what was recorded for us in the written memoranda submitted to us. And the plain meaning of this — the very meaning that Mokram Pasha, and others besides Mokram Pasha, repeated — is that Sidqi Pasha was telling the Egyptians among his colleagues one thing, and telling the English among his negotiators another; that he was practicing what he calls skill and shrewdness, deceiving both the one party and the other.

12 Nor did he content himself with all of this; he insisted on carrying his heroics to their utmost limit and farthest reach, making it plain to the Egyptians that it was these very colleagues of his among the negotiators who had stood between him and success, through their excessive arguing and disputing; and that it was the English negotiators themselves who had stood between the negotiations and success, because they did not hold sufficient authority; and that he, Sidqi Pasha, could fly to London, meet Mr. Bevin, and need only spend an hour or hours with him before folding him up entirely, bending him to his will, and tucking him into his pocket without effort or difficulty — then keeping him prisoner in that pocket, never letting him out into the open air, unless he yielded to Egypt everything she wanted. Only then, and not before, would he restore to him his freedom, and let him go on his way to New York.

13 But Sidqi Pasha paid no heed to warning or caution, and gave no ear to counsel or guidance; he flew to London, met Mr. Bevin, and returned to Egypt defying his opponents, announcing to his friends the good news that he had fulfilled the promise and kept faith with the pledge, and that he had brought back the Sudan as a lawful, ready possession — not, as he put it, for Egypt, but, as I would rather say, for the people of the Nile Valley, as both Egyptians and Sudanese alike ought properly to say.

14 The reader may perhaps recall that two days ago I said I would wager with anyone, on anything, that Sidqi Pasha had brought nothing of worth from London. And no one took up the wager; for it seems that all Egyptians know Sidqi Pasha just as I know him, expect of him just as I expected, and trust him to exactly the degree that I trust him. He told them he had brought back the Sudan as a lawful, ready possession, and not one of them believed him — for they have grown accustomed, over

years and years, not to believe him whenever he speaks.

15 And no sooner had Sunday passed and Monday come, than the British Prime Minister rose in the British House of Commons to calm the fears of the English, who seemed to have feared that Sidqi Pasha might have spoken the truth, and that the Sudan might have slipped from their grasp — and to calm the Egyptians too, whom he took for naive and heedless, imagining that they had settled into confidence over Sidqi Pasha's declaration; he wished to spare them the disappointment, and to shield them from the setback that follows upon trust once it proves, as our esteemed teacher Lutfi Pasha al-Sayyid would say, to have been trust without any real object.

16 The British Prime Minister rose, and gave the lie to what Sidqi Pasha had announced in his declaration, restored to the English their sense of security, and fixed fast in the hearts of Egyptians their fear; and both parties came to know that Sidqi Pasha had flown out, and flown back, and returned empty-handed. He gained nothing for his homeland, but only exposed his health to grave harm, which we hope God will soon lift from him, so that Sidqi Pasha may return strong, vigorous, and whole, able once more to toy with his skill and his cunning at the expense of Egyptians and Englishmen alike.

17 All these are things the Egyptians have grown used to from Sidqi Pasha. They deny him none of it, and perhaps they would deny only whatever contradicted it, should Sidqi Pasha ever manage to produce such a contradiction.

18 But the thing that truly embarrasses Egyptians is that Sidqi Pasha, this time, went too far with himself and with his fellow countrymen when he rushed to broadcast his declaration before the proper time for broadcasting it had come. There is no doubt that the English told him: we will agree that Egyptian royal sovereignty over the Sudan be mentioned. But they undoubtedly told him other things as well, and Sidqi Pasha ought to have governed himself and mastered his own affair, seeking to satisfy his desire through discretion, and holding his silence until he could face his fellow negotiators with what he had brought back from the land of the English; then, had they approved it, he might have announced it to the people, and had they rejected it, he might have followed his own judgment and broken off the negotiations, or dissolved this unruly body altogether, and imposed upon it a dictatorship that would carry matters through as he himself wished, not as the

negotiators wished.

19 It was Sidqi Pasha's duty to follow this path — first, out of regard for his own well-being; second, out of regard for the dignity of his fellow negotiators; and finally, out of regard for political tradition itself, above all else. But the craving for triumph took hold of the man's affairs entirely, so that he paid no heed to his fellow ministers, no heed to his fellow Egyptian negotiators, no heed to political tradition — indeed, no heed even to the truth itself; instead, he said one thing, and concealed many others, and his case became like that of one who recites: "O you who believe, do not approach prayer…" — and then stops there, and does not carry the noble verse through to its end, leaving people to imagine that God is forbidding them prayer altogether. For it seems the English told Sidqi Pasha that they saw no objection to mentioning Egyptian royal sovereignty over the Sudan — but on the condition that all affairs of the Sudan remain exactly as they now stand, untouched by change, whether great or small, and that the Egyptians place on record their own recognition of the Sudanese people's right to declare their independence whenever they wish.

20 And it is perfectly clear that Sidqi Pasha could not possibly have broadcast all of this; for all of this does not record a triumph, but rather a failure — and an ugly, disgraceful failure at that.

21 And the worst of all this is that Sidqi Pasha did not conduct himself as a statesman ought to conduct himself when negotiating with a foreign power, and when he had agreed with that power to preserve the secrecy of the negotiations. And so the British Prime Minister was forced, in the British House of Commons, to give him the lie on the one hand, and to rebuke him on the other, thereby exposing himself to this harsh humiliation, and exposing his own government to that same humiliation — but exposing Egypt to nothing at all; for Egypt has nothing whatsoever to do with him, and the English know full well that he did not speak to them in Egypt's name, did not negotiate with them in Egypt's name, and that Egypt disavows before them, and before the whole world, everything he told them and everything he heard from them.

22 This lapse into which Sidqi Pasha has fallen stirs in us a sense of shame on Sidqi Pasha's own behalf, even as it stirs in our hearts a feeling of pity for him. For Sidqi Pasha is too skillful, too adroit, to have fallen into such a lapse, were he not, as I said at the outset of this piece, a man advanced in years, pressed hard by illness, weighed down by cares, and

possessed entirely by the craving for triumph.

23 But what, one wonders, might the proper course be, now that circumstances have brought Sidqi Pasha to this pass? Is it possible, is it reasonable, is it permissible, to hand the reins of government to one who cannot even hold the reins of himself? And to entrust the fate of Egypt to a man advanced in years, pressed hard by illness, and weighed down by cares?

24 And if Sidqi Pasha does not spare himself from undertaking dread and bearing pain and exposing himself to danger, and if Sidqi Pasha does not spare his homeland from this policy of incapacity to which his age, his illness, and his heavy cares are driving him, then it falls to us to spare our own interests, and to beseech His Majesty the King to entrust the affairs of government in Egypt to a man not advanced in years, not pressed hard by illness, and not weighed down by cares; and to beseech His Majesty the King to relieve Sidqi Pasha of government, out of mercy toward him, out of pity for him, and out of a wish to spare him from danger.

25 And it may well be our due to call upon Sidqi Pasha's fellow Egyptian negotiators to spare Egypt this policy of incapacity and these lapses, and to relieve Sidqi Pasha of this heavy and perilous ordeal; and the path open to them is clear and easy, for Sidqi Pasha will gather them, on Saturday according to some accounts, or on Thursday according to others, and will lay before them what he has brought back from the land of the English — and what he has brought back from the land of the English runs contrary to the minimum that the greater number of them have already resolved they can accept, and runs contrary, in the sharpest degree, to what Egypt itself can accept.

26 And so, both counsel for the homeland and counsel for Sidqi Pasha himself demand the rejection of what Sidqi Pasha has brought back from the land of the English. There, let the negotiations be broken off; there, let Egypt resume its struggle; let Sidqi Pasha be freed to attend to his health; and let Egyptians be spared this great and hateful ordeal.

27 I have no doubt whatsoever that the Egyptian negotiators will heed this plea, and so save their homeland from this danger, and save Sidqi Pasha from himself as well…