On the Sudan

Al-Balagh, 18 April 1946.

1 It is the right of the Egyptian and English negotiators who will begin their negotiations in a few days, and who will prepare the ground for them from today, when they meet at the dinner table in the British Embassy — it is the right of these negotiators to rejoice with the fullest rejoicing; for the Governor-General of the Sudan has lifted from their shoulders a heavy burden, and has relieved them of a grave problem, and has assured them that their negotiations will be easy and brief, requiring no give-and-take, and no argument or dispute; for the Governor of the Sudan has resolved the question of the Sudan before the negotiations have even begun, and God has spared the Egyptians and the English the trouble of inquiry and study, and the hardship of investigation and scrutiny.

2 The Egyptians and the Sudanese have read the Governor-General's address to the Advisory Council, and the English have read it too, and all have learned that the Governor-General has decided that the question of the Sudan shall not be settled by any opinion until our Sudanese brethren have been consulted by constitutional means. He has likewise decided that no more than twenty years will pass before the Sudan becomes an independent state, choosing the destiny it wishes for itself, and managing all its own affairs, assisted in this by certain experts who are not themselves Sudanese. This means that the Sudan will not be a subject for fruitful negotiation on this occasion, unless the purpose of these negotiations is to persuade the Egyptian delegation of this British opinion, which on the one hand makes a referendum obligatory, and on the other sets a term for the Sudan's complete independence.

3 We must be fair to the Governor-General of the Sudan, for he does not say these things of his own accord; he relies, on the one hand, on the statements of Mr. Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, and relies, on the other, on the Egyptian memorandum sent by al-Nokrashi Pasha to the British government, in which he recorded the Egyptian government's view that the wishes of the Sudanese should be consulted in determining the Sudan's fate.

4 The Governor-General thus expresses the view of the two governments he represents in his office; but what matters is to know to what degree the view of these two governments expresses the

inclinations of the Egyptians and the Sudanese, and what they themselves believe among themselves. All the Egyptians denounced al-Nokrashi Pasha's government for the weakness of its memorandum in whole and in detail, and faulted it for the manner in which it presented the question of the Sudan in that memorandum; and the Egyptian delegation withdrew, in keeping with this memorandum, which it regarded as a great national catastrophe.

5 There is no doubt that the Egyptians had approved their delegation in what it demanded, but al-Nokrashi Pasha paid no heed to the Egyptian nation's opposition, nor to the official delegation's protest; for he believed that Divine Providence had laid upon him the burdens of government, and had entrusted to him Egypt and the Sudan, so that his memorandum was, in effect, a revelation from this Divine Providence which could not rightly be criticized, nor ought it to be a subject of objection — for who indeed could object to what Divine Providence cast into the heart of its chosen champion, His Excellency Mahmoud Fahmy al-Nokrashi Pasha?

6 Be that as it may, al-Nokrashi Pasha did record for his government this absurd theory, the theory of the referendum, and he did not record it by chance, but prepared the ground for it with long and continuous groundwork; for he sent an envoy to London, just as President Roosevelt used to send envoys to the capitals of the great powers, and his envoy spread in London talk that people have not yet forgotten, nor have they forgotten the indignation it stirred; and among what he spread in this talk was an invitation to this absurd innovation — the innovation of the referendum.

7 And although the Egyptians — for all their differences — had warned of the danger of this innovation and cautioned the government against its harm, al-Nokrashi Pasha did not wish to take heed or to be cautious, but insisted upon this innovation most insistently; for, as I have said, it had been a revelation cast by Divine Providence into his great heart.

8 It is not strange that al-Nokrashi Pasha recorded this innovation in his memorandum; what is strange is that the English, when they replied to al-Nokrashi Pasha's memorandum, paid no heed to his having recorded this innovation, and did not wish to record it again in their own memorandum, but merely took note — as they put it — that the Egyptian government wished to speak on the matter of the Sudan. This means that

al-Nokrashi Pasha had satisfied the English before the negotiations even began, and had given them, of the Sudan question, what they wished to take, and what they had not reckoned they would be able to take had the Egyptians been resolute in their affairs, and entrusted the conduct of their policy toward the English to those who know how to stand firm against the English, and know how to extract their rights from them. Al-Nokrashi Pasha gave them what they wished to take of the Sudan question, thus preparing the ground for the story of the referendum, then recorded this story in his memorandum, and the English took note of this recording, and conveyed that to al-Nokrashi Pasha, who accepted it and was reassured by it.

9 It would have been reasonable, after al-Nokrashi Pasha's ministry resigned and Sidqi Pasha — may God grant him health — rose to the burdens of government, for the new government to recall the previous government's memorandum, and to change the basis of the negotiations, especially since Sidqi Pasha had denounced this memorandum, and denounced the reply to it. He declared as much in his speeches, and recorded as much in the articles he published in the newspapers; but he did not recall the memorandum, nor did he change the basis of the negotiations, and he declared, just as al-Nokrashi Pasha had declared before him, that he would enter the negotiations free of every constraint.

10 Those who warned him cautioned that such declarations avail nothing with the English so long as there remain written memoranda that bind the freedom of the negotiations; but he paid no heed to this, and gave it no attention. And when the Egyptian delegation was asked to take part in the negotiations, it refused to take part unless the Egyptian government wrote to Great Britain a memorandum freeing itself from al-Nokrashi Pasha's memorandum and the reply to it. Sidqi Pasha did not accept this demand, nor did he wish to discuss it, but contented himself with what he himself had declared, and with what al-Nokrashi Pasha had declared before him to the Egyptians — that the negotiations would be free of every constraint.

11 The official delegation for the negotiations was then formed, and afterward the British Foreign Secretary declared his opinion on the Sudan, an opinion matching that of the Governor-General; and the newspapers rose up, denouncing and protesting, but Sidqi Pasha said nothing — he did not rise up, did not denounce, did not protest, but chose silence and immersed himself in it. The journalists asked our teacher the Foreign Minister his opinion of this declaration, and he answered that he

was studying it, and the outcome of his study is not known to this day.

12 The Egyptians have read that the British ambassador traveled to Wadi Halfa, met there with the Governor-General of the Sudan, and then returned to Cairo. And here we are today reading the Governor-General's address delivered to the Advisory Council, and his opinion on the fate of the Sudan; and it seems most likely that he had informed the British ambassador of this opinion before making it public, and most likely that the British ambassador had authorized him to make it public — and the British ambassador does not represent his government in Egypt alone, but is a member of the British delegation to the negotiations.

13 I do not think I need to delve deeply into this subject; it is enough to say: I would have wished, as all the Egyptians would have wished, that the Governor-General had not delivered this address of his after meeting with the ambassador.

14 Yet there is a question the Egyptians ought to put to Sidqi Pasha first, and to themselves second: did the Governor-General consult the head of our Egyptian ministry regarding this address of his before delivering it? For the Governor-General does not represent the British alone, but represents the Egyptians as well; he is an Egyptian official appointed by Egyptian royal decree, and in all his acts he ought to proceed from the will and opinion of the two governments, not from the will or opinion of one government alone. It is one of two things: either the Governor-General proceeded from the opinion of the Egyptian government when he said what he said — in which case the Egyptian government's opinion on the question of the Sudan has become known, and it is wholly at odds with the unity of the Nile Valley, upon which the Egyptians and the Sudanese are agreed, and I am confident that the Egyptian government has not yet declared its opinion, nor departed from the Egyptians' consensus. Or else — and this is the second possibility — the Governor-General did not consult the Egyptian government and did not proceed from its opinion, but consulted the British government instead, and relied on al-Nokrashi Pasha's memorandum after understanding it as he wished to understand it, and interpreting it in the manner that suited his own inclination.

15 What, then, is the penalty for the high official who acts contrary to the orders of those who appointed him, who creates difficulties for them, and stirs up problems before them? His penalty is quite simple: he ought to resign, or be dismissed. But the Governor-General of the Sudan

will not resign, nor will he be dismissed; for he does not represent Sidqi Pasha alone, but represents Mr. Bevin as well. And Mr. Bevin is the British Foreign Secretary, and Great Britain has vast armies in Egypt and the Sudan, still garrisoned in Cairo, Alexandria, Khartoum, and other cities.

16 Sidqi Pasha is weak by comparison with Mr. Bevin, and for this reason he is unable to dismiss the Governor-General, or to compel him to resign. And the strange thing, for all that, is that we are about to begin negotiations free of every constraint, founded on the basis of equality between equals.

17 Do the Egyptians not see in all this a bitter comedy that fills hearts with sorrow and pain, and traces upon the lips a smile that a frown would serve better than?!

18 Do the Egyptians not see that minority governments are too weak and too helpless to avail them of anything?! Al-Nokrashi Pasha's government invents the theory of the referendum, and Sidqi Pasha's government is unable to abolish this absurd theory, and the Egyptian people speaks and speaks and insists on speaking with every insistence, yet Sidqi Pasha does not heed it, just as al-Nokrashi did not heed it before him. Then the Governor-General of the Sudan comes forward to declare that the fate of the Sudan will not be decided except after a referendum on the one hand, and that the Sudan's complete independence will be achieved after twenty years.

19 The Egyptians would also like to know the standing of this declaration in the mind of our Prime Minister, and in the minds of the members of the official delegation to the negotiations. As for its standing in the minds of the Egyptians, we do not think it needs any explanation — but who, pray, pays any heed to the Egyptians? They are expected to hear and obey, and are expected not to create difficulties nor stir up problems before Sidqi Pasha, lest the negotiations be exposed to failure.

20 Would that Sidqi Pasha might say the same to the British; for negotiations proceed between two parties, and it is not just that what is imposed on one of these two parties should not likewise be imposed on the other. Would that Sidqi Pasha might demand of the English, in a pride that portrays Egyptian dignity, that they join him in censuring the Governor-General, and in dismissing him should he refuse to resign.