

Audacious

Taha Hussein

Kawkab al-Sharq, 16 February 1934

He is, without doubt, our great dictator, Sidqi Pasha; for you may search among Egyptians and non-Egyptians alike for a man you could describe by this epithet, confident and assured that you have neither erred, nor fallen short, nor exaggerated, and you will find no one but this great man.

Great men are most often distinguished by particular traits that embody their greatness, and that come to people's minds whenever their names are mentioned: this one is distinguished by mercy, that one by courage, this one by breadth of mind, that one by breadth of cunning, this one by kindness of heart, that one by love of tradition, this one by boldness followed by retreat, by advance followed by flight, and by entanglement in words ...

As for Sidqi Pasha, he is distinguished by audacity ... by an audacity that knows no bound ... neither in length, nor in breadth, nor in depth.

Sidqi Pasha is audacious in every direction imaginable — audacious toward himself, audacious toward people, audacious toward the constitution, audacious toward the law, audacious toward the foreigners, audacious toward the English, audacious toward whatever you like and whatever you dislike, audacious toward whomever you like and whomever you dislike. He fears nothing, reckons with nothing, and holds nothing in awe. He is not merely a bold man; he is audacity itself, taking the form of a man with this trait.

Sidqi Pasha stands apart among the great men of Egypt — indeed, among the great men of the whole world, if you like — so there is no need to trouble yourself with verification or scrutiny where Sidqi Pasha is concerned, for the man himself troubles neither himself nor other people with verification or scrutiny.

He was once at war with the Wafd, scheming against it, attacking it, lying in wait for it, pouring upon it whatever harm he could. Then this did not stop him from being a friend of the Wafd, extravagant in his friendship, openly proclaiming his support for it and his defense of its principles, earnest in this, utterly devoted to it!

Then days turned a short turn, not long, and there was Sidqi Pasha at war with the Wafd, openly proclaiming his hostility toward it and stirring people against it, earnest in this, utterly given over to it; then days turned a very short turn, and there was Sidqi Pasha contemplating drawing near to the Wafd, pursuing this, and not hesitating to speak of it, or to enlist whomever he could speak to or enlist in that cause.

Then days turned a short turn, and there was Sidqi Pasha forming his ministry in defiance of the Wafd and the Wafd's parliament, and there he was abolishing the constitution, after having been among the constitution's staunchest supporters, and there he was dissolving parliament.

Stranger still than all of this is that he did not hesitate for a moment to proclaim that the whole nation stood with him when he could not reach parliament, and stood with him after he had reached parliament; stood with him when he could not gain leave to enter parliament, and stood with him when he dissolved parliament; stood with him when he was zealous for the constitution of 1923, and stood with him when he suspended it; stood with him when he returned to upholding this constitution, and then stood with him when he consented to its suspension; and remained with him when he sought out the Wafd so as to enjoy the blessing of this constitution, and then remained with him when he abolished the constitution and when he drew up the new constitution.

When he formed his ministry and issued the constitution, and called for an election and held that election, no doubt or question remained that the nation stood with him, for it gave him sixty-seven and seven-eighths percent of the voters' votes; and there was no doubt or question that the nation stood with him, granting him its support and devoting its affection to him, at the very time when whatever happened at al-Badari and elsewhere was happening, among those scenes of disgrace.

Stranger still, the whole nation stood with him — even his adversaries, who fought him outwardly while supporting him from behind the curtain; even those souls whose lives were taken under the shadow of his happy rule rose to heaven content with him, praising him, praying that his rule might long endure; for he had sacrificed them for the sake of liberty, and taken their lives to protect Egypt from chaos and ruin!

Then days turned a turn that was short by the reckoning of time, for it did not exceed three years, yet long by the reckoning of the Egyptians, for it was filled with evil and harm, with terror and dread ...

Days turned this short, long turn, and Sidqi Pasha's foot slipped, and he fell from the seat of power — but the nation, at this very time, stood with him too: it showed joy at his fall, while concealing within itself a bitter grief and a deep, searing pain!

He resigned from the People's Party, and the nation showed joy at this, while concealing within itself grief over it; and he returned to the People's Party, and the nation was not stingy with him in support and encouragement. He resigned from the Chamber of Deputies, and the nation was alarmed at this resignation, within itself and before God, yet showed contentment with it, solely to guard against the wrath of the good man; and when he returned to the Chamber of Deputies, the nation could not hide its delight, nor keep its joy to itself, but rushed headlong into it, flung itself into it recklessly, and paid no heed to the displeasure of the good man and his ministry.

And the good man was, indeed, good: he neither disciplined it nor tormented it, but bore this waywardness of it with patience, and forgave it this lapse. Most likely he feared Sidqi Pasha, and his questions in the Chamber of Deputies, and his interpellations, which no ministry can withstand, however strong it may be — how much less, then, a mild ministry like the good man's ministry?!

And Sidqi Pasha was a man entirely at ease throughout that fierce war the good man waged against him; no fear crept into him, no terror reached his heart; and whoever supposed that he resigned from the People's Party or from the Chamber of Deputies in flight before the good man, or out of fear of the good man's ministry, was mistaken ... he resigned only to toy with the good man's good nature. And play is permitted to great men; they need to amuse themselves, and to win a little innocent diversion that makes them laugh, and makes other people laugh too.

Rumors and reports were stirred up around Sidqi Pasha that filled the earth and the sky, and he was neither troubled by them nor alarmed by them, but met them with a mocking smile; for he is audacious, fearing nothing, reckoning with nothing, holding nothing in awe.

The cotton affair was stirred up, and he smiled at it, and mocked those who stirred it up, and challenged the minister of finance to speak, and the minister of finance could not speak.

The Corniche story was stirred up; he laughed at it, and let people hope they might catch him ... he drew close to the investigators until they nearly laid their hands upon him, then drew away from the investigators until they could not even reach him with their eyes, let alone with their hands; and now he comes and goes about Cairo, and about all of Egypt, and between his house and the Chamber of Deputies.

He left the People's Party and its club, rising above the People's Party and its club; but he will found a club of his own, for he cannot live without a club in which he might shine before his followers; and now he gives speeches in the Chamber of Deputies, standing before the good man, upright of stature, head held high, nose in the air, tongue unleashed. Then he speaks, and drives the minister of finance and the minister of agriculture into whatever confusion and disarray you could wish.

Do you still doubt, after all this, that Sidqi Pasha's greatness, if it is distinguished by anything, is distinguished by audacity?!

Having finished with his popular adversaries and their like, Sidqi Pasha turned to his old friends ... the English. Has Sidqi Pasha ever, on any day, forgotten his English friends? But he showed, in any case, that he was turning to them, and began speaking to their newspapers, starting with the Egyptian Gazette; and he may well follow with the Daily Telegraph, and follow that with the Times, and flood all the English newspapers with interviews ... what interviews they are!

From today, the good man will learn what politics really is, and what war between the pillars of politics really is; and from today, the good man will be certain that his nights will know no sleep, and his days will know no rest; for Sidqi Pasha has grown active, and set his mind on attack, and woe to the adversaries of Sidqi Pasha when he grows active, and when he sets his mind on attack!

In his interview with the Egyptian Gazette, Sidqi Pasha displayed the utmost audacity a bold man could display: he disowned himself entirely, denied himself categorically, erased a persona that had once been his, and took up a new one in its place; and he did not exchange one persona for another in secret, behind curtains, away from closed doors, but shed one set of clothes and donned another openly, before everyone, without hesitation, without flinching, and without caring what people would say. And when has Sidqi Pasha ever cared what people would say? For Sidqi Pasha is a man greater than all other people!

Sidqi Pasha used to say, and say again, and drive his colleagues to say, and say again, that negotiation was coming without a doubt, and that he would, despite all his adversaries, arrive at negotiation, then at the signing of the treaty, then at the conclusion of the treaty. He had, he said, reached an agreement on this with the English in Egypt, then reached an agreement on this with the British foreign minister in Geneva, then begun on this with the High Commissioner in Egypt, until his adversaries began to ask themselves: how can a man dare to assert falsehood to such a degree?!

But Sidqi Pasha did not hesitate, the day before yesterday, to declare, with a composure quite unlike him, that everything he had said, and driven his colleagues to say, was nothing but camouflage and bluster, trickery and deception, and that the English had not negotiated with him, had not set about negotiating with him, had shown no inclination toward this negotiation, but had merely given him to understand that they would negotiate only with a truly democratic government ...

So it seems that, while in power, Sidqi Pasha wanted to deceive people, and so deceived himself and his colleagues, so that the ruse might pass unnoticed and the contrivance go unseen; and now he wants to deceive people once again, and so deceives himself and his friends once again, so that the ruse might pass unnoticed, and so that people might think he is still a statesman, able to speak on politics, to draw up plans, to interpret history, and to foretell the future.

The only thing Sidqi Pasha has forgotten, a very small thing indeed, is that his audacity has never deceived anyone on any day, that no one ever believed him in anything he said before he took power, while he held power, or after he left power, and that people will not believe him today, having refused to believe him yesterday.

Sidqi Pasha was only a great man when circumstances favored him, and opportunities availed him; and once circumstances failed him, and opportunities deserted him, he became a man of the slightest standing and the least consequence; he may come and go, hold forth and range freely, write and speak — he will achieve nothing unless those circumstances that once favored him and made him a great man should favor him again.

And Sidqi Pasha is audacious; he circles around these circumstances, hoping they might favor him, hoping they might make him a great man once more, hoping they might raise him back to power, and

give him the upper hand over the good man ... but audacity is one thing, and discernment another, and a man is often audacious while discernment escapes him, for all his audacity.

It appears that Sidqi Pasha has not lost his audacity, but that illness has left scars and marks on his discernment; he hopes for what offers no hope, and circles around what offers no way of reaching it, and the utmost that Sidqi Pasha achieves by these interviews is to alert the good man to his war against him, and to draw the good man's attention to the fact that he has not yet laid down his arms, and that he remains able to make trouble for him, to scheme against him, and to curry favor with the English at his expense; and the good man may fear this, or he may not ...

But no one apart from the good man and his friends need reckon with any of this, nor take up what Sidqi Pasha says in serious argument; for the matter of Sidqi Pasha has, by now, become jest upon jest. And the most amusing thing in it is that his old newspaper, now the good man's newspaper, stands silent and dumbstruck before these words, neither denying them — since it has not attained the audacity that Sidqi Pasha has attained, and so cannot disown itself as he disowned himself — nor endorsing them, since it cannot make war on the good man, having become a weapon in the good man's hand.

It would have been well if the newspaper that was Sidqi Pasha's yesterday, and is the good man's today, had told us its opinion of Sidqi Pasha's courting of the English, the need behind this courting, his scheming against the present ministry, and his inciting the English against it; for it has often denounced this very thing in people who did not do it — why, then, does it not denounce it in a man who does it, and is steeped in it to his ears? Is it content with what its old master says, or is it angry at him?

There is another amusing thing on which we would like to know Sidqi Pasha's opinion: he holds that the High Commissioner ought not to intervene in matters of government unless the Egyptian government mishandles these matters, exposing right, justice, and democracy to danger. This is his opinion; and we would like to know whether the High Commissioner may intervene in his stance on the Corniche story, in the Egyptian government's present stance toward him, and in the Egyptian government's neglect or failure to question him, even before parliament.

There is no doubt that all of this corrupts right, justice, and democracy, and stands as clear proof that the foundation of democracy in

Egypt is either lost, or exposed to grave danger. What, then, is Sidqi Pasha's opinion: may the High Commissioner intervene and ask the Egyptian government why it questions this or that official, while it does not think, or does not wish to think, of questioning Sidqi Pasha about the Corniche story?

As for us, we are loath to see the English intervene even in this, and we would rather that Sidqi Pasha remain privileged, even if the government is unable, or fails, to question him; for Sidqi Pasha's privilege, and the government's deference toward him, or its favoritism of him, if they have any result at all, serve only to confirm the Egyptian people in what they are already convinced of: that this happy era, the era of Sidqi Pasha, is not an era of democracy, nor of respect for constitution or law, but an era of one of those crises that befall peoples, and that do not long remain, for they pass away only by clipping the claws of Sidqi Pasha and those like him, and by severing the means and ways that link them to power, or to the ambition for it.

How fitting it would be for Sidqi Pasha to rest! For soundness of bodily health is not everything.