Departure

Al-Siyasa (Hadith al-Yawm), 19 July 1932.

A successful journey, God willing, and a happy voyage; a safe return, God willing, and a blessed homecoming; then the proclamation of victory—and what pride that will be!—the humbling of the envious, in spite of the spiteful, and the disgrace of the gloating, speaker and silent alike; the scattering of the opposition, to left and right; and then the settling of order, in security and peace, for days to come.

These are sincere wishes we send in good faith to accompany the Prime Minister as he flies over the water, having already swum through the air, and as the city of the Caesars receives him, smiling and radiant, just as Cairo receives him. How fitting that the two cities should resemble one another! How fitting that each should draw near to the other! That is the city of Nero, and this the city of Qalawun; that the capital of Christendom, and this the capital of Islam; that the seat of Signor Mussolini, ally of the Pope, and this the seat of Sidqi Pasha, friend of the Grand Sheikh; that the eternal city of the West, and this the glorious city of the East.

How fitting it is that the two cities should draw near one another on the day genius seeks out genius, intelligence smiles upon intelligence, competence shakes hands with competence, and Sidqi attends Mussolini's banquet.

Exalted be God, as He wills—and may God make my faith the stronger!

What do the Egyptians lack?! And what prevents them from being the happiest of people and the most fortunate in rejoicing?! London's friendship has passed them by, but they have won Rome's affection instead. And where does London stand beside Rome?! They have missed the chance to speak with MacDonald, but have been granted the chance to speak with Mussolini! And where does MacDonald stand beside Mussolini?!

There is in the Egyptians an ingratitude unlike any other ingratitude, and a petulance unmatched by any other petulance! When before today have they seen an eternal and glorious city like Rome make itself ready and adorn itself for the arrival of their Prime Minister, a week or more before he is even due there?! And yet, for all this, they proclaim

no joy, show no rejoicing, and hold no festivities in the far corners of the country!

What do they lack?! And what are they waiting for?!

Here is Al-Muqattam newspaper announcing to us today that a private suite has been reserved for the Prime Minister aboard this grand and mighty liner they call the Esperia. And when before today has a private suite been reserved for their Prime Minister aboard a grand, mighty liner like the Esperia?! And when before has such a thing been announced in the newspapers?!

What do they lack?! And what are they waiting for?!

Their Prime Minister will not so much as reach the port of Naples before he is received there by the royal and military representatives of the Italian government, nor will he board the train without an official Italian envoy at his right hand and an accredited Egyptian minister at his left.

When before have their ministers been received in such a fashion?! And when before have their ministers been accompanied in such a fashion?!

What do they lack?! And what are they waiting for?!

I give them fair warning: if their hearts do not swell with pride, and their veins do not bulge with arrogance, at this lavish reception being prepared for their Prime Minister, they will go back to being as weak and as humbled as before—their Prime Minister traveling as ordinary people travel, no suites reserved for him aboard ships, no governors of cities or commanders of armies to receive him at the ports, no official envoy and accredited minister to accompany him on the train, no eternal city of Rome to fête him, and no great man and leader of Italy to hold a banquet in his honor.

O Lord, inspire in the Egyptians gratitude for this blessing, as You inspired in them the bearing of misfortune. O Lord, teach them rejoicing, as You taught them protest.

What do the Egyptians want?! And what do they lack?!

They want negotiation with the English; they want to wrest their independence from the English. A curse upon negotiation, and a plague

upon independence! I do not think God intended any good for this country when He placed in the heads of its people the idea of independence, and inspired in them the notion that negotiating with the English might lead to it!

I testify that the heads of government were at ease before the idea of independence sprouted in people's heads, and before the fancy of negotiation came to toy with their souls. They used to conduct their administrative ministries in patience and gentleness, going to their offices each morning and leaving them each evening, calm and untroubled, their lives undisturbed by Al-Muqattam's London correspondent, or Al-Ahram's own correspondent, or the political editor of the Daily Telegraph. And they had, before the Protectorate, a Foreign Ministry that communicated with other states and negotiated with them, just as our Foreign Ministry does now, over precious and productive matters—matters over which long and delightful memoranda are composed, like the very memoranda our Foreign Ministry writes now when it negotiates with other states over the car tax: should it be assessed by weight, or should it be assessed by speed, or should it be levied on the car simply because it is a car?!

These are the precious and delightful matters around which negotiations ought to revolve! They are precious and delightful because they will end, after a day or days, or a year or years, in enriching the Egyptian Treasury; and they are precious and delightful because men of thoughtful mind, lovers of philosophy, can find in them excellent philosophical nourishment, as they compare weight against speed, and learn that the great German scientist Einstein holds weight to be a relative thing, varying with speed—so that a car has no single weight, but its weight varies according to the speed at which it devours the road!

These are the fertile, productive, delightful negotiations!

But our government is trying to make this kind of negotiation beloved to the Egyptians, hoping they might turn to it instead of negotiating with the English over independence—and it neither succeeds nor is granted success.

They were overjoyed at the Prime Minister's journey when behind it lay the hope of going on to London and negotiating independence. But when that hope was cut off, or put off until winter, their ardor cooled, and they began to read the news of this blessed journey with a certain indifference that stirs pity; and the newspapers took to spurring them on

with what they published of the news of this journey and of the kinds of hospitality and honor that awaited it there—yet none of this stirred any vigor in them, nor breathed into them any spirit of strength.

And do not believe that it is the financial crisis that has saddened them so that they do not rejoice, stilled them so that they do not stir, and silenced them so that they do not speak—we do not believe this. The financial crisis is nothing but a legend invented by the opposition out of its own imagination; for if there truly were a financial crisis in the country, the ministers of state would not have scattered to the four corners of the earth in search of rest and the comforts of life. And when have you seen the ministers of France, England, Germany, and Italy abandon their countries in the midst of a crisis to rest or seek a cure?!

The crisis is nothing but a legend invented by the opposition; for if there truly were a financial crisis in Egypt, the Minister of Finance and his Deputy would not have abandoned it at one and the same time. The one talks about cotton without raising the price of cotton, and the other pays his respects to the leader of Italy and then goes off to seek a cure and to rest.

There is no financial crisis in Egypt; for had this crisis truly existed, the Prime Minister would not have abandoned it at the very moment it most needed his continuous attention to its finances and his constant watch over its economy.

The financial crisis and the educational crisis are two legends that prove nothing. The Minister of Finance and his Deputy are both absent from Egypt; the Minister of Education and his Deputy are both absent from Egypt; the Minister of Justice is resting in England; the Minister of Public Works is making arrangements for the Jabal al-Awliya dam project, in London; and the Minister of Agriculture is diverting himself—I do not know where.

Everything in Egypt is in the best of states. So then, what is wrong with the Egyptians, that they take no interest in their Prime Minister's journey, and pay no heed to the marks of honor and reverence surrounding it?!

Said one group of people: ‘And how would you have the Egyptians rejoice at the Prime Minister's journey, when he is dearer to them than their own lives, and more precious to them than their own souls?! And when have you seen a lover rejoice at parting from his beloved?! Where

has al-Nabigha's saying gone from your mind:

The ill-boding birds foretell that we depart tomorrow,
and for that the black crow caws its omen.
No welcome to tomorrow, and no greeting for it,
if tomorrow brings the parting of those who love.

And another group said: ‘And how should the Egyptians not grieve, not be downcast, at the Prime Minister's departure from them in these days, when events are unfolding, misfortunes are befalling, and crises follow one upon another?!’

For the Prime Minister has a precedent that fills with dread the Egyptians who love him more than they love their own lives, and prefer him above themselves: he was once Minister of the Interior, then traveled to Europe to rest, and then, when some mishap befell, resigned from Paris. Is it not the right of the Egyptians, who love the Prime Minister more than they love their own lives and prefer him above themselves, to feel no ease at this journey, and to dread that Halima might return to her old habits (as the proverb goes), and to recall the words of Jarir, their hearts brimming with sorrow and their souls toyed with by grief:

O Umm Najiya, peace be upon you,
before the going, and before the chiders' blame.
Had I known that our last meeting together
would be the day of parting, I would have done what I did not do.
Had I feared the swift nearness of separation,
I would have been content, or asked what I did not ask.

Said yet another group: ‘God's omen be upon us, and not yours, O pessimists! We see nothing in this but that the cunning opposition has breathed into you its evil spirit and spat into you its poison that kills hearts. Who told you that the Egyptians do not rejoice at the Prime Minister's journey?! Have you not read Al-Ahram?! Have you not read Al-Muqattam?! Have you not read Al-Shaab?! Do you not know that the Senators and Deputies are hastening to Alexandria even now, to celebrate the Prime Minister's farewell?! And if the Senators and Deputies bid him farewell, then Egypt itself has bidden him farewell; for they are Egypt—Egypt that eats and drinks and walks in the markets and travels to Alexandria to see the Prime Minister off. As for everyone else, they are nothing; for they have relinquished their right to act and to

speak to their parliament and its members, the Senators and Deputies, and have nothing left to do but rest for five whole years.’

Among the people there was a dignified old man known for understanding, intelligence, cunning, and shrewdness, who did not speak at length nor smile easily; but when he spoke, he struck upon the truth, and when he smiled, his smile was a sign that evil had, for a time, been turned away from the people, and that fortune would smile upon them for a moment.

This old man listened to the people's talk, head bowed, tapping the ground with his stick; and when they had finished, he raised his head, and they turned to him; then he smiled, and they hung upon his lips; then he said, in a calm and reassuring voice: ‘No harm will come to you; Egypt will reap nothing but good from the Prime Minister's journey. If he has missed out on negotiating with the English, he will negotiate with the Italians instead. He gave them Jaghbub yesterday, because it was never Egyptian to begin with; and the Italians will give him Eritrea tomorrow, because it was never Italian to begin with!’

And if the Egyptians knew how to understand the meaning of these two verses, they would be at ease:

If there be no camels, then let there be goats,
their horns worn smooth as though rubbed down by sticks—
to fill our house with curds and butter;
and riches enough for you are simply to be fed and watered.

A successful journey, God willing, and a happy voyage; a safe return, God willing, and a blessed homecoming.