

Doubt ...

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1 It seems that the victorious army did not clear the field, nor properly rid it of the enemy, just as it did not press its pursuit of the routed, nor strip the prisoners of their arms, but was instead intoxicated by triumph, and the euphoria of victory distracted it from caution and vigilance, and from forcing the enemy into that absolute incapacity which strips him of every movement and every activity. Were it not for this, Sidqi Pasha would not have appeared on the field speaking to the press with a show of reluctance, defending himself hesitantly, bringing up the Corniche affair as though someone had raised the Corniche affair against him. Were it not for this, people today would not find a new newspaper rising upon them with the sun, speaking of Sidqi Pasha with kindness and gentleness, with praise and pride, and speaking of Sidqi Pasha's rivals with sharpness and severity, with fierce blame and dreadful reproach; and both of these show, clearly and plainly, that the ministry's victory was not decisive, that its triumph was not complete, and that the field, even if cleared of Sidqi Pasha within parliament, was not cleared of him outside parliament — for Sidqi Pasha still keeps in touch with the newspapers, still speaks to them, hinting and insinuating, gesturing and alluding, defending himself today only to attack tomorrow; and Sidqi Pasha is still able to find a newspaper to fend for him and shield him, to attack his rivals and press the attack on his behalf, to shelter the remnants of the defeated, gathering them from every quarter and drawing their scattered ranks back together after their dispersal, and attempting — who knows, perhaps it will succeed! — to form of them an army that, even if incapable now of a dangerous assault, remains capable, in any case, of harassing its rival and souring life for him.

2 More than this, the parliamentary field itself was not, it appears, left clear for the ministry, nor did the atmosphere within it turn out as pure as the ministry wished. For a faction of the People's Party and Unionist deputies rebelled yesterday against the ministry, electing men the ministry had not wanted elected, and rebelled against the two allied parties, electing men whose candidacy the two allied parties had not approved. They raised the banner of rebellion boldly and unmistakably, thrust aside the ministry's and the two parties' candidate entirely, turned away from him completely, and set another man in his place, a man who

calls himself independent. And this was not enough to close the day of rebellion; they went further still in their departure, went to excess in their disagreement, and brought discord into the People's Party itself — the very party the prime minister supposed he had left behind on the day Sidqi Pasha left it; they brought in discord, and set up against the ministry's and the party's candidate another man from within the party, one whom neither the ministry nor the party had put forward. And the strange thing is that they were winning yesterday in this maneuver, triumphing in this encounter, and securing a clear victory for one faction of the People's Party over another; and there is no doubt that this sudden assault, this unexpected triumph, opened a door to terror in some hearts, and a door to anger and resentment in others: some called for the vote to be redone, some pressed for the redoing to be hastened, some pressed for it to be postponed, some disowned it, some bristled at it, some grew faint, some were overtaken by despair and gripped by desertion, and some kept their composure, held to patience and forbearance, and moved among the deputies with blame and reproach, until one deputy turned to remind them that the constitution must be respected, and that consciences must not be assaulted.

3 All of this is strange, and all of this is ordinary; and you may deny that a thing can be strange and ordinary at once, but you would do well to remember that you are in Egypt, and in one particular Egyptian setting, and that the meeting of opposites and the union of contraries is a familiar thing in Egypt, and in certain Egyptian settings especially.

4 It is very strange that the ministry should be defeated in the election of the two deputy speakers after triumphing in the election of the speaker; but this strange thing is, at the same time, ordinary, because the ministry, when it triumphed over its rival, did not properly clear the field, and did not make certain that its rival had become truly powerless, capable of nothing.

5 And so those who speak with Sidqi Pasha's tongue have been able to return to attacking the ministry after having fled from it, to remind it of tradition and the constitution, to draw its attention to taste and what resembles taste, and to embolden against it those who turned away from it yesterday; and they will go on doing so tomorrow and the day after, until the second encounter between the Abd al-Fattah-ists and the Sidqi-ists comes in the Chamber of Deputies, in which either the victorious government's candidate will triumph, or the defeated Sidqi-ists' candidate will win out. The ministry has no one to blame but

itself; it is the one that did not wage its war well, did not manage its affairs skillfully, and it is the one whose own strength deceived it into vanity, so that it let itself be bitten twice from the same hole when it believed that Sidqi Pasha would withdraw from politics and cease his opposition once he resigned.

6 In truth, the affairs of the ministry and the affairs of Sidqi Pasha are not without a measure of strangeness and disorder, and perhaps the English bear some responsibility for that strangeness and this disorder. Sidqi Pasha made it appear that he had withdrawn from politics when he resigned the party's presidency and his seat in the Chamber of Deputies, and traveled to Alexandria to rest there for some days, and said, or allowed others to say on his behalf, that he would return from Alexandria to rest in that very house which had witnessed his latest defeat, when he had summoned the deputies and only a few had answered him.

7 And while he was in Alexandria, the newspapers suddenly began to say that he would return to Cairo to take tea with the departing high commissioner, and people understood this as a farewell tea. And why should they not understand it so, when the departure was drawing near, and the ties between the high commissioner and Egypt's affairs had begun to loosen, just as they had already loosened between the dictator and these same affairs? But the farewell itself is not without its own suggestiveness, especially to a certain kind of person who can extract something out of nothing, and who reckons that the English never neglect politics, even at a moment of farewell. And Sidqi Pasha is one of these people, especially in these days when he most resembles a drowning man grasping at whatever he can hold on to, however flimsy and worn it may be; and there is nothing to rule out, indeed there is good reason to suppose, that the cup of tea he drank with the high commissioner on Tuesday restored to him a breath of life and a ray of hope, and made him imagine himself capable of resuming activity — but slowly, deliberately, and cautiously, until God grants him leave to attack. And the strange thing is that he drank his cup of tea on Tuesday and gave his statement to Al-Ahram on Wednesday. And the newspaper that speaks with his tongue had, most probably, intended to appear on Thursday, but chose instead to appear on Friday — meaning that had it appeared on Thursday, it could have spoken of nothing in politics but the talk of the defeated, forced to flee, whereas appearing on Friday, after parliament opened and the election took place in the Chamber of Deputies, it might say something to vex his rivals and prepare the ground for an attack. And so it managed

things exactly as it could, and appeared today with talk of that laughable defeat which befell the ministry yesterday.

8 You see, then, that things are not as untroubled for the ministry and its supporters as they suppose, or as they say, and that Sidqi Pasha — though his political life has ended, as far as the people are concerned, and as far as the matter is seriously considered — is still able to sour life for people who thought their life had turned untroubled. And it seems most likely that those who claimed Sidqi Pasha would oppose the ministry within parliament even while he himself stayed far from parliament knew this man better than his rivals the ministers did. This is indeed a very weak ministry, excessive in its weakness, this ministry that a man whom people are done with, and who is done with himself, can still scheme against and overreach against. This is indeed a very weak ministry, this ministry that a man like Sidqi Pasha can sour, forcing it to look ahead and see nothing but doubt, to look behind and see nothing but doubt, to look right and left and see nothing but doubt, to become convinced that doubt has seized it on every side, and to be so occupied with this doubt that it loses sight of certainty, spending whatever strength and effort it has left trying to free itself from Sidqi Pasha while Sidqi Pasha stood plainly on the field, and then from Sidqi Pasha's shadow, or from his shadows, once Sidqi Pasha had vanished from the field. And what do you make of a ministry that will spend what remains of its days fighting shadows?