

Conclusion

Kawkab al-Sharq, 1933

As for the opening address, it was read by whoever read it, and heard by whoever heard it among the people, on the day the parliamentary session opened at the end of last year, when the Prime Minister delivered the Speech from the Throne, and the people saw many promises.

As for the closing address, it was heard by whoever heard it, and read by whoever read it, and seen by whoever saw it, yesterday and today, in these speeches short and long delivered in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. And in it there is record-keeping, but no promise; in it there are hopes that the Senators, Deputies, and ministers wish to see fulfilled, but the fulfilment of hopes belongs to God alone. God alone has the power to proceed and accomplish what He has decreed, whatever people may say, whatever they may do, whatever people may hope for, whatever they may wish.

Yet this closing address with which the session ended yesterday is not without matter that invites reflection, and stirs in the soul lessons and admonitions from which the wise would do well to take warning, and the discerning to take heed.

For the substance of this closing address is thanks and praise, commendation and eulogy. Every person in Parliament is both thanker and thanked; every person in Parliament is both dispenser of praise and recipient of it.

The Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies begins, as he must begin, with praise of God Almighty and glorification of Him; then he scatters a bouquet of flowers that showers ministers and deputies alike; then he returns, after this general survey, to particulars, praising the ministers and commending them, thanking the deputies and extolling them, and not forgetting the officials of the Chamber's own secretariat.

No sooner has the Speaker finished than the deputies follow in his footsteps: they too praise and commend, they too thank and extol. Then the Prime Minister replies on behalf of the government, repaying eulogy with eulogy, and extolling with extolling.

The like of this occurs in the Senate as well; and so the ministers, deputies, and senators have all drunk their fill of praise, small and great, until they are quenched with a draught after which they shall not thirst again until the end of summer.

How we should have loved to see the cups and goblets of praise offered to the ministers, deputies, and senators by others, not by themselves—to see the people, in their individuals and their multitudes, praise them, rather than have them praise one another, and present to one another these arranged bouquets of commendation and eulogy. But the old proverb did not err when it said:

*Nothing scratches your skin like your own fingernail—
so take charge, yourself, of all your affairs.*

If the people, whether willing or merely compliant, have fallen short in what is due the ministers, deputies, and senators, then it is only right that these gentlemen should not fall short in what is due themselves. And if the people, whether content or reluctant, have been sparing toward the ministers, deputies, and senators in esteem, gratitude, and grateful acknowledgment, then it is only right that they should esteem themselves, thank themselves, and grant themselves grateful acknowledgment. And this they have done, achieving yesterday what they wished, and more than what they wished. However much we may criticise them, however much we may take issue with them, we cannot possibly describe them as having fallen short yesterday in what is due themselves, or having been sparing toward themselves in exaltation and glorification, in salutation and esteem.

As for the people, they stand between two possibilities: either they are ungrateful for favour, denying of kindness, unjust toward those who do them good, stingy toward those who bestow favour upon them and shower them with blessing—and so they receive the closing address coldly, just as they received the opening address coldly, offering neither praise, nor commendation, nor thanks, nor eulogy;

or they are dull of sense, asleep in feeling, so that kindness reaches them from every side without their perceiving it or sensing it, and blessing engulfs them up to their very ears without their feeling this overwhelming flood of bounty that has all but swept over them entirely. And so their tongues are tied against praise and thanks, their hands are shackled against applause, and clouds of gloom and sorrow have settled

upon their faces, as though they were wretched though in fact happy, as though grieved and afflicted though in fact joyful and delighted, as though despairing and hopeless though their hearts are, in fact, filled with hope and brimming with expectation.

For one or the other of these two failings—or for both together—the people were cold on the day the session opened, and the people were cold on the day the session closed.

And what do you make of a people in whom filial ingratitude and dullness of sense have both come together? Truly, such a people deserves what befalls it, and merits being toyed with by events—perhaps these might teach it gratitude toward those who do it good, and perhaps they might rouse it from this deep sleep in which it lies so thoroughly submerged!

Be that as it may, this phenomenon must be put on record, so that the people may know of it once it awakens and comes to its senses: namely, that the people were asleep and heedless, excessive in slumber and neglect, at a time when the ministers, senators, and deputies were watchful and alert; and that the people went on sleeping, dreaming of hope and expectation, of blessing and prosperity, while complaining of grief, hardship, misery, and adversity—while the ministers, senators, and deputies went on in their wakefulness and alertness, beholding the facts as they actually stand, recording all that Egypt has attained of prosperity and abundance, of advancement and progress, of exalted reputation and lofty standing, and giving thanks and praise for all these blessings to those who conferred them, and gratitude for all these bounties to those who bestowed them—namely, the ministers, deputies, and senators.

And what do you make of a people who are reminded of these millions the Ministry has allocated, and which the deputies and senators have approved, to resolve the crisis and relieve its distress, and yet do no more than complain of hardship and want, mention hunger and deprivation, sickness and epidemics, and insist, and press their insistence, that the crisis still persists, remains pressing, urgent, and heavy? Is it not incumbent upon you to inform this people that it is asleep and dreaming, and that the whole and complete truth lies in what the ministers, deputies, and senators said in their closing address yesterday? For there is no hardship, no want; there is no distress, no crisis; these are merely the dreams of sleepers who have gorged themselves on wealth and riches, until indigestion has made them imagine themselves hungry

and deprived!

Indeed—and what do you make of a people who are reminded by the ministers, senators, and deputies that they have allocated sums upon sums, and spent thousands upon thousands on irrigation and drainage, on the building of dams and the preparations for them, and yet acknowledge none of this merit, but complain instead, and press their complaint, and lament that this money would have been better allocated to something other than what it was allocated to, and spent on something other than what it was spent on? Is this not a people asleep and heedless, whom slumber has diverted from its own interests, and heedlessness has distracted from its own welfare, so that it sees every good thing as ugly, and imagines every ugly thing to be good? Indeed so—the people has erred entirely, and the ministers, senators, and deputies have been entirely right!

And what do you make of a people who are reminded by the ministers, senators, and deputies that they have raised for it a solidly-built, well-proportioned edifice of culture, imposing compulsory education, reforming the university's statutes, and expanding the activity of al-Azhar—and yet acknowledge none of this, but instead find excuses and pick faults, claiming that compulsory education was never properly studied or scrutinised, but was rushed through simply so that its law might be said to have been issued; claiming that the government and Parliament have spread the wing of al-Azhar further than is proper, while clipping the wing of the university until it can no longer rise into the air; and that all of this was pushed through with a speed unknown to any country on earth, and a haste unknown to any generation of mankind. And the political idea was more evident in it than the technical idea, until the opposition political parties found themselves obliged to include in their programmes the reform of the state of culture and education, and its restoration to what it was, or to something better than what it was before this happy era? Is this not proof that this people is asleep and dreaming, seeing good and reckoning it evil, seeing blessing and reckoning it misery?

How badly this people needs to be taken in hand with some measure of violence and severity, that its crooked channel might be straightened, its wayward temperament corrected, and that it might come to believe what the ministers, deputies, and senators say!..

But the channel of this people, whether regrettably or happily, whether sorrowfully or joyfully, refuses to soften before the nudging of those who nudge it, the refining of those who would refine it, and the straightening of those who would straighten it. It shall remain, then, as crooked as it is; and the temperament of this people shall remain as wayward as it is; the channel shall not be straightened, nor the temperament corrected, whatever the ministers, deputies, and senators may say, and whatever they may do.

How fierce the contradiction between these two Egypts, which live upon one and the same soil, breathe one and the same air, and drink from one and the same river: official Egypt, and the Egypt of the people!

And what greater proof of this contradiction between these two Egypts could there be than that official Egypt should be stirred by the emotions of contentment and indignation that rage within it, driven by the impulses of hope and despair, ruled by the forces of activity and lassitude, from the day the opening address was recited last year to the day the closing address was recited yesterday—while none of all this finds any echo whatsoever in the soul of the Egypt of the people?

A fierce contradiction, and a wide estrangement between these two Egypts; and God alone has the power to reconcile these two opposites.