

Calm

Al-Siyasa (Hadith al-Yawm), 19 August 1932.

Everything is calm, and everything is stable; the air is clear, the sky is pure, the climate is mild, and the ship proceeds in God's name and by His command as though gliding over the sea, with neither captain nor passengers fearing any mishap or disturbance. And the Prime Minister is at ease in this calm; he too is calm, taking the cure or resting at Vichy, after having toured the length and breadth of Egypt and bestirred himself across the length of Italy.

Everything is calm, and everything is stable. But there is a calm that brings comfort, and a calm that brings fear; there is a calm that gives rise to hope, and a calm that comes before despair. And I do not know—or I do not wish to know—which calm we are in. Is it a calm that precedes hope, or a calm that gives birth to despair?

Indeed, I do not know—or I do not wish to know—whether this calm is deep or merely apparent; whether it is continuous or broken; whether it is long-lasting or brief. Truly, I do not know, or I do not wish to know.

Is the Prime Minister settled at Vichy, or unsettled? Is he resting, or weary? Is he still, or restless?

Everything, on the surface, suggests that the Prime Minister's mind is at peace, enjoying the lukewarm and the cold waters of Vichy after having enjoyed the glasses and goblets passed round the tables in the city of the Caesars. But this apparent calm, this reassurance so excessive in its clarity, is not the kind to put one's mind at rest, nor the kind to reassure.

How agitated the telegraph wires were, how frequent their flashing between Cairo and Rome, when Egypt's great man was a guest of Italy's great man! And how utterly still the telegraph has fallen since the Prime Minister settled himself in Vichy! Yet the Prime Minister is not among those who love to be wrapped in silence, encamped upon by stillness. What, then, is the matter with us, that we read in the newspapers nothing of how the Prime Minister spent his morning or his evening, nor where he went, nor when he arrived?!

This is a failing for which the newspapers are to be blamed! For the Prime Minister's life is precious to us, his health is dear to us, and news

of him is beloved to us, and it is only right that the newspapers should not forget him; he is still the Prime Minister, and he still deserves to be mentioned in the morning papers and in the evening papers.

As for me, I think the Prime Minister is not resting at all, but waiting; and I think the Prime Minister is not calm with the calm that prevails in Egypt, nor settled as the order there is settled, but is rather a man of divided soul and scattered inclination, looking back toward Egypt, wishing to make out what his opposing adversaries are doing there, and looking ahead toward England, wishing to make out what his neutral allies are doing there. He fears the one and dreads the other, thinking of them all through the day and dreaming of them all once night falls upon him, waiting in anxiety and agitation to see what will become of the one and the other.

And meanwhile he looks at himself, at his helpers and supporters, at his capacity to hold firm and his hope of remaining in power, and he sees a pale, feeble light, nibbled away at its edges by darkness, as the darkness of night nibbles away at the light of twilight.

A fearful calm is this calm we are in, this calm that shelters the Prime Minister at Vichy; and perhaps the article that the Times published from its Cairo correspondent, and that the newspapers broadcast among us yesterday evening, is among the clearest signs of this fear concealed beneath the calm we are in, and of these shadows that surround what remains of the life of the present Ministry, nibbling away at its edges little by little.

What the correspondent says in this article about the Wafd and the Liberal Constitutionalists does not concern us now; for we know the English habit of speaking about the opposition and about sitting governments. So long as they have not actually turned their backs on the sitting government, so long as they have not openly declared hostility toward it or waged open, fierce war against it, they go on showing support for it and showing their contempt for its adversaries and their massing against them; and they insist on nothing so much as repeating that the opposition is weak, with no share of strength, that it has failed, with no portion of success—repeating this and broadcasting it without tiring or wearying of it, until the appointed day comes, when weakness turns to strength, failure to success, and defeat to triumph and good fortune.

Let the Times correspondent say what he likes about the government's adversaries, then; we know what he wants, and we understand the meaning of what he says, and we have no doubt that the leader of the Liberal Constitutionalists made the gravest of errors when he spoke the truth about the Prime Minister and made it public, while the Prime Minister speaks falsehood about him and makes it public. And we know it would have been more fitting for the leader of the Liberal Constitutionalists, had he wished to oppose Sidqi Pasha, to send him instead a bouquet of flowers, arranged in the finest taste, containing nothing but what would please him, delight him, and satisfy him. Yes—the leader of the Liberal Constitutionalists erred when he protested, and asked the nation to protest along with him, that the affairs of this country are not entrusted to its own best men and sons, men who know how to be gentle with it, to have pity on it, to seek its benefit, and to make of themselves a worthy model and a fine example in politics and administration, in conduct and in morals.

Yes—and the leader of the Liberal Constitutionalists erred most gravely of all when he petitioned His Majesty the King, who holds the lawful right to retain ministries or dismiss them, who is solicitous for his people's welfare, the trustee of their interests, the embodiment of their dignity and honor. The leader of the Liberal Constitutionalists erred when he submitted to His Majesty the King a letter, petitioning in his party's name for the dismissal of this Ministry, on the grounds that it had failed to resolve the economic crisis, had not advanced the country one finger's breadth toward the completion of its independence, and had been unable to reform the administration, but had instead corrupted it.

And from all of this there arose a general, all-encompassing corruption, which threatens a corruption still more general and more all-encompassing, should the affairs of the country not be entrusted to a national ministry that governs neither by caprice nor by partisan zeal, but governs Egypt for Egypt's benefit, and relies in its governance upon the people's love for it, their trust in it, and their support for it—not upon what this Ministry relies upon: enticement at times and intimidation at others, a humiliating weakness toward some quarters and a violent harshness toward others.

The leader of the Liberal Constitutionalists erred when he asked all this of His Majesty the King, because he did not submit to His Majesty the proofs for what he described in the Ministry as weakness and impotence, as negligence and injustice—as though these qualities had not already

become as plain as the noonday sun, as though His Majesty the King could not know of the government's affairs what all the people know, the Times correspondent among them, and as though it were improper to submit to His Majesty brief, convincing petitions, when what must be submitted to him are lengthy volumes and detailed tomes.

Let the Times correspondent say what he likes about the opposition; they know what he wants just as he himself knows it. But what did he intend when he wrote about the Ministry and its head, Sidqi Pasha? Did he intend praise, or did he intend censure? Did he intend support and endorsement, or did he intend disgrace and defamation?

That Egypt has been calm since Sidqi Pasha took up the burdens of government is plain and beyond doubt; but she was calm before Sidqi Pasha took up the burdens of government too, and was calm then out of love of calm and a desire for it; and she is now calm for the reason the Times correspondent records: that Sidqi Pasha has silenced the opposition and shackled it, so that it cannot speak and cannot move, its leaders surrounded by troops, its clubs besieged by police.

And which of these two kinds of calm is more pleasing to the Times correspondent, and to the English? This one, which arises from contentment and is fit to grow and endure, or this other, which the people are forced into by sheer compulsion, and which is apt to turn into something of no good either to the Egyptians or to the English?

So then, Sidqi Pasha has succeeded, in the Times correspondent's eyes, in establishing order—but only on condition that the troops and the police remain as they are, watching and standing guard, never sleeping by night nor resting by day. And Sidqi Pasha has succeeded in something else, in the Times correspondent's eyes: he has succeeded in multiplying his loyalists, helpers, and supporters, through this intimidation on the one hand, and, as the Times correspondent himself records, through the bribery and enticement of those in financial straits on the other; so that they are caught between ruin, if they hold fast to their political convictions, and ease, if they abandon those convictions and join Sidqi Pasha.

And what victory resembles this victory, won by its possessor through violence and oppression, achieved through bribery and the corruption of morals?!

And Sidqi Pasha has succeeded, in the Times correspondent's eyes, in maintaining a balanced budget, even though the Times correspondent himself records that the state's basic revenues have fallen off considerably, and that Sidqi Pasha will be forced to make up this shortfall, not through economy and good management, but by imposing new taxes and burdening a people whom the crisis has already stripped of everything it could reach!

And what financial victory resembles this one—achieved not through economy and moderation in spending, but through continued extravagance and excess in burdening the taxpayers. And Sidqi Pasha has succeeded, too, in not having yet imposed harsh sacrifices on officials—but he will be forced to impose them before long.

And Sidqi Pasha has succeeded—and what a marvel of success it is!—in the matter of negotiations: at the start of the year he was ready to talk about them and throw himself headlong into them; by the middle of the year he had grown careful never to mention them, and had come to see it as better not even to think about them, until he could be sure he was able to carry them through to their end.

What?! He is, then, not confident that he can carry the negotiations through to their end! And what is it that denies him this confidence?! Is it denied him by his victory in establishing order through oppression and violence?! Or is it denied him by his winning over people through bribery and enticement?! Or is it denied him by his having propped up the budget on a foundation of extravagant spending and excessive burdening of the people?! Or is it denied him by the fact that he has not succeeded in any of the things governments aspire to succeed in?!

Is it he who does not trust himself, or is it the English who do not trust him?! Or is the matter shared between him and the English?! So that neither does he trust himself, nor can the English feel at ease about him—they, who know of his affairs far more than the Times correspondent has said.

As for me, I confess that I read this article, and found in reading it the very best pleasure and delight that readers can find in a piece built on irony and play. And there is nothing strange in this; for irony may well be the most prominent feature of English criticism, and everyone knows Antony's speech in the story of Julius Caesar. And in reading the Times correspondent's article on Sidqi Pasha, readers are compelled to ask themselves: has the Times correspondent not taken that speech as a

model to imitate, praising Sidqi Pasha just as Antony praised Brutus?!

In any case, I have no doubt that the Times correspondent, and many English journalists in Egypt and England, when left alone with themselves, speak to themselves about our present Ministry in the very terms I speak to myself and to others: namely, that our Ministry has reached the natural term of its life, that the distance between it and its setting is not far off, that it finds hardship and difficulty in holding on to this feeble breath that still keeps it alive, and that its holding on to this feeble breath depends entirely on England's policy of neutrality—and everything suggests, as far as one can tell, that this policy of neutrality has already given notice of its own passing.