

Rights Are Not Begged For, but Demanded with Firmness and Strength

The Teacher Must Be Honored by the State, and His Right Must Not Be Destroyed — Al-Balagh, 15 June 1950.

Alexandria, the 14th — from Al-Balagh's correspondent — the men of education in the Alexandria district held a grand tea party in honor of His Excellency Dr. Taha Hussein Bey, Minister of Education, on the occasion of his return from abroad, attended by a great many dignitaries, notables, and men of education, the number of those invited reaching close to a thousand.

The party was opened by Mr. Saadallah Hashem Bey, the district's Inspector-General and chairman of the celebration committee, who greeted His Excellency Dr. Taha Hussein Bey and spoke of the feeling of esteem and affection that the teachers hold for him.

He was followed by the professors: Dr. Ibrahim al-Labban, Mahmoud al-Bishbishi, Ali Ezzat al-Ansari, Mahmoud Khalaf, Tawfiq Jabr, Muhammad Mansour, Fadl Ismail, Ibrahim Muhammad Nada, and Dr. Zaki Mubarak.

And after the words of the speakers and poets had come to an end, His Excellency Dr. Taha Hussein Bey rose amid loud cheering and vigorous applause, and delivered an extensive address that was met with full approval, its passages interrupted by applause; and in this address the following occurred:

Dear colleagues:

May God forgive you the offense you have committed against yourselves, and the offense you have committed against other innocent people besides; for I had wished that you would spare yourselves, and spare your guests, this effort and this hardship, but you refused, so may God forgive your insistence, and I thank you for the good you have shown me.

And I assure you that had I known I had already offered something deserving this effort which you have taken upon yourselves, and imposed upon other innocent people besides yourselves — had I known I had

already offered something deserving even a part of this effort — I would not have wished that you spare yourselves and spare other people this trouble; for some who speculate may think me modest, and some who speculate may think I love to work without receiving praise when I work, but I assure you sincerely that I do not believe I have done anything of consequence, and I assure you sincerely that between my own conscience and myself, and between myself and God, I do not believe in the least that I deserve anything of what you say.

Dear colleagues:

I said at the UNESCO conference that Egypt has been foremost in realizing the cultural hopes that people in this age strive for, for she achieves the bond between East and West, taking from the West what she takes and broadcasting it to the East; for Egypt is not selfish, does not love to monopolize the good apart from her neighbors. So tell me, how does Egypt broadcast this good? She broadcasts it only through you, through you who publish throughout the lands of the Arab East: you call for reform, you enjoin what is right, you forbid what is wrong, and you call the whole Arab East to a righteous life.

When people mention Egypt, they mention her wealth, and they mention her strength — sometimes — and her efforts in spreading civilization throughout the East, and they mention her antiquity... her ancient past and her new antiquity. So who is it that raises up for Egypt these generations that realize this wealth? None but the teachers. And who is it that knows Egypt through her ancient past, and makes the world acquainted with that ancient past? None but the teachers.

Trust that Egypt is indebted to you for everything, and whoever says otherwise has given the lie to himself, given the lie to his Lord, and given the lie to his own conscience.

Trust that I do not flatter you nor seek to please you, and it does not concern me whether you are pleased or displeased; I say only what I have said to you now, and what I said of you before, before I was a minister; so when I say that Egypt is indebted to you for everything, I say only what I believe and am at ease with, so do not entertain suspicions of me, do not think that I want you to applaud or to be pleased, for you have praised me with what you suppose I deserve, and with what I believe I do not deserve, and I have praised you with what no one doubts you deserve, so let us say we have exchanged praise — let whoever is pleased with that be pleased, and whoever is displeased be displeased, and let whoever

wishes to die of spite, die of spite.

But let us leave off this exchanging of praise, and let us be, as God loves scholars and teachers to be, modest, praising one another only in due measure, and let us avoid excess, for God does not love those who exceed bounds, and let us speak of the serious matter at hand, for it is more deserving that we speak of it, and that we reflect upon it when we are alone with ourselves, and that we speak of it to one another when we meet.

And the serious matter at hand is that before you stands a people of ancient glory, with a great hope that its ancient glory will return to it, a people that wishes its future to be better than its past and its present, and wishes to reclaim its freedom in the best form freedom can take. And all of this lies in your hands; no one but you can achieve it for Egypt. Let us all reflect upon it and speak of it and cooperate upon it, and let us each pledge to the other that when we rise to bear this trust, we rise to it with courage, fearing nothing and dreading nothing, paying no heed to the stinginess of the stingy, and paying no mind to those who entertain suspicions of us and weigh what they like and what they dislike.

Let us reflect that this people awaits from us a free, dignified life, and let us grant it this life, whatever hardship, effort, and sacrifice that may cost us.

Gentlemen:

He who lacks a thing cannot give it, as I have said, and he who lacks freedom cannot be free; so if you wish to grant Egypt her freedom, be free among yourselves and within yourselves, free between yourselves and the state, and impose your freedom upon those around you, for without this you cannot raise up free generations, nor restore an ancient glory. Pay no heed to the anger of the angry, nor to the displeasure of the displeased, and I am the first to call upon you to pay no heed to me, should I grow angry for any cause but God's; for I am not your minister except insofar as I counsel you well, and I am, as Minister of Education, only a colleague of the teachers, chosen from among them this time to speak in their name, drawing his freedom and his strength from their freedom.

Discharge the rights of the pupils that are incumbent upon you, and be honorable toward yourselves, so that dignity may spread among the pupils, and counsel sincerely in private and in public, then demand your

own rights, and accept no diminishing of them, whatever the circumstances may be.

They mention Egypt's need for an army; but there can be no army if there is no teacher raising up an educated, enlightened nation for a valiant army to defend. They mention Egypt's need for agriculture, for industry, for commerce, for irrigation, and whatever else you wish of these utilities — agriculture exists only once it is taught in the schools, and industry exists only once it is taught in the schools, and were it not for the engineers you graduate in agriculture, and the professors you graduate in commerce, in the various walks of life, this life would not exist at all.

Everything in the life of the people issues from you, and ought to return to you; you are the first ones responsible for Egypt, in her present and in her future. Weigh this well within yourselves, discharge the duties this imposes upon you, and demand of the government and the people that they discharge toward you the duties this imposes upon them...

Gentlemen:

Rights are not begged for; they are demanded with firmness, strength, and seriousness, and it is not fitting for the holder of a right to be lenient or to soften, but rather he must demand it with conviction, with eagerness, and with readiness to defend it, whatever that may cost him. You have rights that must be discharged to you, and even if we have discharged but a few of them, you have, deep within the government and deep within the people, much that has not yet been discharged to you; so be patient, and endure patiently, and stand firm together, and fear God, that you may prosper, and trust that a Minister of Education — whoever he may be — cannot succeed unless he feels your support, and speaks in your name in the Council of Ministers and in Parliament; so be helpers to the minister, on condition that you all discharge toward the people what the people awaits from us.

And among the first of these rights that the teacher ought to hold dear is that he should be honored by the state, that his dignity should not be squandered, nor his right destroyed; so hold fast to this dignity, and remember that if you do not hold fast to it, no one else will hold fast to it for you — the rights of the pupils are drawn from your own regard for your rights.

For you are the model that stamps dignity, pride, and the readiness to defend the homeland, when disasters come, upon the souls of the pupils.

And we have managed, in these days — I will not say to discharge your rights to you, but to make people feel that you have rights; so strive that we may pass from this stage to another stage — from the stage of making people feel it, to the stage of discharging it.

But from me, to you all, my most sincere and heartfelt thanks for what you have offered in verse and in prose, and to your speakers — I give my word — that I shall be as they wish, and to your poet, that I shall neither rest nor let myself rest until he is satisfied, and to the poet of al-Azhar, that I shall not forget what he has asked of me.

I offer you my pure thanks, and my sincere greeting, but I have a right over you that you must discharge: that you be with me when seriousness is called for in the affairs of teachers, pupils, and learning.

Gentlemen, let this gathering, which you have imposed upon yourselves and upon innocent people whom you have kept from their duties, be a timely opportunity for us to pledge to one another, moved by duty and by right, whatever hardship and effort that may cost us; and trust that the whole government is with you, and though we have reached a point that does not yet satisfy all our rights, know that all the ministers believe what I believe, and say what I say.

And His Majesty the King protects the right as a right, and defends the duty as a duty; he wishes all Egyptians to be faithful to their duties, to hold fast to their rights, and to live with dignity; for he is intent on remaining a noble king to a noble people in a noble homeland; so be reassured, and spread reassurance around you, and should you feel that something calls for taking action, we shall enter the battle together; but we shall need nothing of the sort, so long as Farouk watches over Egypt, and Mustafa al-Nahas is head of the government.