

## Today's Talk

### Examples

I was neither mistaken nor excessive when I supposed that our Prime Minister would profit from his visit to Rome — that he would stand before the great man of Italy, Signor Mussolini, as a diligent pupil before his brilliant master. Indeed, the Prime Minister himself records this discipleship in the telegram by which he took leave of his teacher before departing the beautiful land of Italy.

The Prime Minister declares that he is profoundly impressed by the level of material (and moral) progress Italy has achieved through the energy and genius of Mussolini; that, representing a nation friendly to Italy, he rejoices in this truth and seeks in Mussolini's deeds "examples worthy of imitation."

So then, he admires Mussolini — and there is no blame in admiration. Every man is free in what he loves or detests. And if he seeks in the works of the great Italian fitting examples, he too is free — he has not overstepped his right nor gone beyond his station. For each person may choose the model he wishes to emulate, the example he desires to follow.

But he admires Mussolini and takes him as a model not on his own behalf alone, but on behalf of Egypt as a whole. For the Prime Minister represents us all; he does not ask our opinion of this representation, nor does it matter to him whether we approve or object. He is sincere, moreover, in his claim to speak for Egypt — I am the first to attest to his sincerity and to acknowledge that he truly represents our country. And should I ever accuse him of falsehood, or doubt his claim, or deny my confidence in him, you know well to whose hands both he and I would be delivered — to those we would rather not see, save under the most pressing necessity.

So let us make our peace with the fact that Sidqi Pasha represents us as he pleases, since we have already allowed him to act upon us as he wished.

Our Prime Minister, then, is a pupil of the great man of Italy — and Egypt, with him, becomes a pupil of Italy as well. Thus the wheel of days turns and fortunes shift: once Egypt was the teacher of Greece and Rome, and now she is Rome's pupil.

But people do not read the words of the Prime Minister as they ought to be read; they do not understand them as they ought to be understood. Hence they expose themselves to all manner of disappointment and misfortune. Had they read as heroes read — had they understood as great minds understand — they would have discerned what the days conceal for them, whether of good or of evil, and would have prepared themselves for events before their coming. But they pass over the Prime Minister's words as over any other speech — catching a fragmentary, shallow meaning, grasping the general sense but not its details, and then moving on as if they had read nothing.

Such is not the way one reads the speech of an orator. And our Prime Minister *is* an orator — one who says much with few words, who conveys rare meanings in familiar phrases.

If you wish for proof of this, pause a moment with me over the closing lines of the telegram the great man of Egypt sent to the great man of Italy. There you will find grave secrets and

ominous warnings — portents that should stir Egyptians to vigilance, to prepare themselves for what the coming days may reveal, should Providence prolong for our Prime Minister the instruments of power.

What, then, are these “works” in which Sidqi Pasha will find “examples worthy of imitation”?

As for our former Constitution, the Prime Minister buried it and declared that it would never again be published nor revived. He has established instead a constitution of his own making, which he deems sufficient and suited to Egypt’s needs.

As for the press, he has imposed upon it such conditions as he pleases — all, of course, in the service of ensuring its full freedom and perfect ability to express every opinion unrestrained by the excesses of democracy.

As for the opposition, the Prime Minister has dealt with it under his new system with firmness and strength — until it came to believe in him, to submit to him, and to repose its confidence in him.

As for the administration, he has reformed it so thoroughly that what was crooked has been straightened, what was confused has become stable, and people now feel secure in all things. It has become, indeed, an example to be emulated by the most advanced nations that aspire to good governance.

As for the nation’s wealth and the people’s prosperity, the Prime Minister has brought both to their highest possible level of stability and ease — so that Egypt, thanks to him, is now the envy of all. Others hunger while we are fed; others thirst while our cups are full; others stretch out empty hands while ours overflow.

Then what, pray, does Sidqi Pasha hope to learn from Mussolini? In what field does he wish Egypt to become Italy’s pupil?

Surely you see with me that the Prime Minister’s words are ambiguous — like all eloquent speech, they require interpretation. And it is for that reason that I write this piece: to lay before you a few of the “examples” Sidqi Pasha may seek from Signor Mussolini.

Order reigns in Egypt — but it is the order of armed force. I do not mean the foreign, British force; I do not claim that the Prime Minister leans upon British bayonets. I mean the Egyptian army itself, and the police, who exist to defend the homeland and preserve peace within it.

But a system that rests on soldiers’ spears and policemen’s clubs cannot long endure. It must rest upon the people’s hearts.

The Prime Minister’s eloquence — however eloquent he may be — his oratory, however dazzling; his generosity, however lavish — none of this can win the people’s affection for his new order. For all of it depends on two frail forces: desire and fear. And all that depends on desire and fear is fleeting — it vanishes when fear and desire fade.

Thus there must be a lasting foundation, a firm pillar to uphold the new regime.

Signor Mussolini found such a pillar for his system. He created a new art of education: he took the young — children, boys, adolescents — and conscripted them into a sort of civic army. He taught them certain lessons, trained them in certain disciplines, until he had fashioned from them a generation convinced that the Fascist alone is the essence and soul of Italian life. By this new method of education, Italy has become something like Sparta of old.

This is one example that may attract the Prime Minister — to establish our own education and upbringing upon this new foundation, that he may win the hearts of future generations, since he could not win the hearts of those already grown.

But to secure such a system of education and instruction requires that the teachers, instructors, and professors themselves devote their loyalty to the new regime.

Mussolini knew how to win these men to his cause. He bound them all with solemn oaths — to be faithful to the system and to make their teaching serve it. He gave them the choice: swear allegiance or be dismissed. Some swore and kept their positions; others refused and were expelled.

This transformation did not stop with the elementary and secondary teachers — it reached the universities as well.

Such is another “example” Sidqi Pasha may wish to imitate from Mussolini.

Nor can a system endure unless its governors understand it in detail, are trained in its practice, and believe in it with a firm and sincere faith — and unless there are enough such men that power can pass among them.

Mussolini achieved this by making himself the supreme instructor and his government a vast school. He trained his ministers in the arts of rule; when they had learned well, he dismissed them — not in anger, but as a teacher dismisses his pupils when the lesson is done — to reserve them for another day, or to assign them new duties elsewhere.

Thus does Mussolini change his ministers from time to time, not out of dissatisfaction, but as a method of education and discipline.

Perhaps, then, if Providence extends Sidqi Pasha’s tenure, he too will return from Rome and test his ministers, dismissing those who have mastered their lessons, appointing others in their place, and removing any he deems unfit for the new order.

Finally, no regime can be secure unless the nation feels a strong sense of pride and power, compelling foreign states to respect its dignity. Mussolini achieved this in dealing with Italy’s foes and friends alike. He used violence in foreign policy, disregarding conventional courtesies, and hurled speeches like thunderbolts that made Europe tremble.

I know it would be difficult for Sidqi Pasha to imitate Mussolini in this respect. Yet if we cannot frighten the British openly with speeches, armies, and fleets, perhaps we can frighten them secretly — with visits, interviews, and evasions.

You see, then, that our Prime Minister was indeed eloquent in his telegram to the great man of Italy, and that Egypt was not mistaken in sending him on this brief mission to Rome — to learn from that supreme master the art of government and the preservation of order.

Believe me, the words of the Prime Minister must not be read as one reads ordinary speech. They must be analyzed, weighed, and turned over from every angle; for in the mind of the Prime Minister lie secrets so obscure that even the Nile Valley itself could scarcely contain them.

And suffice it to say that God has gathered the whole of Egypt within it.

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn  
*al-Siyāsa, 4 August 1932*