

Cookery ...

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In classical Arabic the word simply means cooking, and you need not cite the verse of poets or the speeches of the purest Arab orators to prove it; for Sidqi Pasha, who is an authority on everything, used this very word this morning in a statement Al-Ahram published for him — Al-Sha'b did not publish it — and he used it in exactly this sense, admitting no doubt whatsoever, since he used it alongside "cooking" itself, saying: "But it is explained by the fact that the message was cooked in Egypt by cooks who have long practiced this craft." And this craft is the cooking, or the cookery, of messages in Egypt, sent off to England to be published there, then carried back to Egypt by telegraph to be broadcast in Al-Ahram. It is quite obvious that Sidqi Pasha used neither cookery nor cooking in its literal sense, but used both figuratively.

So Sidqi Pasha is not merely a skilled philologist; he is, besides that, an eloquent writer who knows how to fashion metaphor and figure, for messages are not cooked or prepared in a kitchen, but are made ready and drawn up — and in this expression there lies a long, elaborate comparison, which I do not know whether the minister of traditions and the men of letters around him at the ministry of education can properly work out, or whether it will defeat them, so that they must seek it instead from the Language Academy, once it convenes, God willing.

In any case, cookery is cooking and cooking is cookery, and were it not that Sidqi Pasha, besides his skill in language and his mastery of rhetoric, possesses a share of exquisite literary taste, he would have used "cooks" in place of "chefs," and would have said that this message was cooked in Egypt by cooks who have long practiced this craft; but he preferred taste, lightness of spirit, and elegance of phrase, and so used both words together, and hit upon this usage most felicitously, and it has become only right that we should go seeking these cooks, or these chefs, who occupy themselves with political affairs, cooking them thoroughly, preparing them with care, adding to them and taking from them, and making them ready in that particular preparation which sometimes turns sharp and fierce enough to provoke anger, and sometimes turns mild and gentle enough to arouse no notice and no anger at all.

It is only right that we should go seeking these cooks of the state — those whom Sidqi Pasha knows, who cooked that message some days ago and sent it off to the Daily Telegraph, and who managed their concealment and disguise so poorly in preparing this dish that they gave themselves away, and Sidqi Pasha learned the nature of what they were preparing, because, it would seem, he caught the scent of the cooking.

But cookery has another meaning in colloquial speech, for it is sometimes used to mean that taste which allows you to fit things together properly; people say of someone that he has little cookery in him when his share of taste is slight, when he speaks and rushes headlong into speech, acts and rushes headlong into action, taking no account of anything or anyone. And it appears that those who cooked this message were no experts in cooking, for they failed to close the windows and doors properly, and so gave themselves away; and because they failed to fit things together properly, and did not balance what they added to their dish of spices, they fell short of good cookery and mastery of the craft — they deceive no one with this empty talk they whispered into the ear of the Daily Telegraph's political correspondent, and we do not suppose that a single person read this message and believed it held any value, great or small, nor do we suppose that a single person read this message and doubted for a moment that it was cooked in Egypt, and that the cooks who cooked it, or the chefs who prepared it, had little cookery in them, and no great share of skill or mastery in the craft.

For everyone knows what they know of British neutrality in Egypt, and everyone knows that this neutrality has grown weary of itself, and pained by life in Egypt, and has all but turned away from it, and has set its mind to taking the air and finding recreation in some other country, such as Turkey, and in some other city, such as Ankara, leaving the Egyptian atmosphere open to a plain, open interference that neither hides nor conceals itself; and everyone knows that the simplest principles of good cookery required that the papers of the Union Party be the very last papers that ought to speak of this Daily Telegraph message, until the trick had run its course, and until people's opinion of this particular dish served up to them had become apparent; but the French-language paper of the Union Party could not hold back its hunger, and rushed upon this dish, and drowned in it up to its ears, and published the message, and took it up with interpretation and analysis, with construal and justification, and ended by establishing the proof that the office of the High Commissioner is truly neutral, that it will never intervene between

the parties, great matter or small, let alone intervene between members of a single party once they have split apart and become enemies to one another.

Nor did Sidqi Pasha, for all his skill and mastery, prove any better versed in good cookery than the Union Party's paper; for he too rushed upon this message, and named those who had cooked and prepared it, forgetting that these very cooks and chefs, who have long practiced this craft, had cooked much for him too, and prepared much for him too, and that their cooking used to delight him, that their cookery used to please him, and that he had often urged them on to cook, and pressed them on to prepare, and that the fault is not the cooks' and chefs' fault if Sidqi Pasha left office and was succeeded by other men who love the cooking of these cooks, and make abundant use of the cookery of these chefs.

And Sidqi Pasha recalled the British government's note of 1930, and his reply to it, and Sidqi Pasha denied that the author of that splendid, historic reply had needed any English assistance; but Sidqi Pasha forgot that people say, and insist on saying, that this very splendid, historic reply was itself an elaborate dish, and that among Sidqi Pasha's own friends and rivals there are those who could say to him: do not bring up that reply, for we cooked it together.

So you see that those who cook for Sidqi Pasha's rivals had first cooked for Sidqi Pasha himself, and that Sidqi Pasha, who used to relish the cooking of these cooks yesterday and now denies it and shuns it today, along with all these others who have so little cookery in them, appear unable to fit things together properly, unable to master the concealed scheme, the war whose traces and consequences show themselves while its preparations and preludes remain hidden. And the plain truth about all of them is that they were friends yesterday and have become enemies today, that they have quarreled to the fullest extent quarreling is possible in Egypt, that they have hurled evil at one another and accused one another of wrongdoing, that they have cooked for one another and cooked against one another, until, having filled the Egyptian air with the stench of this hideous, repugnant cooking, they were not content until they had filled the European air with it too; so *Le Temps* published its article in *Le Temps*, and the *Daily Telegraph* published its message in the *Daily Telegraph*, and Sidqi Pasha knows perfectly well how articles are cooked for *Le Temps*, and how messages are cooked for the *Daily Telegraph*.

The important thing Egyptians ought not to be distracted from is that these people have done no more than continue what they began — scheming against one another, working against one another, striving to weaken one another, striving to spoil the business of government for one another. And the amusing thing is that whoever reads Sidqi Pasha's statement in Al-Ahram cannot doubt that the man is most anxious to convince his intimates and allies that the message was cooked in Egypt, so that they need not concern themselves with it or pay it any heed — after experience has shown that the Daily Telegraph, in matters of this kind, does not represent English opinion at all, but represents instead the opinion of a group of Egyptians who used to cook for it before Sidqi Pasha resigned, and who go on cooking for it now that he has resigned; which means that had this Daily Telegraph article been cooked in England itself, it would carry an altogether different weight, and Sidqi Pasha would fear it far more on behalf of his friends and intimates, and would feel far more concern over it on behalf of his supporters and allies.

Which means that Sidqi Pasha knows perfectly well the moral and political worth of what the Daily Telegraph publishes when it takes up Egyptian affairs; but the thing we would delight in knowing is the High Commissioner's opinion of this particular dish — does it please him, or does it displease him? And of those who cooked it — did they serve him well, or did they serve him ill? Did he truly complain of Sidqi Pasha's making use of his visit against the ministry, or did the cooks complain on his behalf and drown themselves in officious meddling? And the thing we would delight in knowing is the High Commissioner's opinion of all this talk that circulates about a well-known English paper holding its own place among the great English press — for Sidqi Pasha says that this great English paper is influenced by a group of Egyptian cooks who serve its readers dishes prepared for it in Egypt, which it does no more than serve up without inquiry, without investigation, without any effort to establish the truth.

And it appears that this lack of cookery does not wish to stop at Le Temps's article and the Daily Telegraph's message, for it takes up something else too, something we would have liked to keep well away from cookery and cooks, from cooking and its cooks: the speakership of the Chamber of Deputies is being cooked in two different kitchens; the People's Party men are cooking it for Sidqi Pasha, and the Unionists are cooking it for Dr. Rifaat Pasha, and each side is anxious that the ministry accept its own dish, and each side stands ready to boycott the ministry

should it accept its rival's dish; and the minister of traditions, known for his splendid, masterly cookery, does not hesitate to show his leaning — God forgive us the expression — indeed to declare his opinion to the two kitchens' owners, favoring, and announcing that the ministry favors along with him the Union Party's dish; and once this opinion of his became known, the greatest cook in the People's Party grew impatient with it, and asked the mediators to break off the negotiations, and the matter ended with the two parties' cauldrons left to go on boiling until parliament convenes, if it convenes at all, and there the ministry will be offered two dishes: one is Sidqi Pasha, with the People's Party behind him, and the former premiership, and the founding of the present order, and his visit to the office of the High Commissioner and the Daily Telegraph message about that visit, and *Le Temps's* article on the debt question and the cotton speculations, and everything connected with all this in the way of spices and relishes; and the other is Dr. Tawfiq Rifaat Pasha, with his sacrifice of his ministerial post for the sake of the speakership, and his honorary doctorate from the faculty of law, and the Union Party behind him — and who can tell you what the Union Party is, with all its pillars and its stakes — and the ministry is free to choose between these two dishes, or, rather, the ministry is compelled to choose one or the other of them; and the strange thing is that the independents and the opposition in the Chamber of Deputies have not prepared, from among themselves, any dish of their own that might spare the ministry this trouble and relieve it of the choice, for there is no necessity that the speakership of the Chamber belong to one of the two allied yet quarreling parties — and what is to prevent the leader of the National Party from becoming speaker of the Chamber, so that the ministry might find relief, the quarrel might cease, the air might clear, and the crisis between the allied yet quarreling parties might be postponed for a while?

We think this dish is unavoidable, and we think the opposition will spare no effort in preparing it; but can the ministry stretch out a hand to it, or open a mouth for it, or make ready a stomach for it? These are questions that tomorrow, near or distant, will answer. Whatever the case, you will agree with me that it is a painful thing for cooking to have entered official politics to this degree, however far short the cooks may fall of good cookery.