More Paradoxes!!

Al-Jumhuriya, 10 November 1957.

As for the first, I am truly astonished at it, yet I am unable to understand it, and I would wish that the government might kindly make this understanding easier for me and for many other people. There is no Egyptian who has not been distressed by this tragic catastrophe that occurred some days ago, which killed upward of twenty citizens, and displaced tens of others — I do not know whether all of them have found shelter to take refuge in, or have not found one even now. And there is no Egyptian who is not most eager to know who bears the sin of this catastrophe; for the owner of the building is not alone responsible, since he lives in a civilized homeland that has its systems and its laws, its courts and its police, and its government, which knows the people's right over it and its own right over the people.

And all of this requires that people not be allowed to erect whatever buildings and structures they wish, except in accordance with systems and laws, within known limits and imposed restrictions. It has been said that the government suspended six of the engineers believed to have been negligent in overseeing the construction of the building that collapsed some days ago; but I have seen some engineers, whom this decision did not touch either closely or distantly, denying most strongly and most forcefully that any responsibility, light or heavy, should fall upon these engineers; for the General Administration of Planning does not possess the authority to oversee the construction of buildings, but only the power to permit the construction of these buildings within certain limits and particular conditions, and the power to refuse this permission if these restrictions and conditions are not observed; and then, as the engineers told me, it does not possess the power to punish those who contravene its order and erect buildings without its permission, but merely draws up reports against them that avail neither them nor the residents of these buildings anything. And I want to know, and I want people to know, whether what the engineers told me is true or not. For if it is true, then on what grounds were these men who were suspended, suspended? Or why is their punishment sought, and for what offense are they being investigated? And if this is not true, then the government has been correct in what it has done so far, but how can some engineers permit themselves to deny what the government has done, and ask me to express their thoughts and make them public so that

they reach the responsible officials, and so that the people may know that none of them has wronged them, nor shared in the sin of this catastrophe either closely or distantly?! And I believe it is the Egyptians' right to have this matter set in its proper place, and to have those who shared in this catastrophe clearly identified, and to know that these participants will be seized for their sin most severely, and punished for it most harshly.

And if the laws now in force do not allow the Planning Administration to carry out its duties as they ought to be carried out, then the government and parliament have no choice but one of two things: either they legislate these laws at once, with the utmost possible speed, or they abolish the Planning Administration altogether and leave the matter of building and demolition to anarchy, so that people do whatever they wish, bearing the consequences of their own actions — bearing them between themselves and their own souls, before God and before their own consciences, not before a state that has set no system for this matter known to people, so that they might either comply with it or contravene it and be punished for that contravention. I do not conceal that I had hoped and expected that some of our deputies would question this matter, so that we might hear from the minister responsible, whoever he may be, something to clear up the obscurity, dispel the darkness, and explain to Egyptians the realities of this responsibility, and the matter of those who are to be questioned over it and held to it.

The engineers have asked me to express their thoughts and to be fair to them on my own account; for they judged that I had wronged them in what I wrote some days ago about this catastrophe.

And I hope that I have indeed been fair to them on my own account; as for whether the government, the parliament, and the authority that suspended some of them will be fair to them, that is a matter in which I can neither harm nor benefit them.

And second: I do not know whether this news distressed people or delighted them, though I know that many newspapers made light of it and turned it into a subject for publicity — it is the story of our astronomical observatory, which sees the world's observatories keeping vigil while people sleep, and sees everyone's preoccupation with these things that Soviet Russia sends up to circle the earth, not dozens of times but hundreds of them, and to pass over Egypt, and over Cairo in particular, time and again — only to announce, naively and with ease, that it did not see anything of these "planets," if they may be so called, and then to

announce once more that had it said it had seen these planets, the civilized world would have laughed at it, and then to announce yet again this splendid, dreadful piece of news: that it did not see this planet when it passed over Cairo on a Friday, because the staff were on official holiday.

It does not concern me whether our observatory sees this planet or does not see it; what concerns me is that there is an observatory in Egypt, established many long years ago, that Egypt lives in the second half of the twentieth century, and that her observatory has still not been prepared to record a phenomenon such as this, which has stirred the whole world into the most violent and most intense agitation. And Russia has since sent up a second planet, larger than the first, but our observatory did not see it either, just as it did not see the planet that preceded it. The meaning of this is that the world's observatories can see and are sensitive, while ours is blind and cannot feel.

Readers are free to reflect on this as they wish, but the higher authority that oversees this observatory must do something more than reflect, so that our observatory may feel and may see.

And third: nothing is less absurd than this, nor more deserving of mocking astonishment, than the story of that thing which fell one day, or one night, in Alexandria, and was then shown to some of our scholars, who hastened, with remarkable speed, to pronounce it a fragment of the Russian planet and the rocket that propelled it into the sky. And the strangest thing I have heard is that scholars should rush so quickly to judgment of this kind, laughing, and making people laugh, when it turns out to be a fragment of something else, something far closer to the earth, something that grows in Egypt, and on the Alexandria road in particular, which travelers going and coming see, and which those passing by, going and returning in the darkness of night, know well.

And the worst thing in this story is that scholars should rush, and that newspapers should rush to publish what the scholars said, and I only hope that the news agencies will not rush to broadcast it outside Egypt, so that Egyptians are not the only ones laughing, but that whoever reads this news in the East or in the West laughs along with them.

How many laughable things there are in Egypt — yet it is laughter that resembles weeping!!

As for the fourth, it is pure comedy, with no harm behind it and none ahead of it either: for we read in the newspapers of East and West that the Russians alone are the ones who understand what their planets transmit in the way of symbols and signals, and that the Americans and the Europeans exert great effort to understand these symbols and signals, but their efforts come to nothing, and they, like us, are waiting for Soviet Russia one day to disclose the meaning of these symbols and signals.

As for the Ministry of Guidance in Egypt, it has understood these symbols with an understanding that can only be described as truly splendid, opening before us very wide horizons of hope; for it has outstripped the Americans, outstripped Europe, outstripped the whole world, and has rendered useless the efforts of Soviet Russia, understanding from her artificial planet some part of what it is saying.

Read, if you wish, part of the announcement that the Ministry of Guidance published in the newspapers, to alert people that its magazine had appeared, or wished to appear.

There you will find this sentence: "The artificial moon — what has it done?! It said: beep, beep, beep," and its translation is: "Send me the November issue of the magazine on the wing of cosmic rays."

Is it not only right that we should all congratulate the Ministry of Guidance and its splendid magazine for this marvelous feat, which has lifted the obscurity, removed the doubt, and shown the Russian scientists that there are people in Egypt who not only understand them, but understand their artificial planets before all other people? And it is now our right to ask the Ministry of Guidance, with our thanks, to inform us who reads the magazine aboard the first and second artificial planets, since it has doubtless sent it there on the wing of cosmic rays. And who knows — perhaps in the next issue we shall read an article bringing us symbols and signals, or in pure classical Arabic, confirming the breadth of this magazine's readership on that planet which circles on, neither wearied nor fatigued!