Adli…

People seem to have passed beyond embarrassment and distress, beyond hardship and misery, to a point where they almost deny themselves. They hurry past great events which once would have held them still—events they would have pondered long, savored their pain deliberately, probing it deeply, as though there were a certain pleasure in tasting sorrow slowly, in lingering over it and prolonging its causes.

In the past, when such an event struck them, they would fall into a heavy, lasting silence. That silence would gradually give way to a sharp, painful wakefulness. They would then grasp the gravity of the blow, recall the person it had taken from them, dwell on his memory at length, reenact his various attitudes and positions, and finally turn their gaze to their own present and future, imagining the dead confronting those circumstances. They would ask themselves what his stance would have been had life been extended to him. From this long, varied meditation they drew their many paths to grief and their diverse means of sorrow. Their souls resisted severing the bond with the departed. And when time did its work and the burdens of life multiplied, attempting to draw over memory a veil of forgetfulness, these souls strained to resist circumstances, to fend off oblivion, to keep the lost one present before them—seen, mourned, wept for, or wept through.

That is how people once lived—when life deserved the name, and days truly were days. But now people have changed because life itself has changed; days have changed, and life has lost its value in their souls. Pleasure and pain alike are now tasted only in haste. Events and calamities pass without pause, briefly noticed if at all. Disasters have multiplied; burdens and trials have grown heavy. Nerves have lost the power to endure, and so have souls—no longer capable of deep sorrow, just as they are no longer capable of true joy.

Each person has become like a light, restless ball, flung about by events, tossed by catastrophes. Hardly does it strike one calamity before it rebounds toward another—swift, violent, weightless—seeking yet another shock, or being driven toward it.

This alone explains the people's response to the terrible blow that struck them when the news came of the death of Adli Yakan—may God have mercy on him. The news fell upon them like a thunderbolt. They were stunned. But they recovered quickly, for they have grown accustomed to thunderbolts in these days. They recovered and grieved; their anguish sharpened until it nearly resembled despair. Yet that anguish was brief. Within a day or two, they were distracted—not forgetting him, but diverted from him by the harsh necessities and pressing pains from which they neither know how to escape nor how to endure.

What do you expect of people who greet the dawn with fear of its brightness, and meet the night with dread of its darkness? Who awaken unsure where the day will drive them, and fall asleep unsure where the night will lead them?

How can such people be asked to savor the bitterness of grief or the sting of pain, or to delight fully in the sweetness of joy? They have lost—almost entirely—those subtle, powerful faculties by which life once revealed itself to them as it truly was. Faculties that allowed them to learn from what warned, rejoice in what delighted.

Now they ponder their crises of every kind, finding in either escape from them or submission to them nothing but seekers and targets, victors and vanquished, the wretched and those awaiting wretchedness, the embarrassed and the driven toward embarrassment. They are excused, then, if

events have turned them away from the prolonged remembrance of this great man—especially while he still lay in exile, his body not yet crossed the sea to his homeland, not yet laid to rest in its sacred soil.

They are excused. And Adli himself—may God have mercy on him—would be the first to accept their excuse. For no one was more keenly aware of their condition, no one more compassionate toward them or more faithful in his concern. Despite his distinction and evident aristocracy, he shared their sufferings and bore with them the burdens of sorrow and hardship.

The Egyptians are too honorable to allow their brief silence after Adli's death to be mistaken for forgetfulness or neglect. Adli is not one whom oblivion can claim, nor are the Egyptians a people for whom gratitude comes lightly undone.

In any case, the memory of history is stronger, firmer, and deeper than the memory of individuals. History will always record that four Egyptians were the leaders of the national independence movement—or, rather, the leaders of the Egyptian revolution that flared after the embers of war had cooled, when the Egyptian nation rose demanding recognition as a free and dignified people, resolved to live in a free and dignified land.

These four figures were the emblem of the new political life of Egypt—and then of the East as a whole. They will remain its emblem despite the contrasts in temperament, inclination, and personality that distinguished these great men from one another. No historian can depict the freedom of Egypt and the freedom of the East in this postwar period without relying upon these four leaders in politics: **Saad, Rushdi, Tharwat, and Adli**—may God have mercy on them all.

Saad was, in this Eastern Egyptian revolution, like a fiercely blazing spark—one that could not be extinguished, that set aflame everything it touched or approached, casting its scorching rays far and wide, awakening fire wherever it reached, stirring hearts from their slumber, driving people toward life after death, dignity after humiliation, independence after submission.

Rushdi stood as the jurist of the revolution, extracting truth from ambiguity, restoring to it clarity beyond doubt, defending it with luminous argument, sound proof, and sincere, passionate conviction.

Tharwat was the master strategist—resourceful, subtle, capable of finding hidden entrances and gentle exits when circumstances grew strained and affairs entangled.

And Adli was the calm, steady, wise intellect of the revolution—one who acted only with clear insight, advanced only with confidence gained through long reflection and measured deliberation, who undertook nothing without dignity, composure, and restraint seldom found among leaders. Had the revolution lost even one of these four, it would not have taken the shape we know, nor borne the distinctive character that set it apart.

The revolution was formed from the temperaments of these four men. They disagreed, clashed, struggled with one another fiercely—but that very struggle was essential to the life, strength, and endurance of the movement. Then God permitted them to return to harmony, to restore affection and cooperation. They reconciled; the nation accepted them; and God accepted them, choosing them for His mercy—one following another into eternity, each having fulfilled his duty.

Saad preceded them; Adli was the last to depart. Much has been said—and will continue to be said—about Saad, Rushdi, and Tharwat, with ever-greater clarity and appreciation as time passes. But little

has yet been said about Adli, because he lived until recently, and because the trials of our age have diverted attention from prolonged remembrance.

To speak of Adli is no easy or simple task. The moment you begin to trace the qualities that made him who he was, you find yourself admiring them all, urged by each one of them to praise him and bear witness to his worth. And soon you are left perplexed: what should you take up first, and what can you possibly leave aside?
Yet three aspects of this man's life impose themselves on any writer or thinker who undertakes to speak about him.

The first is his personal distinction—his private character and the way he related to others.
In this domain Adli was among the least exposed to criticism. His graciousness of manner—*riḍāʾ al-khulq*—was the most striking and unmistakable of his virtues, and yet it did not thrust itself forward, nor did it tempt people into easy familiarity. It encircled itself with a kind of reserve and elevated dignity which many mistook for arrogance, a form of loftiness from which they instinctively held back. But when fortune granted someone the chance to draw near to him and enter the intimacy of his nature, all that assumed hauteur melted away. One found not pride but dignity, not haughtiness but a noble refusal of what was common or base. Behind that reserve there stood a transparent spirit, a loyal and generous heart, and a conscience both noble and alive. All this would reveal itself in the sweetness of his companionship, the refinement of his conversation, the chasteness of his speech, and in the kind of relationship that lifted those around him to his level rather than lowering him to theirs.

The second aspect is his political doctrine.
Adli—like his comrades—believed fully in Egypt's right to independence and was deeply committed to securing that right. No one ever questioned his faith in that regard. And like them, he believed negotiation with Britain could, if rightly conducted, bring Egypt to the freedom it deserved. But it was his *method* of pursuing this objective, his way of giving it practical form, that distinguished him so sharply and revealed the clearest features of his temperament and character.

Adli was never a man of force or tumult. He was not one of those leaders who could forge a powerful link between themselves and the public across all its classes, so that he might become the people's mirror and their source of inspiration at once. Instead, he was a statesman who *loved* the people, trusted them, and guarded their rights—without claiming to inspire them or draw inspiration from them. He acted out of deliberate thought and calm reasoning more than from fiery feeling or impassioned sentiment.
And he did not excel at addressing the masses; he did not possess that enchanting cadence of words that pierces the popular heart. His talent lay elsewhere: in seeing, listening, reflecting, and then acting—leaving to others the work of stirring the people and channeling their collective will.

When he formed his first ministry and declared its program—agreed upon with the Wafd—this program stood as a clear, strong manifestation of the man's upright mind and sound constitutional doctrine. Note how deeply he cared for two things above all:

1. **That Egypt should recover her rights from the British through negotiation**, and
2. **That the results of that negotiation must be laid before the Egyptian people**, who would examine and approve them through a national assembly.

This assembly, in his view, was not merely to ratify a treaty or regulate Anglo-Egyptian relations. Its mission was far greater: **to draft the constitution**, to shape the authority of the people, and to define

the relation of the legislature to the other powers of the state.
The meaning is plain: Adli believed that the nation alone is the source of authority, and that, being so, it must *author* the constitution and *proclaim* it, rather than passively receive it.

And who can say what course Egypt might have taken, or what crises she might have been spared, had fate allowed Adli to carry out the program he envisioned?

I do not know—perhaps the flaw in Adli's plan was that he made the summoning of the national assembly a *consequence* of successful negotiations rather than a *prelude* to them.
But after all, could he truly have summoned such an assembly **before** negotiating and wresting Egypt's liberty from the British?
What worth could a national assembly have, convened to draft a constitution—indeed, to legislate anything at all—while the shadow of foreign protection still lay across the land?
What would be its standing before the British, and what would be the British stance toward it, if disputes arose?
Whatever the case, Adli's understanding of the people's rights and his formulation of them matched, with remarkable fidelity, the highest democratic ideals.

The third aspect is the unwavering loyalty of this great man to his political creed and to the sovereignty of the people.
He failed in his negotiations with Britain and resigned; he could not convene the national assembly. Yet for the rest of his life he held firm to the belief that negotiation was the clearest path to independence, and that popular authority was the sole legitimate foundation of any government—indeed, the only true pillar upon which domestic and foreign policy should rest.

When the constitution was finally issued, Adli knew how to satisfy both his mind and conscience in the realm of politics. He presented himself to the nation in the elections. When the people judged against him, he accepted their judgment with serenity: bearing them no resentment, harboring no bitterness, and in no way reproaching them for turning toward others. For in his view, the constitution benefited not only those who had sworn allegiance to it, but **all Egyptians**, himself included.

This is why he steadfastly refused—utterly—to form a ministry, support a ministry, or participate in a ministry that did not depend openly and sincerely on the constitution.
This is why he hastened toward reconciliation with Saad when he was invited to it; why he supported that reconciliation with such loyalty; and why he accepted the premiership within it—because its very essence was the restoration of constitutional life, its reliance upon the constitution, and the fate of the ministry being bound to the constitution's survival.

From this you can also understand why he withdrew from political life when the constitution was suspended, and why he rushed to accept office again when it was offered to him so that the constitution might be restored.
And from this you may also understand the vehemence with which he denounced the later changes made to the old constitution, and his haste to join the National Congress that repudiated those changes and demanded the return of matters to their rightful order.
And so he spent the rest of his life—noble, dignified, steadfast—watching events, seizing opportunities, ready to answer the call of national duty whenever it should come. But the call of death came before the call of duty. Adli hastened to the eternal life God had decreed for him—a life of honor and peace.

It was decreed that Adli should die in Paris, far from the homeland—just as his dear friend Tharwat had died. It was decreed that he should die while Egypt was in the grip of a severe political crisis, depending on him and placing its widest hopes in him—only to be tried by the loss of him when she needed him most.
And it was decreed that he should return to Egypt aboard the same ship that had carried Tharwat's body—*the Providence*.
Do you think destiny sought to honor the deep and faithful friendship that bound these two great men, arranging that they be joined in death as they had been joined in life?

Taha Hussein
al-Risāla, 1 November 1933