The Promised Day

Al-Jumhuriya, 6 August 1954.

It is that day, near and far at once, to which souls cling and hopes attach, to which hearts aspire and wishes soar, on which the last contingent of British troops will withdraw from the soil of the homeland, twenty months from now.

It is near, because twenty months is no great matter in the life of peoples, and it is far, because many hopes and many lifespans fall short of it, and those who hold them do not know whether they will live to attain it among the days granted them, or whether it will elude them among the days that elude them. On that promised day, time turns back to its state of twenty-six centuries ago, when Egypt was free in the widest sense of freedom, noble in the most precise and truest sense of nobility, independent in the soundest and deepest sense of independence, her own affair hers to decide and her sovereignty wholly her sons', shared with no foreigner, near or distant, when Egypt alone settled all her own affairs, answering to no distant capital in the depths of Persia, or in the depths of Greece and Rome, or in the depths of Arabia, or in Damascus or Baghdad.

And the sons of Egypt alone settled her affairs, sharing them with no kings or caliphs who had settled upon her soil and attached themselves to her, or whom she had attached to herself. Yes — on that promised day, twenty months hence, the sun will rise over Egypt, and you will see her as you knew her twenty-six centuries ago: free, noble, belonging wholly to her sons, deciding her own affair with no recourse to a distant foreign power dominating her, nor to a nearby foreign power settled within her, but governed only by her own sons, risen from her own depths, shaped by her pure nature, untouched by any taint, innocent of every falsehood. On that day Egypt will know herself again, after she had lost herself and strove to find herself once more, enduring in pursuit of that quest one great trial after another, one calamity after another. Egyptians ought to remember that their homeland never once forgot itself, and never accepted injustice from any source of injustice, but struggled for its independence from the moment that independence was lost, and wore down its invaders, usurpers, and occupiers with hardship.

Egyptians must remember, as that promised day comes to overshadow them, that their homeland never once rested, nor was ever given rest, from the time independence was lost in the sixth century

before Christ until it was regained in the twentieth century after Christ. Rather, it spent these long centuries in patient endurance, in stubborn struggle, in rebellion, wearing down and being worn down by those who subjugated and exploited it, until it was granted the chance to reach the goal it had striven for, having borne every form of hardship, and having made others bear every form of hardship, to attain it — attain it in free, noble independence.

There are, in Egypt's history across these long centuries, lessons for whoever wishes to learn them, admonitions for whoever wishes to heed them, knowledge for whoever wishes to acquire it, and wisdom for whoever wishes to plumb its depths. Egypt is the only homeland in all the regions of the earth, the only homeland that struggled across these long centuries, conscious of its struggle at times and unaware of it at others. But it struggled always, preserved its character always, took part in the advancement of civilization always, discharged what humanity required of it always, resisted those who subjugated and exploited it, until it was granted the chance to reap the fruit of its long and heavy struggle, which has filled history with learning and wisdom, and filled the earth with civilization and culture.

I would not wish the reader to think that I am exaggerating or indulging in excess, or merely yielding to that noble sentiment, the love of homeland; rather, I affirm what I say with complete certainty. The slightest glance at Egypt's long history across these twenty-six centuries establishes, without doubt or ambiguity, that Egypt never once submitted to a colonizer except with reluctance and rebellion whenever she was able to rebel, and with resistance whenever the means of rebellion were not available to her, while all the while taking part in the advancement of civilization, bearing the greatest share in preserving, spreading, and broadcasting culture, seizing every opportunity to discharge her duty toward civilized humanity, whole and undiminished.

It is the right of Egyptians to love their homeland more than they love themselves, and to take pride in its history both when it was free and independent and when it was subjugated and humbled; for in both these states it remained forever useful to humanity, bearing its burden without weariness or tedium, without despair or hopelessness.

And it is as though Egypt had refused to reach the goal she had set for herself except at the hands of her own sons, untainted and uncorrupted, risen from her own depths; for Egypt was granted the

chance to struggle and draw near to the victory she sought — this complete and ample independence — but she would falter each time she drew near the goal, as though she sensed that the hour of triumph had not yet come, because her affair was not yet in the hands of her own sons.

How often she struggled against the Turks and overcame them, or very nearly did; how often she struggled against the English and wrested concessions from them, wearing them down with hardship; yet she always stopped short of the goal — until she removed the foreign crown from her soil, overthrew the throne of Muhammad Ali and his descendants, and secured her sovereignty for her own sons, restoring this sovereignty to the whole people; and once she knew that, were she to achieve success, it would belong wholly to her, free of any foreign hand, near or distant, she pursued her goal unhurried and attained it with ease, and her sons found themselves, one day, having won in the shortest possible time what many generations across long centuries had failed to win.

Two years ago the revolution broke out and brought down from Egypt's throne the last foreign king, and a year ago the revolution declared that Egypt had no need of a throne at all, since it tempts the covetous and fixes upon itself the hopes of adventurers, and that the whole good lay in returning the people's affair to the people; so it abolished the monarchical system and declared the republican system. And this year the nascent revolution, not yet two years old, attained what Egypt had wanted since the most distant of ages: this pure and noble independence, liberating the soil of Egypt from the foreign occupation whose end we had so long wished for and so long struggled to bring about, without attaining anything of what we wished, until the despairing came to believe that humiliation had been permanently inscribed upon Egypt, and until some claimed that the qualities of good and evil had been divided among the regions of the earth, so that each quality of good chooses the region that suits it, going to it, followed in turn by a quality of evil — so that wealth chose Egypt, and humiliation declared that it would follow after it.

How, then, would these claimants and those despairing ones react, were they to see Egypt having kept her wealth, renewing her pursuit of its increase and vitality, and rejecting humiliation, setting in its place a proud and noble self-respect, and a dear and precious glory.

In two years, the army's revolution in Egypt has accomplished grave matters, and brought about mighty events; it has cast off the monarchical system to which it had been subject for tens of centuries, which had dragged upon it much injustice and imposed upon its people humiliation and abasement in various eras of its history, in the Middle Ages among them. And what of a nation that used to buy its kings with money, then seat them upon its throne after preparing them for it, teaching them how to reign, how to oppress, how to wear down their own masters with hardship, and how to repay them good with evil, kindness with ingratitude, and benevolence with wrongdoing, injustice, and tyranny.

Egypt cast off this system in the first of the revolution's two years, securing her internal sovereignty for her own sons, shared with no one, and then turned her attention to her external problems, resolving them with an ease and gentleness to which history can scarcely find an equal.

She first resolved the Sudan question, and did not claim it for herself, for she had never wished to do so on any day, nor did she leave it to the covetous to exploit it and subjugate its sons, but rather took the greatest care to secure its freedom before securing her own, and succeeded in achieving what she had striven for. In a few months she established a national government in Sudan, composed of the Sudanese themselves, managing their own affairs and deciding their own fate, as they themselves wished, not as other covetous and colonizing parties wished. She then turned to the matter specific to herself and the English, growing firm when firmness was called for, and gentle when gentleness was useful, rejecting whatever did not suit her dignity or secure her honor, refusing with the refusal of one who has given up hope, yet accepting with the acceptance of one who still hopes, and arriving in the end, in these recent days, at the noble course: she secured evacuation without gamble or hazard to the future, without denying the past or disowning her glorious historic tradition of firm connection to the civilization of the Mediterranean — that civilization which she herself founded, then broadcast, then helped to develop and kindle, until it became the civilization of all mankind in this modern age.

And throughout all of this she attended to social reform, pursuing it diligently, without slackness or delay; she enacted agrarian reform to abolish the differences between classes, and to fix in the minds of all citizens that they are brothers, among whom there is neither master nor mastered, and that Egypt's wealth was not created for one group to monopolize at the exclusion of another, but was created for all citizens to

enjoy, each according to his effort, his competence, and his diligence in work, without this involving injustice, excess, or tyranny.

In two years, the army's revolution resolved the intractable external problems that beset Egypt; it secured the Sudan for the people of the Sudan, and secured Egypt for the people of Egypt, and laid the foundations of internal social reform.

She achieved all of this in the shortest possible time, after many generations had failed to achieve it across protracted ages, and she achieved all of it with the utmost gentleness and the utmost ease. She shed no blood for its sake, took no life for its sake, exposed no public or private interest, for its sake, to any danger near or distant. So all of this became a splendid example from which the contemporary world will doubtless benefit.

And I said, when our revolution broke out, that it would not benefit Egypt alone, but would benefit many lands around her. And I am happy now to observe that I was neither mistaken nor exaggerating; for our revolution has already benefited Sudan, restoring it to its own people after it had been easy prey for the colonizer, and scarcely had the English agreement gone into effect some days ago than France found herself compelled to restore to Tunisia a great part of her right, granting her internal independence, and she will doubtless grant her complete independence before long.

Nor am I the one inventing this parallel between what has happened in Egypt and what has happened in Tunisia, for the French press itself has acknowledged it; Le Monde, commenting on the Anglo-Egyptian agreement, wrote that this agreement would undoubtedly affect the Tunisian question, and scarcely two days had passed before the Prime Minister of France flew to Tunisia to declare to it that France was restoring its internal independence, in a frankness free of all reservation.

And the Italian press recorded this the same day in its commentary on the French decision; Il Corriere della Sera said that it was to be noted that this decision came in the wake of the Egyptian-British agreement.

And I am entirely confident that the effect of this agreement will extend beyond Tunisia to Morocco, and perhaps this will come to pass even before Al-Jumhuriya publishes this discourse.

For Egypt is, without doubt, the heart of the Arab world, and Egypt's freedom is, without doubt as well, the foundation of the freedom of the whole Arab world, and I am confident, after all of this, that Egypt's complete freedom will not benefit Egyptians and Arabs alone, but will benefit all of civilized humanity.

For Egypt's position between East and West makes her fit to be a source of great good to East and West alike when she is settled and content, and a source of great harm to East and West when she is disturbed and discontented, on condition that Egyptians conduct their own affairs well, with firmness, resolve, gentleness, and determination. And I bear witness that the revolution has conducted Egypt's affairs with firmness, gentleness, and determination, so let us await this promised day joyfully, full of good cheer, that those who live to see it may rejoice in it, and that those who are not granted the chance to see it may be content with it, knowing that they were granted the chance to live until they saw their homeland attain what it wished, and become a homeland dear and noble.