

Farewell...

Perhaps **Şidqī Pasha** will allow us to bid *truth* and *freedom* farewell for a while, now that he has graciously informed them that Egypt is no longer their dwelling place, and that they must take their leave and go where they please. When the negotiations between us and the British are concluded—whether to our satisfaction or our regret—and God permits Şidqī Pasha at last to rest, then truth and freedom may perhaps return to Egypt. They may be allowed re-entry—or they may be turned away—depending on the circumstances at that time.

For the moment, however, this land has grown inhospitable to them; hearts have turned away; both public and private interest demand that they depart and seek refuge elsewhere—perhaps in **Palestine**, or in **Syria**, or in **Lebanon**. These countries will surely welcome them warmly and receive them with joy, even though Palestine is the theatre of a fierce struggle between the falsehood of Zionism and the right of the Arabs, between the dominance of colonialism and the yearning for independence; and even though negotiations are still under way in Paris to complete the liberation and evacuation of Syria and Lebanon.

None of this prevents truth and freedom from dwelling in those lands, for their governments do not fear them, do not see in them any threat to order, nor any obstacle to progress or independence.

But Egypt's case is far more difficult—ininitely more tangled. For Egypt holds one view of the negotiations, while her government holds another; and since it is not Egypt herself who will negotiate with the British, but **Şidqī Pasha's government**, Egypt must now bow to reality, endure what she hates, submit to what she does not desire, until God brings His will to pass.

There is no path to such endurance—no hope for such submission—unless truth and freedom themselves depart from the valley of the Nile and reside elsewhere, east or west, until these negotiations are done. In the meantime, the government will be free to say whatever it pleases, to do whatever it wishes, to reveal to Egyptians what it chooses, and conceal from them what it chooses, to command and to forbid at will—without fear of contradiction, protest, or defiance.

This is the necessary condition if affairs are to proceed smoothly, and if the cabinet is to complete the free, untrammelled negotiations it has undertaken—negotiations as free as the breeze that blows in the open air, unhindered by any obstacle. It is, of course, self-evident that *the freedom of negotiations requires the restriction of the people's freedom*. The two swords cannot rest in one sheath. The government cannot be free to negotiate with the English while the people are free to watch, to question, and to hold it to account.

Since negotiations are demanded by the people themselves, the logic of things dictates that the people must renounce their liberty—for whoever seeks the end must approve the means. The desired end is negotiation; the necessary means is the curtailment of freedom.

Elsewhere in the world—in the East or the West, in Palestine, Syria, or Lebanon—people would laugh at such reasoning. But Egyptians do not laugh; they take it in earnest. They see in it pure wisdom, flawless truth—for Egyptians, after all, are the most rational of all nations, the most versed in the philosophy of Aristotle. And Aristotle taught long ago that whoever seeks an end must accept the means.

Thus, since the people desire negotiation, they must accept its natural conditions. They must allow *truth* and *freedom* a holiday abroad—so that the Egyptian nation may rest from the fatigue of inquiry and debate, from the burden of protest and dissent, and from the toil of vigilance and accountability. The government, too, will rest from all this; and so will the British, freeing both sides to negotiate without distraction.

If only the English were as wise as the Egyptians! They would have spared themselves much error and escaped many troubles. For the English negotiate constantly—with the Russians, the Americans, the French, and nations large and small—yet they achieve nothing. Their negotiations end, or they themselves end, in failure. Why? Because the English do not understand matters as Egypt does.

They negotiate while allowing their people to remain free—and then they are astonished when they fail. If only they had learned from us that *negotiation and liberty cannot coexist*—that one must drive out the other! If only they had done as we do—suspending liberty when they wish to negotiate, and suspending negotiation when they wish to be free—they would succeed in all they attempt.

But the English are strange by nature. They prefer freedom to everything else—even to successful negotiations, however vital they may be. They value freedom so dearly that they fight for it, risking the greatest dangers. They cherish it—but only for themselves. They grant it to all who dwell on British soil, but deny it to others.

I once read in a French newspaper that a British member of Parliament had submitted a petition signed by more than fifty thousand citizens demanding that pit ponies in the coal mines be treated humanely, and that their working hours not exceed eight per day. The paper remarked, with irony, how the Indians might well compare their own lot and rejoice at the comparison.

The English, then, prefer liberty to diplomatic success; hence they do not send truth and freedom on holiday during their endless negotiations. They do not suppress *The Times* or the *Daily Telegraph* or the *Daily Herald*. They do not surround newspaper offices with police, nor assign prosecutors to act as censors. They do not burn newspapers, nor blot out their words, nor dictate what may or may not be published.

And so, they fail in negotiation after negotiation. But they love Egypt more than they love themselves, and they care more for Egypt's welfare than for their own. They truly wish their talks with Egypt to succeed, even if their talks with other nations fail. That is why they insist—sincerely—that the atmosphere of negotiation be pure, clear, and tranquil, unsullied by opposition, untroubled by liberty, and untouched by truth.

They would have suppressed the freedom of the British people and the press themselves, had it been possible—but corruption runs deep in the British soul, and they can tolerate no substitute for their liberty. So, being unable to curb their own press, they are content to have **Ṣidqī Pasha** curb ours—to have *al-Wafd*, *al-Miṣrī*, and *al-Balāgh* confiscated in place of *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Daily Herald*. Something, after all, is better than nothing.

If both negotiating nations cannot be subdued, then at least one should be—and the wiser of the two is he who perceives the necessity of submission, bows to force, and welcomes

control. And, of course, the wiser of the two nations is Egypt: she understands the logic of Aristotle, knows that whoever seeks the goal must accept the means.

That is why the English sincerely urge us to purify the atmosphere of negotiation—by sending *truth* and *freedom* on leave, perhaps to the hills of Lebanon. And that is why we, too, sincerely wish to give Egypt a rest from truth and freedom—and to give truth and freedom a rest from Egypt. For some weeks or months, we might then live in tranquil humiliation, in peaceful servitude—content with this calm, tepid life that simple, unsuspecting souls enjoy, those who can be told that the sun rises in the west and sets in the east, and who accept it without question; who are commanded and obey, forbidden and submit; who are led wherever they are driven, simply because they “understand the nature of things” and the logic of Aristotle, and believe that whoever seeks the end must approve the means.

All this is reasonable, all this is real. What is strange—what alone deserves inquiry—is the interpellation submitted in the Senate by the Leader of the Opposition, asking the Prime Minister to explain the confiscation of newspapers, and how it violates the constitution.

The poor man did not know that *the constitution is a means, not an end*; that negotiations are more important than the constitution; that liberty is an evil to be borne only when it causes no harm, and rejected entirely when it does.

Had I been a member of the Senate like the Leader of the Opposition, I would have known how to answer him—and how to thank Ṣidqī Pasha for his love of Egypt, his care for her welfare, and his noble protection of her from the dangers of truth and freedom and all the sins they may bring.

I therefore support Ṣidqī Pasha completely. The newspapers must be censored; citizens must be watched; Egyptians must be returned to that blissful age, sixteen years past, which they had almost forgotten—the age of calm, secure, obedient living—so that we may win from the English true evacuation, genuine independence, and the unity of the Nile Valley from source to sea.

These are a thousand times more precious than truth or freedom, than the confiscated papers, than the daily losses of their owners, than the inconvenience Egyptians suffer when they search for *al-Wafd* or *al-Balāgh* or *al-Miṣrī* and are told they have been seized. What do they lose? They will still find other newspapers to tell them the news—as the government wishes it told. New papers will grow rich, for people will buy them willingly or unwillingly; others will grow poor, for people will shun them. There is no harm in that. As **Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī** said a thousand years ago:

“The wealth of Zayd is the poverty of ‘Amr.”

So yes, I support Ṣidqī Pasha fully. Let him confiscate the disobedient papers, reward the obedient ones, and make the Egyptian people walk in his path rather than their own.

And if I were a minister beside him—or even an adviser—I would counsel him to grant himself, his country, and our British allies final relief from this tiresome *constitution* that his opponents wield against him every day. Whenever he seizes a paper, they cry, “You’ve broken the constitution!” Whenever he acts to preserve order, they say the same. Whatever he does, they accuse him in the name of the constitution.

Would it not be natural for him to relieve himself—and them—of this burden? He is preparing for negotiations, while his enemies distract him with these endless “constitutional questions.” Which is more important—to prepare for the negotiations, or to waste time preparing answers to their interpellations?

Besides, the constitution still exists—half-awake, half-asleep. Awake, when Parliament meets; asleep, whenever it is suspended for “reasons of necessity.” It lives like a sleepwalker: rising at night, moving, advancing, retreating—without knowing what it does.

What harm, then, if the constitution were to fall into a deep, peaceful slumber—until the negotiations end, whether in paradise or in perdition?

And if it is necessary to grant *truth* and *freedom* a holiday abroad, why not extend the same kindness to the deputies and senators—let them vacation in the provinces—and to the constitution itself—let it rest in the drawer of a desk?

Let the Prime Minister believe me: his time is too precious to be wasted on idle talk, and the national interest far too dear to be sacrificed to truth, freedom, or constitutional scruples. Let him free himself—and Egypt—from these empty words that have lost all meaning.

I ask of him only one thing—a single, modest request which I know he will not deny us, for he is far too generous and kind to refuse:

Let Ṣidqī Pasha smile his gentle, complacent smile—and grant us leave to bid farewell, at least for a while, to **Truth, Freedom, and the Constitution.**

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn

al-Balāgh, 10 March 1946