

And Finally ...

Al-Balagh, 16 December 1945.

Everything in Egypt proceeds exactly as the Egyptians would wish, and in the very best way they could desire: an order as settled as the mountains are settled, a comprehensive security in which the strong and the weak alike take their ease, an integrity in action the like of which history has never recorded for any nation in any age, and a truthfulness in speech that will become a byword for generations to come. Everything in Egypt proceeds exactly as the Egyptians would wish; everything proceeds in steady, unbroken regularity, just as the sun and the moon proceed across the sky.

When Egypt rises tomorrow morning, the ministers and officials go to their offices, and do whatever work God wills them to do, and idle away whatever time God wills them to idle, and say whatever God wills them to say. And when the sun tilts from the zenith of the sky and inclines somewhat toward its setting, the ministers and officials go home to their houses, and eat whatever God wills them to eat, and sleep whatever God wills them to sleep. And when the sun has cast off its cloak of darkness, as the ancient poet puts it, the ministers and officials make their way to their clubs and coffeehouses, to their playgrounds and places of amusement, and amuse themselves however God wills them to amuse themselves, and sit up in conversation however God wills them to sit up, and drink however God wills them to drink — until, when midnight comes, the ministers and officials return to their houses, and there is sleep, and there are dreams; and then, when morning comes, they resume tomorrow's life just as they began yesterday's. And God causes the night to pass into the day and causes the day to pass into the night, and the sun runs its course to its appointed resting place — such is the ordaining of the Mighty, the All-Knowing.

And the Egyptian people are calm, at ease, watching the ministers and officials come and go just as they watch the sun rise and set, reflecting on the signs of God, marveling at God's wisdom, utterly certain that everything proceeds just as fate decreed it from eternity, and just as the Pen inscribed it on the Preserved Tablet before light and darkness were created, and before the earth was spread out and the heaven raised up, and the planets and the stars scattered between them.

There may be found among the Egyptians those who grow impatient with this steady, uniform life, which proceeds toward its end along an easy, even course, with no crookedness and no deviation in it; and these Egyptians are the sick ones for whom we must seek medical treatment, to heal their hearts and souls of this impatience, which indicates nothing but a disordered temperament, a corrupted taste, and an unsound disposition.

And they seek, for this impatience of theirs, pretexts that they invent out of whole cloth, fabricate from nothing, and create from within themselves; for they do not love calm, nor do they feel at ease with stability. They grew up with the English settled in their country, controlling their own interests, while the ministers and officials came and went; so why do they now grow impatient with what they grew up with, and weary of what they ought rightly to have grown accustomed to?! Why do they now demand the evacuation of the English from Egypt?! And what offense have the English given them, that they should grow so impatient with them, so disavow their presence, and so depart from the traditions known of them?!

For the Egyptians have been known for the generosity of their hospitality since the most ancient times — so why this repudiation of the guest?! Why this impatience with him?! And what would they say to their forefathers, were their forefathers raised up from their graves?! And what will they say to their own sons, when their sons ask about this sudden malady — how did it come about, and from what did it arise?!

The English have accompanied us since our birth, just as time itself has accompanied us; we have done them no wrong, and they have done us no wrong — so why do we demand their evacuation from our homes?! And why do we press this demand, and go to such excess in our insistence?!

Do you see now the reason for which the government hesitated so long before demanding the evacuation? It meant to open our eyes to the consequences of the matter, to alert us to its sources and its origins, and to remind us of the manners we inherited from our forefathers, and which we must pass on to our own sons — manners which require us to honor the guest, to rejoice in his presence, and to stand toward him in the position of a servant toward his master, a slave toward his lord. Was it not our ancient poet who said:

And I am indeed the guest's slave, for as long as he remains present, though in nothing else about me is there anything resembling a slave.

And the very least a wise government, conscious of its duty and faithful to it, must do, is to guide the people when they go astray, to discipline them when they deviate from noble conduct, and to set them back on the right path when they swerve from it. But things have truly gone wrong in these days — gone so wrong that it is now the people who discipline the government, or rather, let us say, that it is now the people who force the government into bad manners, into deviating from its true purpose, into asking the guest to depart, and the English to evacuate!

Corruption has indeed appeared on land and sea, by what the hands of men have earned — and behold, the Egyptian people grow impatient with their English guests, and press them insistently to evacuate, and behold, they demand of their own government that these guests be made to leave.

The people demanded this in their conversations and in their newspapers, and Parliament found itself compelled to demand it just as the people had demanded it, while the Prime Minister put his fingers in his ears, as far as he was able, so as not to hear this word, and so as to spare his own noble self the injury of this breach of manners. But the people pressed on, and drowned themselves in their insistence, until the head of the government was forced to listen, and forced to speak; and so he told Parliament, by way of excuse, and hope, and delay, and procrastination, that he would seize the opportunity whenever it arose.

But the people pressed on, and drowned themselves further in their insistence, and would not be content with excuses or hopes, nor satisfied with delay or procrastination; so the Prime Minister took another step, and gathered the assembly, and spoke to it and listened to it, and announced to the people, last September, that the time was suitable for demanding the evacuation. And at that suitable time, he was still denouncing the corruption of the age, the people's departure from their own nature, and their deviation from their ancient manners; but he kept one thing hidden within himself, and showed this people — who resemble children — another thing, by which to placate them, humor them, and gently lull them toward calm and sleep.

But the people did not grow calm, and did not sleep, and continued to demand that the guest be expelled and made to evacuate the soil of the

homeland; and the Prime Minister kept returning his fingers to his ears, month after month and part of another month, until the corruption had become general, contagious as an epidemic, and behold, the ministers themselves began demanding of their own chief that the guest be expelled and made to evacuate the soil of the homeland. And the chief was astonished, then he denied it, then he raged — and then he looked, and found himself between two options: either to give up his post and keep to his house, so that another chief might come who would expel the guest and bring about the evacuation; or else to join in what the people had unanimously agreed upon — this disordered temperament, this corrupted disposition, this deviation of taste from the right course — and so himself demand the evacuation, and take the lead in expelling the guest from the soil of the homeland.

And the Prime Minister thought and weighed the matter, then deliberated and reflected, and then found himself compelled to follow the same path as the people, and to arrive at the same coarseness and corrupted taste that the people had arrived at; he resolved to act, yet scarcely managed to; he advanced, though had he been able, he would have preferred to hold back; and he recited to himself, between himself and his own soul, the words of Abu al-'Ala:

And when I saw ignorance spreading rife among men, I feigned ignorance myself, until it was thought that I too was ignorant.

Yet our Prime Minister did not go to excess in feigning ignorance, nor did he force himself too harshly to keep pace with the people; he merely slackened the rein a little, and approached the guest with some shyness, asking him, gently, courteously, delicately, and kindly, whether he was prepared — not to leave, but to negotiate over leaving. And it is only natural that such things should not be seized upon by force, lest the guest be unsettled from his resting place before we have extended to him the proper grounds, prepared for him the proper means, and been gentle with him in what we want from him and ask of him.

This is our story ever since Germany surrendered last May, and ever since Japan surrendered last August, and ever since the political committee decided that the time was suitable for negotiations last September.

And our story can be summed up in two words, or in three: a people of poor taste wishing to turn the guest out of its house, and a

well-mannered, cultivated chief wishing to remain generous to the very end, who then finds himself compelled, in the end, to go along with the people, doing so as gently as gentleness can possibly go.

What matters is that the Prime Minister has finally been compelled to share in the people's malady, and to ask the English to set a time — not, as I said, for the evacuation itself, but for the negotiation over the evacuation.

But the war has corrupted everything, for it is not only the hosts who have been corrupted and whose taste has soured, but the guests themselves who have been corrupted and whose manners have soured too. It used to be customary that a guest would not linger once the house had grown unwelcoming to him, and he sensed his host's aversion or disdain toward him; and it would have been natural for the English to evacuate as soon as they sensed our impatience and our indifference toward them. But instead they stayed, and insisted on staying, while we grew impatient, and insisted on our impatience; and the more we showed this insistence, the more they showed various forms of defiance and disdain.

And were Mr. Bevin's statements in the House of Commons anything but forms of defiance, and shades of disdain?! We demand the evacuation, and press our demand insistently, and he tells the British that the Egyptian government has asked him for nothing at all!

And for this reason I shall not be surprised if the British Foreign Secretary, upon receiving that gentle, delicate request the Prime Minister sent him, merely shakes his head, shrugs his shoulders, draws a mocking smile upon his lips, and instructs one of his aides to reply to our Prime Minister that he will set the date of the negotiations at the proper time; for the proper time differs as between us and the English — indeed, it differs even as between ourselves alone, for do you not see that we ourselves judged the time suitable in September, and yet did not request the negotiations until December? What, then, is to prevent the English from judging the time suitable whenever they themselves please, rather than whenever we please?! And what, pray, is the Prime Minister to do, if he receives the reply that the date of the negotiations will be set at the proper time?! Is he to acquiesce, however angry the people may grow, or is he to join the people in their anger — and in that case, what is he to do?!

And all these problems have arisen only from the corruption of the age and the change in people's character; for had time passed as it used to pass before, sound and temperate, and had people remained as they used to be, well-mannered, cultivated, and honoring of the guest, these problems would never have arisen, and the Prime Minister would never have been driven to this complicated life, filled as it is with sorrows and cares.

And it appears that the Prime Minister's life has indeed grown truly complicated, filled not only with sorrows and cares, but, alongside these sorrows and cares, with something else that might almost be called apprehension and fear. For the newspapers told us yesterday that the Prime Minister is resorting to kinds of precaution that no one before him ever resorted to — not even his great mentor, Sidqi Pasha; for we never knew Sidqi Pasha to station secret police on the rooftops of houses during his comings and goings. But the newspapers inform us that al-Nokrashi Pasha has exhausted the secret police force of Cairo, and has then turned some of the regular, uniformed police into secret police, hiding their official uniforms and dressing them in galabiyas, and stationing them on the rooftops of houses, to protect him on his way from his house to the Mahmal procession, and on his way back from this procession to his house.

Is this true?! And if it is true, what is its explanation? What is its justification? And how could it possibly be accepted, or found tolerable?!

Is it true that al-Nokrashi Pasha has resorted to what his mentor Sidqi Pasha never resorted to, thrusting the police into people's own houses and stationing them on the rooftops of houses, to protect his path on his coming and going?! Protect him from what?! From the fact that he is a leader the people have believed in with absolute faith, just as they once believed absolutely in Sidqi Pasha before him, and for whose sake the people rejected their old leaders?! Why, as for the Wafd's leader, no one pays him any heed, no one concerns himself with him, no one even senses his presence. And it is for that very reason that his house is besieged, his club is besieged, and he is harassed whenever he goes to attend prayers — all of this, of course, out of gentleness toward him and tenderness for him, so that he should not have to witness people's indifference to him, their disavowal of him, and their turning away from him.

Al-Nokrashi Pasha has taken the hearts of the entire people away from al-Nahhas Pasha, a mighty and powerful taking indeed; so what, then, does al-Nokrashi Pasha have to fear, with the hearts of the people on his side, and the souls of the people entirely at his command?! What does al-Nokrashi Pasha have to fear, having himself requested negotiation with the English and kept pace with the people in their eagerness for the evacuation?! Has the time not come for this comic tragedy to end?! Has the time not come for this entertaining murk to clear?! Has the time not come for those in whom no one believes, and in whom no one places any confidence, to return to their own houses, to content themselves with whatever quiet, idle life God has apportioned them, and to leave to the people their own right to choose, freely and openly, those who will speak in their name and act on their command — because the people love them and they love the people, and because, were these true leaders to come forward, they would never station secret police on rooftops, nor thrust the police into people's own houses without a judge's leave.