Allies ...

Al-Balagh, 14 March 1946.

Our Prime Minister is a tactful man, there is no doubt of it; the Egyptians have tested his tact for more than a quarter of a century now — since he first took part in government as a minister, and since he first dominated the government as Prime Minister, indeed since he was a member of the Wafd, and since he was separated from the Wafd, indeed since he allied himself with the allied and quarreled with the quarrelsome, indeed since he regarded himself as a leader with no leader above him, and since he regarded himself as a mere soldier serving under the leadership of this leader or that.

Our Prime Minister is a tactful man, there is no doubt of it; the Egyptians have tested his tact through all these phases, and tasted the bitterness of this tact whenever he held power or shared in it, and tasted the sweetness of this tact whenever he was removed from power and sat in that observation post of his at the Muhammad Ali Club, waiting for events before they occurred, interpreting them to his companions after they had occurred, and sending to Al-Ahram, from time to time, a word both sweet and bitter — sweet in appearance, concealing anguish beneath — opposing the government then in office, and giving it lessons now in politics, now in social affairs, now in economics, now in budget management, and then waiting to see what echo this sweet-bitter word of his would produce in the government, and what echo in the circles of finance and business, and what echo in the popular political circles. And perhaps he waited too to see what echo it would produce in foreign political circles generally, and in British circles particularly.

And throughout all this he rubs his hands together, and parts his lips, and casts out words here and there that his tongue utters freely while his heart doubts them; for he is a tactful man who always hints and rarely states outright.

Our Prime Minister is a tactful man, there is no doubt of it; the Egyptians came to know his tact when he took part in forming the front that leapt into power in this fortunate era, taking part in it silently, saying nothing, restless, never still, forever in motion, never loving stillness; and the Egyptians came to know his tact when he raised Makram Pasha to the heavens after his departure from power, his removal from the Wafd, and his exclusion from Parliament.

He raised him to the heavens and stood there perplexed, not knowing in which star among the stars to find him a resting place and a station; for he saw all the stars as too small by comparison with the great glory Makram Pasha had won when he parted from the Wafd, and when he turned against the Wafd's leader. And Sidqi Pasha — so it would seem — recalled that famous verse which primary-school pupils have memorized in every generation since primary schools first existed:

Would that the stars drew near me, that I might string them into necklaces of praise, for my own words do not satisfy me for you.

And people reach youth, and reach middle age, and advance into old age, and arrive at senility, and forget a great many things, but they retain a few memories from childhood that float upon their consciousness and run readily off the tips of their tongues; for learning in childhood is like an inscription carved in stone, as the teachers tell their pupils, also in the primary schools. And so Sidqi Pasha — so it would seem — recalled this verse every time Makram Pasha made some new stir.

Yet Sidqi Pasha did not, at that time, believe in Makram Pasha; for Sidqi Pasha believes in no one, and trusts no one, but believes only in himself and for himself alone. Everything and everyone, to Sidqi Pasha, is a means and never an end — a means, no more and no less — to be made use of as long as use can be made of it, and then set aside once setting it aside becomes possible.

For the great Makram Pasha was, to the tactful Sidqi Pasha, a means, no more and no less, and Makram Pasha was enchanted by the praise of this tactful man. And what man is not enchanted by Sidqi Pasha's praise, when he has lost the praise of the multitudes? And who among men is not elated by the commendation that reaches him from the Muhammad Ali Club, when he has missed the commendation that used to reach him from the circles of the people?

Sidqi Pasha bestowed the praise, and Makram Pasha received it; and one of the two men would smile in mockery, while the other would smile in pride — until, when this fortunate era began and Makram leapt to the Ministry of Finance, storming and raging and calling for combat and confrontation, Sidqi Pasha was behind him, pushing him forward and lifting him up, counting against him every word he said and tallying against him every deed he did, lying in wait for him at every turn and seizing every opportunity through him — while at the very same time

lavishing upon him the finest praise and the choicest flattery, so that Makram Pasha became a great statesman and a formidable financier. Sidqi Pasha might differ with him on this or that point of economic doctrine, or this or that art of finance, but he never denied Makram Pasha's skill in politics, his trial by fire in patriotism, or his boldness in great undertakings.

Sidqi Pasha would display contentment while concealing displeasure, proclaim praise while whispering criticism, and Makram Pasha would press forward and forward again, for nothing ever drove Makram Pasha toward great undertakings quite so much as praise, wherever it came from.

And Makram Pasha was a necessary man, imposed by circumstance and required by life itself; for al-Nokrashi Pasha was Prime Minister, and al-Nokrashi Pasha had, inevitably, to resign, and the burdens of governance had, inevitably, to be made bitter for him — and what man was more capable of this than Makram Pasha, the dissenting partner, the ever-contrary colleague? And so let Sidqi Pasha praise him — and he did praise him; and let Makram Pasha press forward — and he did press forward; and let al-Nokrashi Pasha suffer — and he did suffer.

And perhaps readers have noticed this strange coincidence that always seemed to arise between Makram Pasha's policy within the ministry and Sidqi Pasha's policy outside it. Makram Pasha denounced al-Nokrashi Pasha's slowness in demanding negotiations, and Sidqi Pasha denounced this same slowness in Al-Ahram, calling it a policy of buying time; and when Makram Pasha grew impatient with this slowness, and resigned in order to compel al-Nokrashi Pasha to hasten the request for negotiations, Sidqi Pasha was there to support and back him, both outside what was then called the political committee and inside what was then called the political committee too, until al-Nokrashi Pasha was overcome and requested negotiations against his own will. And Makram Pasha was troubled by the British reply to the Egyptian memorandum, seeing in it restrictions he neither liked nor accepted, and wishing these restrictions removed.

And Sidqi Pasha expressed much the same view in Al-Ahram, until people began to ask themselves about this strange coincidence between the two great men in matters of finance, politics, and economics. The truth is that Sidqi Pasha had two brilliant pupils: one was Makram Pasha, brilliant in politics, economics, and finance; the other was al-Nokrashi

Pasha, brilliant in resolve and determination, in discipline and control, and in unleashing the police upon the souls of young men to extinguish them, upon the blood of young men to spill it, upon the heads of young men to crush them, and upon the limbs of young men to shatter them — all in the preservation of security and the maintenance of order, always, and out of devotion to Egypt and the Egyptians, in any case.

And the great master would look upon his two great pupils with a glance of affection and tenderness, full of playfulness and teasing, egging one on against the other, stirring one up against the other, so as to laugh at them both, and so that others too might laugh at them both, just as a kind father does when he teases his dutiful, devoted sons.

And no sooner had our former Foreign Minister said what he said in London about the Security Council — whether it was competent to consider the events of Egypt and the Arab East or not — than the two great men erupted: the master erupted at the Muhammad Ali Club, in Al-Ahram, and in the Chamber of Deputies; and the pupil erupted in his own club and his own newspaper and within the ministry itself, and then resigned; and the second great pupil found himself caught between his master Sidqi Pasha's wit and his colleague Makram Pasha's banter, and whatever respect and loyalty he owed his other colleague Badawi Pasha, at least during the latter's absence.

And so the brilliant master continued to toy with his two brilliant pupils, and whenever he toyed with them he was never content merely to amuse himself, but recorded events, drew conclusions, and waited for the turning of the wheel — until the ninth of February came, when the flood reached its crest, when the belt passed beyond the two breasts, when the vessel overflowed, and the Muhammad Ali Club agreed unanimously that al-Nokrashi Pasha's ministry no longer had any place in government. Scarcely had the week ended before Makram Pasha had resigned, before the entire ministry had collapsed completely, and before the great master had taken his seat upon his old chair, seizing in his two strong hands both the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Interior.

As for the premiership itself, he placed it in his heart and in his head, and in every part of his great person; and from that day forward the master set about teaching his two pupils how resolve and determination are made, how discipline and control are made, how the preservation of security and the maintenance of order are made, and how the management of finance and the reform of the economy are made — while

the two pupils watched, and profited, and prepared themselves for a day that might come, after a longer or shorter wait, when they would profit from the lessons now being given to them.

And in truth, the events that brought down al-Nokrashi Pasha's ministry are quite trivial compared to the events that keep Sidqi Pasha firmly in power, granting him whatever victory and support he wants, and whatever he does not want besides. Sidqi Pasha has proved a brilliant master in the most precise and splendid sense of the word, for he did not share power with al-Nokrashi Pasha, not wishing to bear his burdens along with his own, nor wishing to share in the responsibility for the ninth of February — for what has happened, and is happening, and will happen of such responsibilities is quite enough for him alone; nor did he share power with Makram Pasha, not wishing vexation to reach him from outside the ministry — for had he shared power with Makram Pasha, Makram Pasha would have resigned on the twenty-first of February, and would have resigned after the Alexandria events, and would have resigned the day before yesterday when the matter of the Security Council was raised in the Chamber of Deputies. And so Sidqi Pasha has managed to spare his ministry three crises in less than a month. Compare him, then, to his simple pupil al-Nokrashi Pasha.

And perhaps Sidqi Pasha's stance on this Security Council affair was among the most splendid and admirable of all his stances; for he had turned the world upside down, together with Makram Pasha, in protest against our former Foreign Minister, and yet he took up the burdens of government before the matter was settled, and our former Foreign Minister returned to Egypt before the matter was settled either, and Sidqi Pasha found himself between two men, each deserving of his attention, and each compelling him to reserve and self-preservation.

And for this reason Sidqi Pasha was occupied on Tuesday and did not attend the Chamber of Deputies; and prime ministers may occupy themselves whenever they wish, and free themselves whenever they wish; and so Sidqi Pasha was occupied, indeed, on Tuesday, and left this matter to our master, friend to both sides, or friend to all three parties, the acting Foreign Minister. And the master passed clean through this affair as an arrow passes clean through its target: he questioned Badawi Pasha, received his explanation from him, presented it to the Chamber of Deputies, and the Chamber was satisfied, and thanked the former minister, and Makram Pasha was displeased — but was forced, utterly forced, into silence; and then he went out and wrote a letter to Sidqi

Pasha, which Sidqi Pasha received smiling and tucked away into one of his drawers, and the matter ended there.

Do you see these friends who are enemies?! Do you see these allies who are rivals?! Do you see these men who cooperate before the public and betray one another behind the curtain?! Do you see these men who established this fortunate era and then set about scrambling, with all the strength and reach they possess, for whatever power and authority it holds?! They will negotiate with the British tomorrow or the day after, to wrest from them full rights to complete evacuation and the unity of the Nile Valley.

They will go to the negotiations united in appearance, divided in reality — each of them seizing his opportunities, each of them lying in wait at every turn, each of them watching his own partners, each of them fearful of his own partners; and they — in this splendid condition of concord that conceals discord, of cooperation that conceals mutual betrayal — will negotiate with the English to wrest from them Egypt's rights to evacuation and the unity of the Nile Valley!

God forgive them — would it not be better if they began by negotiating among themselves, to wrest from themselves, for the Egyptian people, its right to be free and dignified, governing itself by itself and for itself, rather than being governed by a small, insignificant handful who display concord while concealing discord, and who make people laugh — not only at themselves, but at themselves and at their homeland together?

But that is another story.