

# Privileges

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These are not the privileges the foreigners enjoy in Egypt, which trouble the conscience of Egyptians, and the conscience of many a living-hearted foreigner besides, and which trouble justice, right, and equity; for every Egyptian loves their abolition, presses for it, sees it as one of the aims of the national revival, and as one of the duties upon which Egyptians ought to spend whatever strength and effort they possess, a duty from which Egyptians ought not to turn away until they have discharged it in full, with no slackness, no neglect, no flagging. The Egyptians are united in demanding the abolition of these foreign privileges; but there are other privileges no less dangerous than the privileges of the foreigners — perhaps graver in their danger, and uglier in their effect upon people's lives, their morals, and their bonds with one another; for they are privileges that reason does not accept, that the heart finds no rest in, that the clear, living conscience cannot settle with, and that not even the easiest rules of morality sanction.

These are the privileges that one group of Egyptians enjoys and another does not — privileges their holders did not earn by treaty, by law, by an established and respected custom, by inheritance, or by any tradition, but which came to them of themselves, submissive and eager for them, pressed upon them by force, in the face of all Egyptians' resentment.

These are the privileges that a group of ministers and senior officials enjoy, for no reason except that they have held ministerial office or taken up positions of government; and these are the privileges that a group of people enjoy who are neither ministers nor officials, but who win the favor of ministers and officials. These are the privileges that rest on nothing but a violation of the law and a breach of the constitution's sanctity, and that exist only where the sense of justice, the regard for dignity, and the recognition of the necessity of order grow weak. These are the privileges that exempt so-and-so from being questioned about what he said or did, while the law requires that everyone be questioned about whatever words or deeds transgress the bounds of the law. These are the privileges that permit so-and-so to enjoy, from the funds of the state, its prestige, and its authority, without right or justice, what is not

permitted to other people — indeed, for which other people are punished, whether for enjoying it or merely seeking to reach it.

These sinful privileges deserve to be abolished, and deserve to be abolished before those foreign privileges. I say this without hesitation, without scruple, without wavering; for the Egyptians' sense of their dignity, the Egyptians' regard for their right, and the Egyptians' earnestness in their independence, are the sole path that leads, without doubt, to the abolition of the foreign privileges, and it belongs neither to a sense of dignity, nor to a regard for right, nor to earnestness in independence, that Egyptians should consent to one of them being set apart from another, and one of them being raised above another, without justice, constitution, or law. And if an Egyptian consents to being humbled by another Egyptian, to being wronged by him, to that other being set apart from him in what he himself has no hope of attaining, to that other enjoying good things denied to him, and to that other violating the law's sanctity while he does not — then he deserves to accept whatever injustice befalls him, to submit to whatever wrong comes down upon him, and to be unable to persuade the foreigner to renounce his privileges, or to give them up. For whoever accepts a little injustice deserves to accept a great deal of it, and whoever bears a slight humiliation deserves to bear a grievous one, and whoever is unable to protect himself under the shelter of law and constitution deserves to be unable to protect the foreigners under that shelter of law and constitution, and whoever accepts that so-and-so and so-and-so should trifle with him, with the law granting him no redress against them, is weak in the utmost degree, and powerless in the utmost degree to persuade the foreigner to set himself on equal footing with him, and to consent to share with him this life of his, which is safe from no injustice, free of no humiliation, and empty of no corruption.

These are bitter truths, but their bitterness does not forbid their being said; rather, their bitterness compels us to say them. For it is better that some of us speak this to one another than that the foreigners should speak it to us; it is better that we say to one another, "There is injustice in Egypt that must be lifted, and unjust privileges that must be erased," than that the foreigners should say to us, "Do justice to yourselves against yourselves, then think of doing justice to yourselves against us"; and better than that the foreigners should say to us, "Be confident that you are capable of doing justice to yourselves against yourselves, and only then speak to us of being capable of guaranteeing us a life founded

on justice, care, and equity." It is no courage to conceal our faults or to cover them up; true courage lies in facing our faults directly, and in striving against them and ridding ourselves of them. For it is better that we expose our faults ourselves than that people should expose them for us, and better that we correct our faults ourselves than that people should correct them for us. These privileges that Sidqi Pasha, and those like him, still enjoy to this day, are faults in our political and moral life that we must expose and call attention to, and openly urge be corrected; for that is better than letting the foreigners spring them upon us unawares.

I would a thousand times over prefer to speak of these faults to the Egyptians, and to have the Egyptians speak of them to me, and to have us press hard upon one another over them — I would prefer this a thousand times over to speaking, one day, to some foreigner about the abolition of the foreign privileges, only to be struck by this harsh, stinging sentence, at which even a man of honor would break into a sweat: "It would be well for you to demand the abolition of privileges once you are able to persuade us that you are capable of not wronging one another, of none of you being set apart from another, and of no group among you rising above the law." Sidqi Pasha, and those like him, and the ministry and its supporters, can say whatever they please, but they will always be powerless to persuade anyone that Sidqi Pasha does not now enjoy a set of privileges that no man ought to enjoy in a country governed by constitution and law.

Here is a man of whom, and of whose conduct, everything that has been said has been said, and about whom, and about whose conduct, everything that has been published has been published; and a committee is formed to investigate a set of acts that he himself approved and carried through; it investigates, scrutinizes, and questions people, yet it cannot reach him, cannot come to him, because the constitution stands between it and that. Then he is told: put before the committee yourself whatever removes every ambiguity from your position, and clears every doubt from your conduct — and he does not stir, as though he does not hear. Then the government is told: enforce upon him the constitution's ruling, and let parliament question him about this conduct of his — and the government does not stir, as though it does not hear. Then parliament is told: enforce upon this man the constitution's ruling, question him about this conduct, so that every ambiguity may be lifted from it, every doubt erased around it, and the reputation of the ministry and the members of parliament

cleared of every taint — and parliament does not stir, as though no one had said a word to it.

A man in this condition, with this standing toward the state, and this standing of the state toward him, is privileged beyond doubt — and whence came this privilege? It did not come to him from the law, nor from the constitution; for law and constitution alike require that ministers be questioned about what they did while ministers. Nor did it come to him from behind the scenes, for we know of no system in Egypt that shields pashas and great men from bearing the consequences of their acts. Nor did it come to him from a treaty concluded between him and the state guaranteeing that he stand above question and answer. Nor did it come to him from a treaty concluded between the state and some other state making him stand above question and answer. It came to him from nothing but the fact that he is Sidqi Pasha — nothing more; it came to him from the fact that he was a minister, and ministers are questioned only before parliament, and the state does not wish, or has not yet wished, to question him before parliament. And yet the state concerns itself with the Corniche story, professing its eagerness to establish the truth of the matter and to punish those responsible for it; so if one asks the state who the responsible parties are, it will answer that they are whomever the committee brings to light. And if the state should claim that there was a responsible minister who approved some of these acts, the state falls silent, Sidqi Pasha falls silent, and everyone falls silent. The strange thing is that Sidqi Pasha's privilege does not impose itself on the ministry alone, nor on parliament alone, but imposes itself on the newspapers as well. Do you remember all those newspapers that once schemed against Sidqi Pasha and stirred people up against him, subjecting him to the harshest kinds of criticism and censure, back when the ministry was in earnest in its rivalry with him? Do you remember those newspapers that stirred up the Corniche story and plunged into it, and plunged ever deeper? They are now silent and still, neither moving nor speaking; and yet nothing has come along to change the Corniche story's state of affairs — this story remains a flagrant scandal, in which hundreds of thousands of pounds of public funds vanished, and an investigation still hangs over it, while Sidqi Pasha has slipped free of question and answer, as a hair slips free of dough; and those newspapers that once schemed against Sidqi Pasha and stirred people up against him are now untroubled and settled, showing no zeal now for the truth, no love for bringing it to light, and no eagerness to know all the responsible parties. What, then, is the source of this privilege the great dictator

enjoys? And what is the source of that tremendous uproar that was raised around Sidqi Pasha and the Corniche, and then fell silent about Sidqi Pasha and the Corniche? And where is this law of guarantees that lifts Sidqi Pasha above question and answer, for no reason except that he was once a minister?

Stranger still than all of this is that al-Siyasa tells us today that the investigation committee questioned some people — or, more precisely, questioned some officials in the Beheira province — about matters touching Sidqi Pasha and Sidqi Pasha's contractor, the very contractor of the Corniche; and the official answered what he was asked, and showed himself ready to answer whatever he might be asked. Al-Siyasa said: this official was then transferred to the farthest reaches of Upper Egypt. Is this true? And if it is true, what is its meaning? What is its explanation? Where does it stand in relation to right and justice? And what is the crime of this official, whom we do not know, and do not wish to know, and who did nothing more than answer when he was questioned — and yet you would still claim to me, after that, that Egyptians stand equal before the law, that none of them is set apart from another, that none of them is raised above another: a minister who is not questioned, and an official who is questioned and answers, and is then transferred to the farthest reaches of Upper Egypt.

As for me, I pray that God spares the investigation committee the consequences of this investigation; for it has asked about matters touching Sidqi Pasha, and Sidqi Pasha is a man above questioning — so let us hope no blame or punishment touches the committee for having asked about the affairs of a man who stands above question and answer. These privileges, and others like them — and be assured there are many like them — are what must be abolished, must be abolished before all else, and must be abolished before we demand the abolition of the foreign privileges; for we may suppose it our due to hold ourselves in honor so that others may hold us in honor, yet if we are lightly regarded by ourselves, let us accept, willingly or not, being lightly regarded by others.