

Congratulations ...

Sawt al-Umma, 5 October 1946

Our own Egyptian life is magnificent, as magnificent as any people's life could ever be — every one of its own affairs proceeding in the very best manner affairs could ever proceed!

The ancient sage once said: nothing more marvellous than what already exists could possibly exist. Everything in Egypt, then, is genuinely marvellous — we ought to smile at it, rejoice in it, and exchange our own congratulations over it, since our own life has never reached any worse a state than the very state it has already reached, nor arrived at any greater evil than the very evil it has already arrived at.

There is no good in life whatsoever that could not, conceivably, have been surpassed by some greater, more far-reaching good; nor is there any evil in life whatsoever that could not, conceivably, have been surpassed by some other, more hateful, more genuinely dreadful evil. The very least incumbent upon a genuinely prudent man, then, is to greet life with contentment, and real reassurance, thanking God he has not been struck by any worse evil than the one he already suffers, nor tested by anything harsher than what he already endures.

The truth is, Egypt has just witnessed a week genuinely brimming with momentous deeds, and matters of real magnitude — one she ought genuinely to be congratulated for, congratulated with a sincere, wholehearted congratulation, entirely free of reservation, entirely free of caution: every single Egyptian body has discharged its own duty in the very best manner duties could ever be discharged, and the very best thing a man could ever be congratulated for is precisely his own discharge of duty, his own upholding of what is right, and his own bearing of responsibility.

I write this very piece, then, my own soul genuinely content, on behalf of the port city [Alexandria] itself, wishing to please every single person, offending not a single one of them, wishing to congratulate every single person, offering condolences to not a single one of them. Everything in Egypt, after all, calls for genuine contentment; everything in Egypt calls for the genuine exchange of congratulations.

The negotiating body has discharged its own duty in the very best manner duties could ever be discharged: it disputed, and disputed thoroughly; it argued, and drowned itself entirely in argument. What real value, after all, could a negotiating body possibly hold, if it never disputed, thoroughly, or never quarrelled, extravagantly?!

Had the Prime Minister simply dictated his own will to his own colleagues, and secured from them nothing but consent and obedience, we would have congratulated him alone, on this same triumph, and grieved for his own colleagues, over this same submission. But the Prime Minister willed something, and some obeyed him, while others defied him — it is only fitting, then, that we congratulate the obedient on their own obedience, and congratulate the defiant on their own defiance. The former served their own selves, and their own party, as best they could; the latter served their own selves, and their own nation, as best they could; and both alike deserve real congratulation, for having simply let their own nature run its own course.

And what, after all, could possibly deserve real congratulation more, than a man proceeding straight toward his own goal, without any crookedness, without any deviation whatsoever?!

The people most deserving of real congratulation, though, are this genuinely momentous triangle, comprising the Prime Minister and the leaders of the two genuinely significant parties monopolizing the majority in the Chamber of Deputies. This same momentous triangle united itself in genuinely excellent solidarity, cooperated in genuinely masterful cooperation, and resolved to see the whole course through to its own end, bearing whatever responsibility might follow, however heavy, however genuinely awkward. It wished to deal gently with the English, so the negotiations might never be broken off — regarding the breaking off of negotiations as a genuinely grave sin, a genuinely serious transgression.

It held firm, too, against the anger of the angry, the indignation of the indignant, the agitation of the agitated — then managed the whole matter, managing it masterfully, and reckoned it, reckoning it with genuine excellence. Its own leader resigned; his own two companions, meanwhile, held firm in their own position, never wavering from it, to the right or to the left. What matters, after all, is never that a single voice unite, opinions align, ranks close together, and Egypt stand united before the English exactly as Great Britain stands united before the Egyptians.

That is never what matters — what matters, rather, is that the thread of negotiations remain connected, never severed, and that the ministry remain in its own seats of power, never removed from them. The triangle has secured both these same things at once: the thread of negotiations remains connected, until the English themselves choose to sever it, and the ministry remains firmly settled in its own seats, whatever events may surround it, until God brings about a matter already decreed.

It is only right, then, that we offer this same triangle our own wholehearted congratulations — for it willed, and achieved, exactly what it willed!

There remains another triangle, no less deserving of real congratulation than the first: this one comprising the distinguished excellencies Sharif Sabri, Hussein Sirri, and Ali al-Shamsi. This same triangle opposed the first triangle, opposing it thoroughly, resisted it, resisting it thoroughly, and finally compelled it to reveal its own real intent, and play out the very last card in its own hand — its own leader resigning, its own remaining two members holding firm, and the meeting of the two negotiating bodies cancelled entirely.

The British delegation departs, negotiations are suspended until the English themselves sever them, and a genuinely great evil, Egypt had very nearly become entangled in, is thereby averted.

This second triangle did indeed err, when it went along with the first triangle in producing that same hateful memorandum submitted to the English — but it erased this same sin, washing away its own guilt and harm, through its own final stand, recovering its own complete freedom, and attempting to unite opinion, and bring hearts together... nor does it matter at all that it failed — it attempted the good, as far as it was able, and simply found no way toward it. Let us congratulate this same triangle, then, on its own escape from the sin of the negotiations, and congratulate it, too, for the praise and commendation the Prime Minister so generously bestowed upon it, when he accused it of chasing mere desire, and indulging in mere whim.

This same triangle might well have become a square, had His Excellency 'Abd al-Fattah Yahya Pasha attended the negotiating body's own final session — but he failed to attend it, owing to his own illness. Better late than never, though: the man was genuinely careful to support his own friends, and share with them in whatever tribute the Prime

Minister had bestowed upon them, and so this same triangle has become a square, as of today.

And everything remains possible: this same triangle might well become a square today, and a pentagon tomorrow — who knows?! His Excellency Maher Pasha might well join it, making it a genuinely five-sided figure; or His Excellency might well decline to join this same square, remaining, instead, a nation unto himself, committed to his own ambiguous neutrality, or neutral ambiguity — exactly as Makram Pasha has remained a nation unto himself, in his own commitment to open, direct attack, containing neither innuendo nor insinuation.

The entire negotiating body, then, as we can see, genuinely merits congratulation, however varied the nature and reasons behind that same congratulation. There remains, though, another body equally deserving of it: the ministry itself, which strove as no one has ever strove, triumphed as no one has ever triumphed, excelled as no one has ever excelled. It was told, on Saturday evening, that its own resignation had been submitted to His Majesty the King — and it said: Amen. It was told, on Tuesday evening, that its own resignation had been returned to the Prime Minister — and it said: Amen! One of its own members remarked, wittily: All I know is that I woke one morning to be told I was no longer a minister, and went to bed that same evening to be told I had become a minister once again!

And exactly as people are congratulated for boldness, and courage, so too are they congratulated for meekness, and surrender.

Let us congratulate the Prime Minister, then, on his own boldness, and congratulate his own colleagues on their own surrender. Though not all of them did surrender: two ministers, at the very last moment, broke ranks — one of them our own distinguished professor, the Deputy Prime Minister, who genuinely welcomed his own resignation, most likely genuinely delighted by it, telling himself: a calamity God has spared us, a trial God has protected us from its own harm. But once he saw the ministry return to him after all, he said: let it pass around us, not upon us. He sent his own resignation to the Prime Minister, cutting off any path toward reconsidering it, through this same statement he released to the newspapers, and handed to the telegraph companies, recording in it his own indignation at the ministry's own policy, and his own solidarity with the dissenters from the negotiating body.

We ought, perhaps, to call these same gentlemen — I shall not say "these Pashas," as the Prime Minister himself put it — by this same name Egyptians had very nearly forgotten: the dissenters. Sidqi Pasha himself once dissented against Sa'd, one day — and now a number of his own followers have dissented against him in turn. How very different, though, one dissent proves from another!

Our own distinguished professor, then, broke ranks with his own colleagues, and dissented against his own leader — resolving, after real hesitation, and acting, after real reluctance — and genuinely earned, for all of this, our own wholehearted congratulations.

I do not know, but the contagion may well have spread from him to his own colleague, Professor Saba Habashi Pasha, Minister of Commerce, who dissented alongside the dissenters, and resigned alongside the resigned, said to be genuinely dissatisfied with this same ministerial post, taken from him, and returned to him, without his ever having any real say in the matter. And so, likewise, let us congratulate the reluctant on their own reluctance, the bold on their own boldness, and the hesitant on their own hesitation — for no reason at all, except that they simply let their own nature run its own course, allowing their own disposition to proceed exactly as it is able.

It seems to me, too, that there remain other people genuinely deserving of congratulation, for having likewise let their own souls run their own course, allowing their own nature to proceed to its own furthest end — these being the very gentlemen who make up the Egyptian Delegation, circling around Mustafa al-Nahhas exactly as a bracelet circles the wrist. They were told, this past April: come, join the negotiations. And they said: on what basis? And they said: we shall never take part in anything crooked. They were then told, in these very last days: come, help us mend what has been spoiled, retrieve what has already been lost. And they said: on what basis? And they said: we love neither crooked paths, nor tortuous ways — we want, rather, to resume the whole matter as though nothing had happened before at all.

They then told Egypt: no alliance with the English, unless that same alliance proceeds from genuine, real freedom, and open acknowledgment of what is right; no freedom, unless evacuation is genuinely achieved; and no acknowledgment of what is right, unless the unity of the Nile Valley is genuinely completed.

And they told Egypt: never gamble, never take reckless chances, and never make yourself a servant to the English.

And they told Egypt: the matter of the Canal is exactly like the matter of the Dardanelles — its own defence ought never to be shared, nor divided, nor made a means of interfering in properly national affairs. Egypt ought never to feel any less national pride than Turkey does; Egypt ought never to fear the English any more than the Turks fear the Russians; nor ought we ever believe the English, when they tell us defence of the Canal must be shared between us and them — since they tell the Turks, in turn, that defence of the Dardanelles must remain confined to themselves alone, excluding the Russians entirely. They are deceiving us, without any doubt whatsoever — or deceiving the Turks, without any doubt whatsoever.

They are deceiving someone, in any case — and we ought never to place our own trust in deceivers.

The Delegation's own leader, and his own colleagues, said exactly this — words of men letting their own nature run its own course, letting their own disposition proceed to its own furthest end, rejecting crooked paths, tortuous ways, and any tampering with the people's own rights and dignity. And it seems to me this same thing genuinely merits offering these same gentlemen our own real congratulations.

The genuine congratulation, though, the complete congratulation, the one entirely free of any deviation, entirely innocent of any ambiguity, pure as the very face of the sun on a clear, temperate day — this is the one we offer to Egypt herself, since the true realities of things, and the true realities of men, have now been laid before her, clear, evident, radiant, and pure, admitting neither doubt nor suspicion. Egypt sees, now, the road toward dignity, freedom, and independence, and sees those leading her down this same road; Egypt sees the road toward abasement, humiliation, and servitude, and sees those leading her down this same road; and Egypt sees the road of hesitation, fear, and apprehension — that same road ultimately ending, in the end, in exactly the same abasement, humiliation, and servitude — and sees those leading her down this same road too.

Egypt can now, then, having had these same realities laid clear and radiant before her, genuinely choose, genuinely know, and genuinely believe that God distinguishes the corrupt from the wholesome, that what is lawful is clear, and what is forbidden is clear, and that a genuinely

dignified people is exactly the one that avoids places of genuine doubt, and despises those who would lead it into such places of doubt.