Season

Al-Ahram, 23 September 1949.

1 This summer wishes to draw to its close, and is minded to depart with its scorching heat, its wearying warmth, and its lethargy that holds souls back from activity, keeps bodies from work, and imposes upon the people of Egypt a dull, listless life, which they live as best they can rather than as they wish. And this autumn wishes to arrive with its sweet breeze, which restores life to souls and activity to bodies, which makes minds love to think and hearts love to feel, and which allows people to smile upon life, and to welcome it joyfully, indeed rejoicing in it, disposing of it according to their needs and their will, and according to their benefit and their purposes. And when summer departs and autumn arrives, boys and young people prepare to make their way to schools and to attend lessons in whatever institutions of learning they study at, and families prepare for what the start of the academic year requires: spending money so that pupils and students may be free to study and to learn, and spending effort to earn this money and manage it, and to provide what pupils and students need of equipment, clothing, and food, so that their leisure for study may be fruitful and their application to it productive.

2 And when summer departs and autumn arrives, professors and teachers prepare to make their way to schools and institutes, where they meet these rising generations, handing down to them the heritage of past generations, and preparing them to face life with diligence and toil, with confidence and hope, and with insight, experience, and the capacity to overcome hardships and endure misfortunes.

3 When summer departs and autumn arrives, the past prepares to hand down its heritage to the future, the nation prepares to renew itself, and the homeland prepares to welcome a new spring in which life spreads, confidence is diffused, and hopes smile.

4 So these final days of September, and these first days of October, are the days of that splendid season in the life of the nation and the homeland together. Days of the season in which hopes are fastened and wishes are attached, and in which the new generation prepares to receive the torch of civilization from the old generation, as a trust that ought not merely be preserved as it is, but ought rather to flourish, to grow, to increase, and to gain in splendor, beauty, brilliance, and radiance. It is the nation's right to rejoice in these days, and to receive them with joyful

hearts, cheerful souls, and consciences reassured that it is capable of survival, growth, and an immortality untouched by languor or stagnation. Thus do I picture these final days of September and these first days of October. And thus ought all Egyptians to picture them. But I look, and I see these days arriving pale and gloomy, weighed down with care and bowed under sorrow; because we do not grant knowledge its due, nor assess progress at its true worth, but welcome the season of education just as we welcome any other season of daily life, granting it none of the contentment and rejoicing it deserves, because we grant it none of the attention and esteem it deserves. For the great majority of our boys and young people pay no heed to this season, because they have no part in it — ignorance and incapacity have come between them and the schools, the institutes, and the universities, so that they face a coarse, animal life, with no gentleness or softness in it, a life that touches their bodies but never touches their hearts or their minds, a life resembling the life of the livestock they herd and the plants of the earth they tend. The education season concerns them neither near nor far. And because the small minority of our boys and young people who do approach this season wish to rejoice in it, it grieves them instead; they wish to receive it with joy and gladness, but it receives them with care, sorrow, gloom, and distress. The schools and institutes turn them away from their doors, being too cramped to hold them.

5 Some of them wish to learn, but the schools' narrowness turns them back to ignorance. Some of them wish to advance further in education, but the institutes' narrowness forces them to stop wherever their course has brought them. Some of them aspire to a rising reputation and an eminent standing, but the schools' and institutes' narrowness turns them back to languor and stagnation, and to contentment with whatever portion of this life has been allotted them — a life that avails those who hold it nothing. And families share with their sons this searing care, and bear with them other searing cares besides, for not everyone is able to provide his boys and young people with the money they need to purchase learning wherever it is sold, or to receive it free of charge, if their marks allow them to receive it so.

6 So this season, which ought by right to be a feast filled with joy, delight, contentment, and hope, is received by our boys and young people with gloomy souls and anxious hearts, and received by fathers and mothers with grievous sorrow and heavy care, and received by the Ministry of Education with this barren activity that avails neither it nor

the people anything at all. It can be likened to nothing but a train that fills the air around it with noise, clamor, whistling, and groaning, yet does not advance a single span forward, but merely churns in place, becoming a source of disturbance and annoyance and nothing else.

7 These countless thousands of young people who have obtained the secondary certificate find no places in the universities, and these countless thousands of boys who have obtained the primary certificate find no places in the secondary schools. And the men of education at the Ministry arrive at their offices and return to their homes, issuing orders and prohibitions all the while, undoing and redoing all the while, quarreling among themselves and then reconciling, disagreeing and then coming into accord. And the boys and young people find no places in the schools or the universities. And suppose they found places, and settled into them, and prepared themselves for study, and their fathers and mothers were set at ease — still the homeland will not be at ease, nor ought it to be; for these boys and young people will not learn as they ought to learn, since a grave obstacle, grave in every respect, stands between them and that: namely, that the teacher's breast is not open to teaching, his mind is not free for learning, his energy is not full for study, and his heart is not wholly given to his students and pupils. He is distracted from all of this by having a family that ought to live in peace and security, for whom the means of a peaceful, secure life have not been provided. He is distracted from it by having daughters and sons who wish to be educated, yet the means have been cut off from them. They have not won the marks that exempt them from school fees, nor has their father won the salary that would let him pay those fees on their behalf — indeed he has not even won the salary that would let him feed them, clothe them, and protect them from the scourges of illness, misery, and hunger. So he approaches this season disliking it, chafing at it, resentful of it. And if the teacher approaches teaching with dislike, expect no good from him. And if you expect no good from the teacher, expect no good from his pupils. And if you expect no good from teachers and the taught alike, have no doubt that the nation is squandering its generations, scattering its heritage, and condemning itself to stagnation and abasement.

8 And the men of education at the Ministry arrive at their office when morning comes and return to their homes when evening falls, issuing orders and prohibitions all the while, quarreling and reconciling, disagreeing and coming into accord, availing neither themselves nor the

people anything at all. Had the Ministry of Education assessed education at its true worth, and recognized what attention and care the people's future deserves, teachers and the taught would have received this great national season with hearts filled with contentment, souls filled with delight, consciences filled with reassurance, and a fruitful energy proclaiming to the people that its future will be better than its past, that its sons will be better than their fathers, and that the homeland will grow, with the passage of time, in strength, pride, progress, and flourishing.

9 The news of Egypt reaches me here, in this remote, cut-off village where I have taken shelter upon one of the peaks of the Alps, and it fills my soul with sorrow and gloom, and tears at my heart with anguish and grief. The Minister of Education is occupied with protecting tradition rather than protecting education, and under-secretaries quarrel among themselves over which of them shall have the decisive word and the obeyed command, while boys and young people find no places in the schools, and universities and teachers find nothing to spend, crying out their complaint and finding no one to hear it. And the coalition parties quarrel over the division of constituencies, and over whether the Chamber of Deputies' term should be short or long.

10 Let the Prime Minister believe me — he whom I know to possess genuine patriotism and true sincerity — that his nation faces a danger more terrible than any disagreement among the parties after their coalition, and that this danger arises from the Ministry of Education's incapacity to rise to the attention, care, and solemnity that education deserves. It will avail Egypt nothing that girls should not travel to Europe, it will avail Egypt nothing that lessons in music and rhythmic dance should be abolished in the schools, it will avail Egypt nothing that the word of this under-secretary or that should be carried out, and it will avail Egypt nothing that the parties should unite or divide, if its rising generations are exposed to this sweeping evil, driven toward ignorance from the very place where they sought knowledge.

11 Let the Prime Minister and his coalition colleagues believe me that it is a right binding upon them all to grant education, teachers, and the taught some share of their attention and their solemn concern. None among them would be content, were he left alone with himself, that Egypt should be an easy morsel for every hungry nation among the colonizing powers. And if we continue to neglect the affairs of education in the manner we have continued thus far, Egypt will have no escape from this very fate.

12 May God preserve Egypt from every harm, spare her the evil of calamities, and grant her educational seasons in which the smile prevails over the frown.