

Protection (1)

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Nothing is easier than for the likes of you and me, among God's opposing servants, to be questioned, should we say or do anything — or should the ministry merely fancy that we have said or done something it thinks warrants questioning and investigation. But should someone other than you and me, among God's loyal servants or God's privileged servants, say or do something that calls for a question to be put, an answer to be heard, the truth to be sought out, and the right of it to be made clear — then the matter of these others is a different thing altogether, one best turned away from, best left unhurried, best forgotten once begun and handed over to God, to rule upon as He wills, when He questions all of us together about what we do and say. For we, on this Egyptian soil, are of two kinds: one kind the state calls to account in this life, and God calls to account after it; and another kind the state is too occupied to call to account, leaving the matter instead to God, who keeps count of everything for every person, and who questions every person about everything. We ought not to deny this or object to it, for if we do, or say even a little against it, we shall be questioned for what we did, and questioned for what we said, and add burden upon burden, and load upon load. The only good lies in submitting and accepting God's decree over us, hastening when we are called and answering when we are questioned, and bearing whatever pains of life God wills us to bear; for this the Egyptians were created, for this the word went before them, and for this fate decreed in their case. And if there is no help for it but that we must find relief for our souls, console the care in our hearts, and find comfort against these pains that sour life for us, whenever we feel the differences between us and others, and see the disparity and distinction between us and others under the shade of democracy and the constitution — then it is enough that we speak of the privilege of the privileged, and the immunity of the immune, and envy them for it in the gentler sense, without resenting them for it; for there may be, in speaking of the favored's favor and the happy's happiness, some consolation for the wretched's wretchedness and the unfortunate's misfortune. Let us then record calmly and tranquilly what we observe of this, and keep it in our memory, for remembrance may prove useful, and the record may prove of benefit, and God turns the days over among

people, so that a day may come when we are able to recall these pains and these regrets, and we shall take care not to impose them upon our adversaries, and take care not to make them despair of justice, or lose hope of mercy, or deprive them of the equality that is their due; for those who have tasted pain, and known its harm to living consciences and living souls, ought not to make others taste such pain, nor burden them with what they themselves bore, nor give them to drink what they themselves drank.

I run over all these reflections after having finished reading what the newspapers published about yesterday's give and take, dialogue and debate, in the Chamber of Deputies; for Sidqi Pasha was, yesterday, holding forth and ranging freely, and Sidqi Pasha was, yesterday, putting before the present ministry remarks that mixed earnestness with jest, force with wit and humor. And the minister of finance met Sidqi Pasha's remarks with a great deal of caution and care, answering guardedly and gently, wishing to concede the point while trying to hide that wish, and failing.

Before this, Sidqi Pasha had been holding forth and ranging freely in the newspapers: cotton and its sale would come up, and questions would be directed about cotton and its sale, and Sidqi Pasha would answer the questions and debate what was said. The story of the Corniche and its scandals would come up, and rumors and talk would spread about the story of the Corniche and its scandals, and Sidqi Pasha would issue statements about whatever touched him in this story, or whatever some people wished to make touch him in it; and matters went on in this way, until Egypt, in the end, learned nothing of the truth about cotton and its sale, nor arrived, in the end, at everything it ought to have arrived at regarding the Corniche affair and those connected to the Corniche affair, closely or distantly. People had been saying for months that the matter of cotton, and the matter of the Corniche, and other such matters, had stirred up in the Egyptian atmosphere out of a wish to tease Sidqi Pasha, and to press him to explain to the Egyptians a number of his dealings, so that they might know whether these dealings were straight and beyond reproach, or crooked and in need of some correction. And when the story of the Corniche was stirred up, people kept talking of it and delved further into it, and they go on talking of it and delving into it to this day. People said, and the newspapers reported, that the investigation committee the ministry had formed would look into everything, and question everyone connected to this story, strongly or weakly; then

people said, and the newspapers reported, that this committee would question Sidqi Pasha himself, to learn from him the truth of what had occurred in this matter when he was minister of the interior. And many people went so far as to imagine that this story had been stirred up solely to embarrass the great dictator, and what embarrassment for a man like Sidqi Pasha could resemble having questions put to him, and waiting for his answers?! And people went on imagining this, then believing it, then expecting it, until the desire to find out grew stronger in them, and they longed for this confrontation that was to take place between a man to whom all matters in Egypt had belonged for more than three years, and from whom all matters had then turned away, as he now stood before an investigation committee putting questions to him and hearing his answers. But the committee investigated and scrutinized, questioned and listened to answers, counted and inquired, and in doing so drew close to Sidqi Pasha, only to move entirely away from him once again; and it has completed, or nearly completed, its investigation without ever questioning Sidqi Pasha. And it was said, in the end, that it would never question Sidqi Pasha, and could never question him, because Sidqi Pasha is protected from this committee's questioning by the constitution! Yes, he is protected by the constitution, for Sidqi Pasha was a minister, and ministers are not questioned about what they do, under the constitution — as it has finally emerged, and as has been said — except before parliament, or before committees that parliament itself forms. And so Sidqi Pasha, and ministers other than Sidqi Pasha, may speak and act, may hold forth and range freely, may publish in the newspapers and give speeches to parties, and may be the subject of remarks in parliament, yet the executive authority, and the committees this authority forms, can never call them to account for anything, nor question them about anything; for they are questioned only before parliament and parliament's committees.

The amusing thing in this affair is the stance of the ministry of the good man toward this story; for this investigation committee was formed to count and inquire, and to lay before itself the truth of the matter clear and plain, free of confusion or ambiguity, and hidden in no respect whatsoever. Now the ministry of the good man, in forming this committee, stood between two possibilities: either it had failed to reckon that this committee would question everyone, including the minister in whose time the Corniche story occurred, and so had been careless and inattentive to the constitution, its provisions, and the constitution's protection of ministers against being questioned by a committee such as

this — in which case, why did it not take advice? And why was it not advised? For had it taken advice, and been advised at the time, it would have avoided a great deal of trouble, and would have prevented the newspapers and the people from mentioning Sidqi Pasha, or thinking of him, or dwelling on talk of him whenever they mentioned the Corniche story, and would have spared Sidqi Pasha himself the need to defend himself, and to publish in al-Ahram and elsewhere all that he has published by way of talk about this story. Or else, it had been neither careless nor inattentive, but had known full well that the constitution's ruling on the matter was clear, and that Sidqi Pasha could never receive a question from this committee, nor give this committee an answer — in which case, it was only right that it should have removed every confusion and ambiguity on this point. And so it was the people's right to observe that the forming of this committee would prove neither sufficient nor convincing; for the story of the Corniche, it appears, like other such stories in which ministers have had a hand, cannot be made clear, cannot be brought to light, unless the minister in whose time it occurred is questioned about his view of it, his stance toward it, and his conduct toward those involved in it, and unless the minister is examined on this with a precise, searching inquiry that erases every doubt and removes every suspicion.

Whatever the case, it has become clear to the ministry, from beginning to end, that Sidqi Pasha has nothing to fear from the Corniche story or the committee investigating it. We would like Sidqi Pasha to understand that we single him out in nothing of this story, for we know nothing of his part in it; and we would also like Sidqi Pasha to understand that he was a minister, that this story occurred in his time, that his signature is what made this story a reality, and that it is the right of all of us to know the truth of his stance, and the plain facts of his conduct, and that this is why we write what we write today. There was indeed a means of questioning Sidqi Pasha, hearing him out, and arriving at a judgment for or against him, namely the regulation the constitution provides for the trial of ministers; but the ministry of the good man never gave thought to this regulation, never drew up a law for it, never laid it before parliament, never issued it quickly, never issued it slowly — and it seems most likely it will resign before it ever gives the matter a thought. It was too occupied with weighty events, too occupied with its war against Sidqi Pasha himself, and it has become clear that it occupied itself with that to no profit or avail; for it has achieved nothing against Sidqi Pasha, has not kept him away from politics, has not diverted him from the Chamber of

Deputies, and has not protected itself from Sidqi Pasha's remarks and the campaign he began yesterday — it only fought him, and strove hard in fighting him, with a great many rumors, much talk, and many maneuvers.

This war then culminated in Sidqi Pasha's stance yesterday in the Chamber of Deputies; and if Sidqi Pasha's cause has indeed grown weak, and fallen so low that people have turned away from him, this is not the ministry's doing, but Sidqi Pasha's doing to himself — he was reckless with people until people turned away from him, and his cause grew so low in their eyes as to wound and wear him down.

And the ministry was busy, instead of attending to the law on the trial of ministers, with the lawyers' syndicate, the syndicate's elections, the syndicate head's speech, and the hastily drawn legislation for the lawyers' syndicate ... and all of this ended for it just as its war against Sidqi Pasha had ended; for the lawyers refused to submit to its law, declared that the law's retroactive provision violated the constitution, and insisted that the election they had carried out remained valid after the law's issuance, just as it had been valid before it. The ministry was busy with whatever you like, and whatever you dislike, among problems that came to nothing; and the result of all this preoccupation with such weighty matters was that Sidqi Pasha stood toward it in the stance of a formidable adversary, and it stood toward him in the stance of a fearful adversary, while the nation stood toward both of them, and their handling of its affairs, in the stance of the pained and grieving.

Have you seen, then, that we on this Egyptian soil are of two kinds: one kind that scarcely does or says anything, or that the ministry merely imagines has done or said anything, without being summoned and questioned, and held strictly to account; and another kind that people cannot question, nor hold to account, nor even summon, so that the matter must be entrusted to God?! And stranger than all of this is that the Corniche story has still not managed, to this day, to stir in a single deputy, or in ten of them, the desire for anything resembling an interpellation!