

Campaign!

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Kawkab al-Sharq, 18 March 1934

1 No troops will be sent to the Sudanese border, for the English take charge of protecting that border, for themselves and for us; nor will troops be sent to any of the regions where peace is feared for or security is dreaded over. For Egypt, praise God, is safe and secure, and the English take charge of protecting it from every foreign assault — they announced as much to all the powers at the very time we announced our independence. Nor, indeed, will this campaign I wish to tell you about be one of those fearsome, dangerous campaigns preceded and followed by cannon and instruments of death; for Egypt has taken upon herself a pledge to be a land of life and peace under the shelter of the constitution and the law. This campaign is, rather, something else, of a special kind: it is a campaign of light against darkness, a campaign of intelligence against stupidity, the zeal of discernment against heedlessness, a campaign of learning against ignorance. And this campaign has a commander whom I think you already know; and if you do not yet know him, then you stand in need of having directed at you, and at the province you live in, or the town whose people you stir among, a campaign like the one we are making the subject of this column. This campaign has a commander you ought to know without needing to be introduced to him, for he is manifest in Egypt's sky and upon her soil, glittering in her sky as a bright star glitters, and rising upon her soil as the beautiful, radiant sun rises; people know him by his resounding speeches, his sonorous addresses, and his deeds, unprecedented and unrivaled — for Egypt has never been blessed, and will never be blessed, with a leader of campaigns resembling this great leader. He has done fine service at the university, fine service in Arabic theater and its instruction, fine service at the Opera, and service too in those dark, thorny problems that once troubled the great dictator's nights and now trouble the good man's. And he has a worthy book known to every jurist, none of whom know its like nor ever will, for God never decreed that anyone should study the sale contract as this great professor has studied it. I think you have now recognized this commander, if you were among those who did not already know him — and I do not suppose such people exist: it is the minister of education. As for his splendid, masterly, radiant, dazzling campaign — which will drive back the darkness, repel ignorance, fill the land with learning after it was

filled with ignorance, and with light after it was filled with darkness — it is the one he will launch tomorrow or the day after, upon the nearest reaches of Beheira province, to visit the schools and oversee, up close, the life of learning and instruction.

2 And this campaign is truly a rare, dazzling thing, if what the newspapers say is true, for the great minister has chosen for it, from among the soldiery, the strongest, the cleverest, the most skilled, the most capable, the most masterly, and the bravest. Suffice it to say that it is composed of the entire general staff of the Ministry of Education. The great minister will travel surrounded by the secretary-general of the Ministry of Education, the director of the minister's office, the minister's private secretary, the inspector of kindergarten education, the inspector of primary education, the inspector of secondary education, the inspector of industrial education, the inspector of girls' education, the inspector of physical education for boys, and the inspectress of physical education for girls. Perhaps the inspector of agricultural education has already gone ahead of him, and perhaps still others besides these have gone ahead of him too, or have been charged with catching up to him an hour or some hours after his arrival. And there are other men of education already settled in Beheira, who will await the army and join it. And perhaps other men of education settled in Alexandria and elsewhere near this fortunate province will be driven by longing to leave their posts, and hasten to meet the minister, to ride in his train, and to join his triumphant campaign. Some cunning observers may note that there is something of an innovation in this campaign — namely, the participation of the inspectress of physical education for girls in it, despite the settled rule that the mixing of the sexes, even in official matters, does not suit the proprieties. But pay no heed to these cunning observers, for they are nothing but an envious lot, pleased by nothing, content with nothing, never at ease unless they find something to scheme about.

3 And so this campaign will prepare — or has been preparing for days now — to set out from the high command's headquarters in Cairo, and will depart the capital with the sun as it rises tomorrow or the day after, and will reach the field within hours. And there, do not ask how the armies of ignorance are routed, how the citadels of heedlessness are toppled, how people's minds are illuminated, how people's hearts are uplifted. Do not ask about the public's rejoicing in that province at the arrival of this triumphant campaign, and the appearance of that victorious commander. Do not ask about the shouting that will reach the

vault of heaven, and tear throats to shreds. Do not ask about the applause that will deafen ears, and split palms. Nor ask, then, about the speeches that will be delivered, the odes that will be recited, the articles that will be composed, and then broadcast in the newspapers for people to read, so that they may know the victorious commander has won the battle, and achieved triumph and victory. All of this is something we do not doubt even now, and shall not doubt once it has come to pass. And there are other things that admit no doubt, the most important being that Beheira province will be distinguished above all the Egyptian provinces, and will fill those other provinces with an envy and a jealousy one might well fear for security and peace, and fear too for the minister's repose. For the other provinces will not be content to let Beheira province have this lasting glory to itself, and will not rest until they too have won from the minister and his general staff a campaign like this campaign Beheira now enjoys. And the minister is too tender of heart, too wide in mercy, too compassionate toward the Egyptians to favor some of them over others, or to prefer one province over another, or to lavish his campaign upon one group of people while being niggardly with it toward another. And so the minister will be obliged to make the rounds of every province, one day at Juzwa, another at al-Aqiq, one day in Gharbiya, another in Aswan.

4 Among these things that admit no doubt is that the minister's arrival, with his general staff, upon this fortunate province will work miracles there: illiteracy will be utterly erased, and everyone — men and women, young and old — will become accomplished readers, on condition only that they not read the opposition's newspapers, nor so much as look at them. And here is the marvel of it: everyone will become capable of reading any newspaper, any book, until, should an opposition newspaper fall into their hands, the art of reading and writing is utterly erased from their souls; and once that newspaper is taken away from them, this art returns to them finer and more accomplished than ever. It is certain that, should the minister visit the other provinces, he will work there what he will work tomorrow or the day after in Beheira province. And perhaps you will agree with me that these visits will have real consequence for the Egyptians' lives: they will bring them all, every one, out of darkness into light, so it is their right to rejoice in them; and they will relieve them all of reading the opposition and the oppositionists, so it is the latter's right to reckon fully with this, indeed their right to judge and to be certain that they have no hope left in life after today, and that Egypt will slip entirely from their grasp. And this has grave consequences, chief among them that the present ministry will fear no opposition and no oppositionists,

and will therefore stand firm, and stand firm for as long as God wills, despite its rivals and its enviers. And there is nothing strange in any of this, nor anything resembling strangeness; for Egypt is of old acquaintance with such miracles. Perhaps the Egyptians know that Osiris used to conquer the lands of the earth without stirring up war in them or spilling blood in them, but rather spreading learning in them and proclaiming peace in them, teaching people how to enjoy life. And if Egypt once brought forth an Osiris in the ancient age, what is to prevent her from bringing forth an Osiris in the modern age? Everything, then, is for the best; Egypt will be enlightened and will rise, and will outstrip the advanced, enlightened nations within weeks. But the Egyptians are a people never satisfied, their souls forever taken up with trifles, forever turning away from great matters and weighty deeds. For I have seen a group of them reading this great news in the newspapers, and then a cloud comes over their faces, their brows furrow, and their tongues let loose a great deal of foolish talk, asking: how much will the state spend on this campaign? And what calls for this enormous army to accompany the minister of education on his visit to the schools of that province? Do you see what shortsightedness this is? What triviality of judgment, what narrowness of thought! People are told that the minister will erase illiteracy from an entire province in a single day, and they ask what that will cost them in money, and begrudge this great man the company of ten senior officials. I assure you these Egyptians were not created for great matters, nor were they created for hope; they were created only to busy themselves with trifles, and to fill their hearts, and the hearts of those around them, with despair and hopelessness. Where, after all, are the expenses these ten men will incur, and the expenses people will bear in receiving and entertaining them, set against this great event, this momentous matter — the visit of one minister to one province? Is it not the English's right to laugh at a people upon whom God has decreed that they understand nothing, perceive nothing, and can never rise above petty matters to great ones? Is it not the English's right to begrudge this people a minister of education, and the minister of education's colleagues, who strive as they strive, sacrifice as they sacrifice, and endure what pain and hardship they endure, only to meet from this ungrateful, thankless country neither gratitude nor praise? They hear him instead asking them about these slight, paltry things they call money — things the peasant pays without hardship, or with hardship scarcely worth mentioning. And who could possibly concern himself with a peasant who goes hungry? Who could possibly concern himself with a peasant twisted by the tax, or unable to pay it, so that the lash falls upon

his back? Is it not strange that the Egyptians should begrudge the minister and his companions the money to be spent on this fortunate journey of theirs, this triumphant campaign of theirs, merely because the peasant bears some effort in raising it and some toil in paying it? What, then, are the Egyptians to do? What would they say if their ministers treated them as they once were treated, in the days when they raised the pyramids and built the temples, bearing or dragging those great weights? Is it not their duty to thank God for the condition they are in, and to thank their ministers for taking from them with ease rather than hardship, and imposing on them the lightest of burdens? Had they wished, they could have taught them what true hardship is; had they wished, they could have shown them what true distress, true misery, and true torment are! And other Egyptians ask about the ministry's own offices — what will become of their affairs on the day their masters and leaders leave them, abandoned by their chiefs and directors — as though the ministry's offices were something worth mentioning or thinking of, set beside a minister's visit to one of Egypt's provinces. I confess I grew impatient with these people as they spoke this foolishness, which stirs anger and fills hearts with rage and resentment; and I confess I wished the minister of education had expanded his campaign somewhat further, and swelled its numbers somewhat more. For if he needs ten men to visit one province, then each of these ten needs at least two companions to accompany him on this visit, and each of them needs his own private secretary and his own private servant, bringing the party's number to thirty — a modest number indeed, not reaching the number of those who have been on trial since yesterday, and have been tasting the pleasure of prison since Thursday, for having wished to visit the martyrs' graves in the city of Alexandria. And the minister could have looked, too, to these followers of the general staff, who also need assistants, and the number could have been doubled, and the state would then have been obliged to spend many times what it will spend now. But the minister, for all his attention to great and weighty matters, does not neglect the small and minute ones; he thinks of money too, and graciously practices economy, and tenderly restrains his spending, contenting himself with ten men when he could, had he wished, have taken twenty, or thirty, or sixty. Who, after all, could have stopped him from taking the entire staff of his office to visit this province with him? But he did not do so — out of kindness to the peasant, out of compassion for him, out of a preference for economy, out of frugality with money, and out of deference to the finance minister. And speaking of the finance minister, we note that he too will be conquering a region of Egypt, and will bring forth there varieties and

shapes of miracles of his own. He will visit the Red Sea coast — and why not? For the Egyptians scarcely trouble themselves over this part of the homeland's soil; so let the minister teach them how equity ought to be struck between the various parts of the homeland and the Red Sea coast, which is, by all accounts, exceedingly rich. Scheherazade tells, in some of the tales of the Thousand and One Nights, that it holds sources of petroleum, quarries of stone, mines of various metals, and sources of other kinds of wealth and riches. And the Egyptians, all of them, know nothing of this; so it is the minister's right — indeed, his duty — to visit this coast, that the Egyptians may learn from him what they do not know. And Scheherazade claims that these sources of wealth have suffered so much neglect, and been so thoroughly disregarded, that they have run dry, or very nearly; so wait, then, for the minister's visit, and you will see the springs of petroleum gush forth and gush forth until they overwhelm the Red Sea itself, and you will see the stone quarries cover with rock more than anyone could carry, exploit, or put to use. As for the metals, speak of them freely once the minister has visited, and no one shall blame you: Egypt will become the richest of all lands in gold, silver, and iron, and whatever metals you please, whether they exist or not! And Egypt will bear no cost whatsoever for this blessed visit, for the minister will spend ten days on it, traveling now by train, now by ship, and the minister may be accompanied by a small or large number of people — but whatever expense this requires will be nothing beside what Egypt stands to gain from this blessed journey. And so the Egyptians' affairs proceed: the undersecretary of the interior searches for public security in Upper Egypt, if it is winter; the minister of education conquers Beheira province with this enormous number of officials; and the minister of finance searches for miracles on the Red Sea coast for ten full days, taking the train now and the ship now. And after all this, people say: Egypt's affairs are asleep, Egypt's rulers are asleep, Egypt's money has run dry or very nearly. No — Egypt may well boast to every land on earth of these masters of hers, who govern and govern well, who manage and manage expertly, who economize and surpass all people in economy. Egypt ought to be glad and rejoice, and raise her head high in pride and honor, for the minister of education is visiting the Red Sea coast, and the undersecretary of the interior has gone searching for public security in Upper Egypt.