A Program …

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Perhaps the Ministry of Education has managed some solution — crooked or straight — to its pressing crisis, accepting from among the pupils and students as many as the institutes and schools could find room for, satisfying as many fathers and guardians as it could satisfy, and relieving some boys and young people from this bewildered, circling life that drives them around the quarters of the cities, and stands them at the doors of schools and offices, pleading, submissive, abject, begging for their due, only to be turned away from it, or else granted it amid whatever harshness and arrogance, whatever cruelty and violence, whatever disdain and aloofness God has willed…

Perhaps the Ministry of Education has managed some solution — crooked or straight — to this pressing crisis of its. And perhaps Egyptians have been freed from this seasonal torment in which they are submerged up to their ears at the start of autumn, only to never be free of it the whole year through — the torment of school expenses, which the fewest of them find within easy reach, while most of them do not find it so, however much effort they expend, however much hardship they endure, and however many burdens they impose upon themselves.

It would be fitting for the Ministry of Education — and for Egyptians together with it — to be done with these pressing seasonal crises, and to turn their thought instead to another, settled crisis, one not confined to a season nor readily resolved, but rather a matter of sustained attention, pressing reflection, and deep deliberation — namely, the crisis of education measured against the whole people, not measured against these tens and hundreds of thousands who suffer at the Ministry of Education's hands, and at whose hands the Ministry of Education suffers at the start of autumn every year.

For we stand before a people numbering some twenty million souls, and this people brings forth its successive generations every year, indeed every month, indeed every day; for children are born in every hour of the daylight hours, and in every hour of the night. And every one of these new generations that the succeeding days bestow upon Egypt is born with its own distinct problems, the most important and most grave of which is the problem of upbringing and education. So we stand between two courses, with no third: the first, that we should be content that the

generations to come ought to live as past generations lived, and as present generations live, in which case there is nothing left for us but to let life proceed as best it can, with its abundance of mixed things and its scant good, with its unsteady progress that hastens for a day and lags for years.

This is the comfortable life that costs people nothing but the easiest of effort, and burdens them with nothing but the lightest and slightest of hardship, and it is, at the same time, the life that guarantees to strong peoples the power to exploit and subjugate weak peoples, and guarantees to strong, wealthy individuals the power to exploit weak, poor individuals.

As for the second course, it is that the life of the generations to come should be better than the life of past and present generations, proceeding in steady, unbroken progress that neither stumbles nor lags nor falls into disorder. This is the wearying life that demands sustained diligence, redoubled effort, and a courage that shrinks neither from facing obstacles nor from overcoming difficulties.

It is the life that spreads among the people a sense of their own right, a faith in their own dignity, a confidence in themselves, and the capacity to discharge their duty. It is the life that strengthens the weak, until they become too formidable, too hard to master, for any colonizer to subjugate, or any seeker of profit or ambition to exploit. We stand between these two courses, with no third, and we must choose one of them, so that we may know what to pursue and what to forsake, so that we may be clear-sighted about our own affair, and so that the outside world may be clear-sighted about our affair too.

For if the outside world knows that we wish to live tomorrow as we live today, and as we lived yesterday, it will lay its plans to exploit and subjugate us, and to meddle with our public services as it has done until now. But if it knows that we wish to live tomorrow better than we lived today and yesterday, and to secure for our sons and our grandsons what our fathers were unable to secure for us of freedom, dignity, and independence, it will lay its plans to deal with us as free men deal with free men, and to conduct itself toward us as the noble conduct themselves toward the noble.

I do not think any Egyptian wishes his son's or his daughter's life to be as his own life was, and as his father's life was; rather, we want progress, and we want progress in its widest sense and its furthest reaches, beyond any doubt. Witness to this is our response to Muhammad

Ali the Great when he founded modern Egypt, and resumed ties between it and the civilized outside world as the ties of a noble, free country that wished to complete, through science and knowledge, what it lacked of dignity and freedom during the rule of the Ottoman Turks.

Witness to this too is our response to Ismail when he wished to spread education, renew Egypt, extend its influence across the horizons and regions of the earth, and strengthen its ties with Europe, and when he had assured himself that he had laid the firm foundation for all of this, he spoke his immortal saying, which became a program for our modern renaissance: that Egypt is a part of Europe.

And when we responded to Fuad, who founded the university and issued the constitution, spread his encouragement of culture within Egypt and beyond it, enabled Egyptians to learn in the best manner learning can be done, and enabled foreigners to research and produce in the best manner research and production can be done. And Egypt, in the age of Farouk, shall not be less responsive to knowledge, culture, progress, and the aspiration to perfection than it was in the age of Fuad, Ismail, and Muhammad Ali.

So then we want progress, beyond any doubt, and whoever wants a thing must prepare its means and seek out its instruments. And progress has no instrument but education, in all its various branches and all its various levels — education that is made free to all people according to what their nature, their talents, and their mental capacity fit them for; education that draws no distinction between city-dwellers and village-dwellers, nor between the wealthy and those who find nothing to spend; education that is made free to people as sunlight is made free to them, as the breathing of air is made free to them, as the water of the Nile is made free to them.

This broad, deep education, bestowed upon all people — that they may take from it the portion their talents allot them — is the first foundation and the last foundation of the progress we covet and aspire to, since the early part of the last century. And the celebration of the centenary of the founder of modern Egypt is nothing but a pause in which we look behind us to see the road we have traveled in the path of progress since we were set upon this road, and look ahead of us to see the road we must still travel, mastering its obstacles, overcoming its difficulties, until we attain the standing that is our due, the standing that secures for us freedom and dignity, and allows us to share in advancing

civilization and raising up humanity.

Thus did the elite among Egyptians think, and thus do they think now, and thus ought they to think tomorrow. And it is not enough merely to think; they must also plan and deliberate. And I do not think Egypt founded the Ministry of Education merely to face the education crisis at the start of every autumn, and then go to sleep until the year turns round, to wake again at the start of the following autumn; rather, it founded it to manage the affair of education, what has been achieved of it and what ought still to be achieved. So if it resolves the autumn crisis, it is bound to turn its thought to the crisis of the autumn to come, and then to whatever autumns follow after, far into the future.

And if it proceeds along this course, it will not meet with crisis at all, but its affairs will move along easily and smoothly, so that it receives the rising generations at the start of the school year with the schools and institutes already prepared to receive them without hardship or difficulty. And had the Ministry of Education proceeded along this course, Egypt would now have a standing quite other than this wretched, despairing standing we witness sorrowfully in these days. I do not wish to weep over what is past, but I do not wish us to grow idle and settle into ease either, only to weep tomorrow as we weep today and as we wept yesterday; and I am entirely confident that Egypt will not rest — nor ought it to rest — before schools and institutes are established within it that guarantee all its sons the chance to be educated without encountering hardship or difficulty in it.

Egypt will not rest — nor ought it to rest — until every village has its elementary school suited to its need and its regional condition, until every city has its primary and secondary school, until every region has whatever practical technical schools it needs, until the country has universities sufficient for the young people aspiring to higher education, without their faculties being overcrowded with them, without their having to bear the burden of travel to distant cities, and without their families having to bear, for that purpose, whatever expenses they can and cannot afford.

Egypt will not rest — nor ought it to rest — before this program is realized, and realizing it is neither easy nor simple, but it is not impossible, and it stands in need of no magic wand, but rather in need of sincerity, confidence, and faith in Egypt's right to be a noble country, and a correct understanding of democracy.

And if all of this is granted to the Ministry of Education, it will take the affairs of education in hand with resolve, and carry out its program without hesitation, without delay, and without pleading excuses. And it will be said that the budget is difficult, but I say now what I have always said: that the budget is not these figures which the Ministry of Finance balances against one another every year, but rather the balancing of the taxes levied to meet the services the people need; and there are nations on this earth that burden their sons with taxes which, had we known of them, would have astonished us entirely, yet people pay what is asked of them, because they know it is taken from them only to be returned to them, and to be spent on their own services.

And Egypt has in these days been driven to enormous expenditures to possess a strong army, so let it be known that a strong army must defend a strong nation, and that a strong nation is one composed of the educated, not the ignorant, of the healthy, not the sick, of those for whom life has been made easy, not those upon whom it has been made straitened.

So if Egypt wishes to be worthy of itself, of its history, and of its hopes, the road before it is clear: that it should establish for itself a ministry of education capable of properly shouldering the burdens of education, and make culture, in the age of Farouk, worthy of what Muhammad Ali, Ismail, and Fuad gave it.