

Two Events

al-Balagh, 22 March 1945

There is no doubt that the Near East will occupy world public opinion to a considerable degree today, and in the days that follow. Indeed, there is no doubt it will be the most important thing occupying world public opinion, after the affairs of the war itself, in these very days. Two grave events are taking place in the Near East, events bound to have the furthest-reaching, deepest effect on the world's coming life. The first occurs in Cairo this very afternoon, when the Arab League Conference convenes, when this League's own charter is signed, and when this League becomes an established fact, a grave force in the life of the nations taking part in it, on the one hand, and in the relationship between these nations and the European and American world, on the other.

It is enough for even the least learned, the least informed about world affairs, to look at the state of the Arab countries at the beginning of this century, then between the two great wars, then at the new life these countries begin today, to see that the Arab East has taken vast, tremendous strides — not merely toward recovering its own freedom and independence, but toward convincing the European and American world that it possesses rights that must be restored, sanctities that must be respected, and a dignity that must be preserved.

All of these Arab countries were once subject to the authority of the Ottoman Turks, in varying degrees of strength and weakness, but subject all the same. Egypt, at the beginning of this century, stood apart from these countries with an internal and external freedom that was, to a considerable degree, compromised. Egypt was free, but with a limited freedom compared to Turkey; British armies occupied her soil, and British policy governed her affairs. Egypt was, nonetheless, better off than her neighbours, enjoying ample freedom of opinion, and guaranteed freedom for individuals and communities alike. Cairo was, for this reason, a haven and a refuge, drawing the hearts of Arabs from every Arab land, sheltering those who feared the Turkish Sultan, who found there both security and freedom, and displayed an activity there that benefited them and benefited Egyptians in equal measure.

Then came the last war, and well-known trials befell these Arab countries, all of which ended in a limited good — but a good beyond doubt nonetheless. Egypt recovered much of her independence, and

continues to demand what remains of it; Iraq took broad strides, achieving as much independence as Egypt did; the Arabian Peninsula recovered her independence entire; Syria and Lebanon won an independence tainted by the Mandate, before freeing themselves of that Mandate as this present war advanced. It is certain that the difference between these countries' lives at the beginning of this century and their lives between the two great wars appears enormous, when viewed by a foreigner from Europe or America — but it falls far short of satisfying us, since our own ideals are far greater than what we have achieved, and of far more consequence than this stage we have reached. It is equally certain that the step we take today will be a decisive step in the history of this Arab East, for it will carry us in a single great leap toward these very ideals.

The Arab East was subject at the beginning of this century, then became free by the middle of it, and is now, from this very day, organizing her own affairs and taking part in organizing the world's — all this before even half the century has passed. Pessimists are free to look upon this development with whatever ill opinion their own pessimism inclines them toward; the crafty among Western statesmen are free to show approval while harbouring resentment, to proclaim admiration for this development while secretly belittling it. None of this will change the truth in the slightest. The truth is that there has always burned, in this Arab East, an ember of free life that was never once extinguished, but has, since the beginning of this century, been steadily blazing, until it has filled the eastern Mediterranean with strength, heat, and light, and become too strong to be defeated, placing European colonialism in a position compelling it to retreat, little by little, whether it likes it or not.

It fills Egyptian hearts with real contentment and delight, and spreads through them a genuine pride and dignity, that Egypt herself held a distinguished place throughout this whole development: she was the first to free herself from Ottoman Turkish authority in the past century; she was the one who welcomed her Arab brothers onto her own soil, sheltering them beneath her own shadow, when that authority's own pressure upon them grew fierce; she was the one who opened the door to liberation from European influence, was the first to walk through it, and laid down the plans for others who wished to follow. She was, moreover, the one who called for the Arab consultations to organize cooperation among the Arab East's own countries, and the one who laid the solid foundation for that cooperation at the Alexandria Conference this past

October. The Arabs will never forget that Egyptian-Arab voice that broadcast the Alexandria Protocol to them on the evening of Saturday, 7 October 1944. Nor will the Arabs forget these Arab voices that will broadcast to them this very evening that the structure whose foundation was laid this past October has now been fully raised, and has begun, from this very day, to face events and overcome trials. Egypt has every right to be satisfied; the Arabs have every right to rejoice; and the Arab East has every right to welcome its new life with boundless hope. But it is equally right that this Arab East should not forget, and will not forget, that life consists not of hopes alone, but of hopes and deeds together.

This, then, is one of the two events that will occupy world public opinion in these very days. As for the other event, it spreads through hearts neither satisfaction, nor through souls delight — but neither does it, at the same time, call for despair, or drive one toward hopelessness. It is the complication that has arisen in Turkish-Russian relations. Matters had long stood settled between these two neighbours, resting on a treaty guaranteeing friendship, cooperation, and good neighbourliness, signed in 1925 — until it occurred to Russia to inform her neighbour that she would not renew this treaty as it stood, since the circumstances that have arisen, and are already changing the world, leave it in need of a great many amendments. This means Russia will follow one of two paths with her neighbour: the first, to put before her whatever amendments she proposes to the treaty — that is, to approach her with demands that become the subject of negotiation; the second, for each of the two neighbours to retain her own freedom, and live as peaceful states live, exposed to whatever incidents or problems might arise.

There is little use in searching for the reasons that drove Russia to this angry step she took yesterday; these reasons are perfectly clear. Not everyone can exercise the patience and forbearance, or affect that composure so close to coldness, that the English are so given to; some people, indeed, regard such patience as weakness, and such composure as a dullness their own nature and temperament simply refuse. And in truth, Turkey's own conduct toward the Allies, during this war, can be described, at the very least, as one whose outward appearances stirred irritation and provoked real discomfort.

She had once enjoyed the purest possible friendship with her neighbour Russia, and had received from that neighbour a great deal of material and moral support in liberating her own territory and recovering her own standing after the last war. She had been, to all appearances,

very nearly Russia's own ally. Yet no sooner had this present war drawn near than she concluded her own alliance with the two Western powers, France and England — all of which seemed to signal she would never maintain continuous neutrality once the war reached the Near East. And yet she maintained continuous neutrality all the same, when Italy and Germany attacked her own allies in the Balkans, and when her allies' own position in Western Europe grew most precarious; and she maintained continuous neutrality still, when Hitler was giving people, through both word and deed, the impression that Russian strength was about to collapse, and when German armies had reached the Caucasus.

Nor did she stop there — the fiercer the war grew, the more she went on affirming her friendship with Germany. France, for her part, could do nothing and say nothing. Britain and America, for theirs, affected patience and forbearance, before finally resorting to warnings and threats. Russia, meanwhile, swallowed her own anger and preferred an imposing, suspicious silence. Then came Germany's defeat, and the preparations to organize the world. And there was Turkey, declaring war so as to take part in that organization, and being invited to take part in it. France said nothing, and had nothing to say, having herself refused to be among those invited to the San Francisco Conference — though this did not prevent her own press and radio from showing a certain bitter displeasure, France not having forgotten that she had once angered the Arab world by handing Turkey the Sanjak of Alexandretta. Great Britain and America, for their part, set the past aside, and thought instead of the peace to come, welcoming Turkey's entry into the United Nations.

Russia, for her part, invited Turkey among those invited to San Francisco, but did not hide the resentment she felt, and her own press and radio went to considerable lengths criticizing Turkey's conduct. Turkey was then informed that Russia would not renew the treaty standing between them, since it stood in urgent need of amendment. It is clear this event struck hard, first in Turkey herself, and then in the Allied capitals, and that it will give rise to a great deal of talk and a great deal of reflection — but it will not, for all that, be cause for fear or suspicion. Two things account for this: first, that there is enough flexibility in politics to mend what is broken, straighten what is bent, and renew friendship between neighbours; second, that the conferences soon to be held to organize the world and settle the peace will, without doubt, find the means to protect these two neighbours from whatever might otherwise drive them into open discord.

It is only fair to note that Mr. Churchill himself recently declared, in the British House of Commons, that there is no way to deny facts on the ground, or reject self-evident truths. There are, in the world, great nations and small nations; there are, in the world, strong states and weak states, and there is no way to deny this, nor to deny the consequences that follow from it. But it is equally fair to note that Professor Beveridge offered a genuinely sound analysis of the plan that will be under discussion at San Francisco.

What appears most clearly and plainly of all is that Turkey, if she is not Russia's own ally, is at least Great Britain's ally and America's friend; there is no doubt, then, that matters will proceed in a manner guaranteeing peace in the Near East, and allowing Turkey to enter her own new life in this new world exactly as other nations enter it — with a great deal of hope, hedged about by real problems, and requiring, too, a great deal of real work.

Whatever the case, the Near East will be the subject of talk and study in these very days, and may well occupy world public opinion at the expense of Poland's own affairs — growing ever more complicated rather than any closer to resolution — and at the expense of Romania's own affairs, still unsettled, and still requiring consultation among the Allies who conferred together in the Crimea. And who knows — perhaps events of the war, in East and West alike, will distract the world for a while from all of this talk.