

## **An Interview**

*Kawkab al-Sharq, 2 June 1933*

The Prime Minister gave it to a Parisian newspaper, and al-Ahrām published its detailed summary yesterday. When we read it we repudiated it, and we hesitated between two explanations: one, that the Prime Minister's interlocutor had failed to understand him well and had not succeeded in accurately representing what he heard from him; the other, that the Prime Minister himself was exhausted and that illness had stood between him and proper oversight of what he was saying. In any case we preferred to leave this interview for a day or part of a day, in the hope that the Prime Minister might read it and correct it, and that the ministers here might read it and correct it. We had no wish to be harsh with the man and hold him to things he perhaps never said, or said while ill.

But Sidqi Pasha's newspaper is aggrieved and resentful that the opposition newspapers paid no attention to this interview and did not subject it to commentary and analysis — or rather, say that Sidqi Pasha's newspaper is pleased with this interview, delighted by certain things in it, seeing in it a herald of long continuance and a good omen for the relationship between the present Ministry and the English. It is recording against the opposition newspapers their silence about this interview, and takes the view that this silence is proof that the opposition newspapers have been struck dumb by Sidqi Pasha's interview and silenced — that they do not know what to say.

And although we have never thought highly of the skill of those who write in that newspaper or of their loyalty to the Prime Minister, we could not have imagined that they would sink to such a level of naïveté and reach such a degree of weakness as a drowning man clutching at straws in search of rescue and survival. There is nothing of value in Sidqi Pasha's interview, and nothing new in it. And if we must find something in it, there is nothing to find but what plainly indicates that the man is still exhausted and worn out, and that the best thing — the only good thing — would be for him to heed the advice of the *Morning Post* and genuinely rest, not combining rest with the conduct of public affairs, since his health neither permits nor enables him to do so. And what do you say to a man who wishes to speak about the Capitulations and tells his interlocutor that the Capitulations have become useless from both the financial and judicial standpoints?

Useless to whom? To the Egyptians? Who has ever claimed that the Egyptians have benefited or can benefit from the Capitulations in any financial or judicial sense? When did the bound man benefit from his bonds? When did the man carrying a heavy burden benefit from his heavy burden? When did the shackled man benefit from his chains and shackles?

To the foreigners? What greater absurdity than the denial of one who denies that foreigners benefit from the Capitulations in financial and judicial ways? Do the Egyptians demand the abolition of the Capitulations for any reason other than that they benefit the foreigners — excessively so — and harm the Egyptians — excessively so?

What the Prime Minister said is therefore not speech — that the Capitulations have become useless from the financial and judicial standpoint — but a sick man's rambling issued from an exhausted and worn-out person, in which we ought not to seek sound meaning or coherent opinion. It is for this reason that we felt sympathy for the Prime Minister and had no wish to dwell on this interview of his, and wished that the Ministry had noticed the weakness in it and issued a communiqué correcting or denying it. And what do you say to a man who sees himself, and whom people see, as the greatest of the Egyptians — God forgive us — or rather as the most capable and brilliant of all politicians and their conversation pieces, who when he speaks to a Parisian journalist claims to him that the Egyptian nation wishes to abolish the Capitulations, but prefers to abolish them gradually, bit by bit, stage by stage? And when has it ever been sound policy and political prudence, cleverness and skill, to say such things to the press — even if it were the undeniable truth? And on whose behalf does the Prime Minister speak these words? And who told the Prime Minister that the nation wishes to abolish the Capitulations bit by bit and gradually? Or does he claim that he is the nation, and that whenever he holds an opinion it is the opinion of the nation — even when that opinion is a sick man's opinion? And what do you say to a man who speaks to a Parisian journalist and does not scruple to say that we are waiting for Great Britain to finish with its preoccupations before we resolve the pending questions between her and us, and then we shall ask her to help us abolish the Capitulations? Is this the speech of a man who genuinely feels what his country deserves by way of dignity and honour — we are waiting for Great Britain to finish with its preoccupations? And why should the Egyptian question not be among those preoccupations? And why should the other preoccupations take precedence over the Egyptian question? Is it a courtesy we are extending to the English? Or arrogance on the part of the English toward us and contempt on their part for us? If it is the first, then how generously we treat Egypt's rights and how anxious we are for the English's approval. And if it is the second, then how small we are in our own eyes and how lightly we take our own affairs. But the one speaking is the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister — as you know — is exhausted and worn out, and it is not easy for him at all times to weigh what he says. And if he were truly capable of weighing what he says, he would be too ashamed to speak to a Parisian journalist and claim to him that we are waiting for our agreement with the English to be concluded before asking them to help us abolish the Capitulations. Perhaps exhaustion led the Prime Minister to think that he was frightening the French with this warning and filling their hearts with alarm when he told them that we would reach agreement with the English and then seek their assistance in abolishing the Capitulations. But exhaustion caused the Prime Minister to forget that this is

something that ought not to be said even if it were true, because it is incompatible with dignity and honour and political advantage, and because it conveys to foreigners that we will not be able to abolish the Capitulations unless the English help us do so, and that we will offer our agreement with the English as a means — or if you prefer, call it a bribe — to enable us to abolish the Capitulations. But the one speaking is the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister went to Versailles to rest, not to engage in politics and its conversations — he is too exhausted to manage to be right in these conversations.

And what do you say to a man who speaks to a Parisian journalist and claims to him that we are in ongoing negotiations with the English to resolve the pending questions, and forgets — and how powerfully illness drives one to forget — that he denied, before leaving Egypt, that there were any negotiations between him and the English? And he denied it because the British Foreign Office itself denied it in the most categorical terms, compelling the Prime Minister to deny it as well. The most likely explanation is that the man did not mean to imply ongoing negotiations between himself and England in the sense that there have been since the Milner negotiations — he meant the continuation of the disagreement between the two countries and attempts to reach agreement, but illness stood between him and felicitous expression and precise phrasing. Then his newspaper came along and exploited this weakness, claiming, as the common people say, that there is a sheikh behind the dome — or that behind the hill there is what lies behind it, as the ancients used to say. Then it proceeded to sensationalise and exaggerate in its sensationalism, claiming to possess knowledge and secrets of the negotiations that it was unable to disclose or speak openly about, because political circumstances did not permit it. Pardon me! We swear that if the Prime Minister and his supporters and his newspaper possessed the slightest knowledge about the negotiations they would not have kept silent about broadcasting, spreading, exploiting, and grossly over-exploiting it. No — these people have nothing but a pack of lies, nine-tenths of which are wishful thinking and one-tenth of which hangs on the judgment of fate.

The most charming thing in this charming interview is the Prime Minister's sympathy for France and his congratulations to her for not having possessed Egypt. I confess that I try to find a meaning for these words and succeed in finding none — and who knows, perhaps Sidqi Pasha's newspaper can explain these words, about which I have no doubt that the French read them and laughed and shook their heads and shoulders.

Then the Prime Minister spoke about the debt and said nothing new, did nothing, showed no strength or resolution, but only showed weakness, fear, and supplication, and pinned his hopes on the frankness of the English and the assistance of the English — because they share Egypt's view and support Egypt in paying in paper rather than gold. This is the interview that the Prime Minister gave to the Parisian newspaper, which we repudiated and about which we

felt sympathy for its author that it should be subjected to commentary and analysis.

This is the interview about which Sidqi Pasha's newspaper claims that the opposition newspapers fled from explaining and interpreting it because it contains a mention of negotiations and evidence of long continuance. Did the Ministry's newspaper act in ignorance in this foolishness, or does it wish to divert the press from the missionaries' affair and from the weakness into which the Minister of the Interior has stumbled — a weakness with nothing of strength in it, reports that do not represent the truth, and promises whose fulfilment cannot be hoped for?

They say that if speech is silver then silence may be golden, and they say that a wise enemy is better than an ignorant friend. But these enduring popular maxims have a strange way about them — people all believe them, people all have faith in them, and people all violate them. As for the Prime Minister, he is excused if he forgot them or acted against them, for he is exhausted and worn out. And as for the Prime Minister's newspaper, it is excused if it forgot them or acted against them, for it is a drowning creature seeking rescue.