

## Freedom...

by Dr. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn Bey

I do not wish to anger the Prime Minister, for many serious reasons. First of all, today we welcome the month of Ramadan — that blessed month in which the Qur'an was revealed, as guidance for mankind, with clear proofs of guidance and discernment. It is a noble, merciful month, one in which harshness and violence are not becoming, even toward those who are harsh and violent with others. For God Almighty says: *"Indeed, whoever is patient and forgives—surely that is of the matters requiring determination."*

Secondly, the Prime Minister is at this moment absorbed in negotiations with our British friends and allies. Those negotiations are heavy and unpleasant—gentle one moment, harsh the next; they smile in the morning and frown by evening; they permit in the day and restrain at night. They impose on our Egyptian negotiators, and on their chief especially, a long and bitter toil that wears the temper, exhausts the spirit, and narrows the patience. I do not wish to add to his burden.

A third reason restrains me even more: the Prime Minister's anger is something fearful indeed—spreading panic in hearts and alarm in souls. I do not wish for myself, my family, or my friends to feel fear or trembling in this holy month. His anger, after all, can send people to prison, shut down newspapers, suspend livelihoods, and scatter the ranks of society. All this is grave and odious, especially when God tests His servants with both heat and fasting at once.

You will agree, dear reader, that these are sufficient reasons to make me speak calmly and with moderation, even on a grave subject. For God commanded Moses and Aaron to speak gently to Pharaoh, that he might take heed or show fear—and our Prime Minister, God forbid, is no Pharaoh! Yet God taught His prophets good manners, and it befits people to follow such divine courtesy whenever they can.

So let us speak gently to the Prime Minister, that he might recall the rights of the people and his duty before God. Let us recite to him the Almighty's words: *"Indeed, God commands you to render trusts to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, to judge with justice."*

The Egyptian people, as we know, have sacred rights granted them by God and affirmed in the Constitution. The greatest of these is **freedom**—that which makes man truly human, distinguishing him from the beast, enabling him to order his life as he wills, to choose good and avoid evil. Without freedom, there would be no religion, no law, no constitution—for all these rest on command and prohibition, on reward and punishment, and these make sense only for free beings.

Freedom—of thought, of speech, of action—should know no limit but the equal rights of others. These are first principles taught to children in school, and yet we must repeat them in the press because the world turns, opinions change, and self-evident truths are sometimes forgotten or denied.

The Prime Minister, entrusted with the people's rights, has not fulfilled this trust. We cannot meet as we wish, nor speak, nor write freely. The Constitution guarantees this; so does Islam;

so do the laws. Yet he often makes himself both plaintiff and judge—accusing newspapers as he pleases, condemning them without recourse to the courts. That is no rendering of the trust of freedom.

We learned, even abroad, that he has gone beyond confiscating papers to outright suspension—without trial, without investigation. He fears, he accuses, he decides, he executes—unchecked by law, constitution, or conscience. And Parliament, instead of defending liberty, has met this with half-measures and polite compromise.

Freedom, then, has become cheap—cheap to those sworn to protect it, cheap to those meant to cherish it. The fault lies not only with ministers and deputies, but with writers and intellectuals who have feared prison and the closure of their papers more than they have loved freedom. But liberty is not a gift from men; it is a gift from God, and what God has given no man has the right to take away.

I call upon the Prime Minister and his colleagues, upon writers and thinkers alike, to heed the Almighty's words:

*“Indeed, God commands you to render trusts to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, to judge with justice.”*

And I declare before them all that I—who possess only myself—shall be, when God wills, as every noble man should be: I will accept no compromise, no bargaining, no debate in the matter of freedom of thought.

Woe to the intellectuals—indeed, woe to all free men—if fear can make them betray their liberty.

**Ṭāhā Ḥusayn**

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