Beware ...

Mesamarat al-Gayb, 1 February 1948

Nations encounter, in the course of their own lives, circumstances imposing upon the educated among their own sons genuinely firm, decisive, genuinely difficult duties — duties they ought never to fall short in discharging, nor lighten the burden of, nor disown the responsibility for. Should they do so, or do even some part of it, they would sin against their own selves, against their own homelands, and against human dignity itself, purely as human dignity.

It seems to me that some of these same circumstances, imposing these same duties upon the educated, have now confronted Egypt, and now surround her, calling upon the conscience of the educated among her own sons to awaken, should it be sleeping, to grow alert, should it be negligent, and to genuinely weigh its own duty toward itself, the homeland's own claim upon it, and human dignity's own claim upon every dignified human being.

The truth is, we now find ourselves entering, in these very days, a life in which we cannot hope to enjoy ease and comfort, nor settle into rest and reassured living, except once we have discharged, toward ourselves and toward our own children, the duty of genuine counsel and guidance, and genuine persistence in that same counsel and guidance — however much hardship that may bring upon us, whatever effort it may cost us, and whatever real dangers and trials it may expose us to.

This same division, which has corrupted relations among the great victorious powers, splitting them into two great camps, each plotting against the other, scheming against it, preparing to wage war against it, whether defensive or offensive — this is no light, trivial matter we can simply hear of, or read of, without real concern, without real attentiveness, without any need to turn away, on its own account, from the ease and calm we have grown accustomed to.

We have already seen exactly what the last world war poured out upon the peoples of West and East alike — trials, disasters, and horrors: some extinguishing souls and spilling blood; some spreading ruin and destruction, toppling civilization and settled life itself; some squandering dignity, and effacing the very values of truth, justice, freedom, equality, sympathy, compassion, solidarity, and cooperation in the pursuit of good.

The warring powers, in that last war, never possessed the weapons, nor the means of horror, they will possess once a third war is ever stirred up — the horrors of the First World War, terrible though they genuinely were, held no great significance whatsoever, set beside the horrors of the Second; nor will the horrors of the Second World War hold any great significance whatsoever, set beside the horrors of a Third World War, one the great powers are already preparing themselves for, and toward which the wretched peoples of the earth are already being driven, forcibly.

The very least incumbent upon the educated, and upon opinion leaders, in Egypt and in countries resembling Egypt, is to give their own fellow citizens real insight, guide them, warn them, and stand between them and exposure to these same disasters and dangers, so far as they are genuinely able. Nor does it matter, once they have discharged this same duty, upheld what is right, and offered genuine counsel to their own homelands, whether they succeed in what they have attempted, or find the very means of success cut off from them — our own great ancient poet was not mistaken, after all, when he said:

A company, like spearheads themselves, made camp upon ground just as sharp, while night's own darkness pressed close about them —
theirs only the duty of seeing the matter through to its own utterance, never the duty of seeing through its own consequences.

Egyptians who read the newspapers, listen to the radio, and genuinely understand what they read and hear, will already have noticed that Great Britain is attempting to prepare herself for the coming war in the very best manner she can — organizing, to this end, her own relations, and the relations of the United States of America, with Western Europe, through concluded alliances, and reinforced ties; and wanting, indeed attempting, to this same end, to organize her own relations with the countries of the Near East and Middle East too, through concluded alliances, and organized cooperation.

She has attempted this, and continues attempting it, with Egypt, without success up to now; has attempted it, and continues attempting it, with Iraq, without success up to now either; has attempted it with Transjordan, and we shall see whether her own attempt succeeds, or fails. It is said she is attempting it, too, with Syria and Lebanon, with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and with Yemen besides.

The one significant argument Great Britain relies upon, adopting it as her own means toward enticement and intimidation, toward

temptation and fear, is communism itself: Great Britain professes the deepest genuine concern for the Arab East's own interests, over the spread of communism within it, and the extension of its own hand toward it, using this same grave danger to frighten the wealthy, and the powerful and prestigious, offering them a genuine choice — if the word "choice" even applies here — between allying with her, sheltering beneath her own banner, to preserve their own wealth, prestige, and power, or opposing her, breaking from her own alliance, and exposing themselves instead to communism, which demolishes the social order outright, and abolishes wealth, prestige, and power outright as well.

Nor does she stop even there, going even further still in her own professed concern for the East, and for Eastern peoples, offering the Eastern states not merely to share with them in defending their own homelands, but to assist them, too, with economic reform, and raising the standard of living, as the phrase goes.

Great Britain, throughout all of this, forgets only a single thing: that her own participation in military defence, exactly as she offers it, amounts to nothing but the protectorate itself, its own name merely changed, its own substance left entirely intact; and that her own participation in economic reform, and raising the standard of living, amounts to nothing but squandering internal independence, and infiltrating the very matters nations most jealously guard their own exclusive right to manage.

It stands entirely clear that communism is a system genuinely to be guarded against, unsuited as it is to the Arab nations' own temperament, and to the stage they have already reached in their own modern life. But it stands even more clear still that this same guarding against communism ought never to come to us from outside, nor be imposed upon us by any foreign power — it is, rather, something we ourselves ought to attempt, through our own particular efforts.

Our own particular efforts, though, are not to consist of legislating laws, restricting freedom, and seizing people on mere suspicion — they are, rather, to consist of reforming the social order itself, enabling it to rely upon itself, to take genuine pride in its own existence, and to make its own members genuinely cherish preserving it, and guarding it.

Should the social order manage to guarantee people a life whose own substance is justice and prosperity, genuinely free of injustice, misery, and deprivation, its own members would genuinely deserve to

love it, hold fast to it, resist its own change, and spare themselves any real adventurism.

What we genuinely need to fix, then, in Egyptians' own hearts, minds, and consciences — sparing no genuine effort, withholding no real exertion in doing so — is this: there exists a genuinely vast difference between the communist system Great Britain warns us against, the one we ought genuinely to guard against, and resist, through the proper reform of our own social institutions, and the international political character of Soviet Russia herself.

We can genuinely detest communism, and still maintain relations of genuine goodwill and cooperation, in politics and in trade, with Soviet Russia herself. The British themselves do exactly this: they resist communism within their own country, while concluding trade agreements with Russia; the French do exactly this too; and America herself would genuinely wish she could do exactly this as well.

There is, then, a genuine distinction between the Russian state and the communist system itself: we can be genuine friends to the Russian state, and genuine enemies of the communist system, without incurring any real embarrassment, or any real fault, in doing so.

The other thing we genuinely need to fix in Egyptians' own hearts and minds is this: allying with the British and Americans, at this particular time, means nothing whatsoever except taking sides between the two disputing camps themselves, and becoming genuinely entangled in whatever consequences follow from that same alignment.

We stand in no real need whatsoever of quarrelling with the Russians, nor of waging war against them, so long as we can genuinely protect ourselves from their own social system. It is not the Russians, after all, who occupy the Canal — it is the British who occupy it. The Russians have indeed shared in the burdens of the Palestinian question — but it was the British who created this same question, fashioning it themselves, entirely.

Everything, then, forbids us from quarrelling with the Russians, and everything compels us to quarrel with the British — until we manage to wrest from them, and from their own allies, our own rights, and the rights of the other Arab peoples besides.

Let Egyptians reflect on all of this, then, and consider it carefully, and let them recall the ancient poet's own words:

Judge well your own foot's own place, before you take the step —
for whoever climbs a slippery slope unwarily, slips.