

The Minister of Education's Word

Jaridat al-Wafd al-Misri, 9 September 1943.

At so resplendent a celebration and so brimming an assembly, after so enchanting an address, it is no wonder that I rose, bewildered of tongue, to offer thanks from a grateful heart. You would insist on honoring me with this generosity and courtesy, you multiplied, in your address, embellishment and eloquence, and you pressed on in your resolve without hesitation or reluctance, so that nothing remained for me but to submit. And I came to believe that you are truly compulsory in more than name; for your authority — binding, as it is, upon the small beginner — has become binding upon the Minister as well. And what increases my delight in this charming celebration is that you, teachers of the compulsory schools, know no false ornament, and that you held this celebration believing it to be a due owed by right rather than by favor — yet I have accepted it as one accepts the kindness of a benefactor, or as one friend accepts an obligation from another.

Nor had it ever crossed my mind, even in my fondest hope, that I should see this celebration reach such a height of joy and such a summit of splendor, honored as it was by the presence of the exalted President, who raised it higher still and exalted it further.

My brothers! A bond of affection has long united us, and a thousand proofs upon proofs have established it, nor could it have been otherwise. And how should the firm bond of affection not be unbreakable between those who serve the nation's rising generation, its daughters and its sons, and one who is the teachers' own faithful servant!

My brothers! No democratic nation could ever neglect the cause of compulsory education; for democracy is the rule of the great mass, that is, the rule of the people. And compulsory education is the education of the great mass, that is, the education of the people. And so concern for this education and its men has gone hand in hand with democracy's own logic; and for this reason I said to you at your conference on the 25th of July, 1936, the following: "You have no enemies but autocratic governments." Then I said to you: "If we may seek instruction from history, we find that compulsory education met in Europe with every variety of persecution and harm. And this pattern has held true across the ages in every land. Autocratic governments have waged against this education a fierce, unceasing, and powerful war, for fear that the

heedless masses might awaken and demand their right to enlightenment, to prosperity, and to governance. The prevailing claim was that the common mass of the people was created only to labor, not to learn or to think, and so had no concern with the affairs of government and authority, just as it had no concern with learning and knowledge. But God would not have it otherwise than that His light should be completed; and when the light of democracy was at last revealed, God decreed for this education a clear and lasting victory; for compulsory education is the pillar of democracy and the secret of its success — upon it rests democracy's foundation, and by it democracy is made complete; for it is the first and last stage in the education of the true ruler, namely the people. And whenever the level of this education sinks, the intellectual level of the nation falls with it, and the gulf between the privileged class and the common class widens; morals diverge, minds grow apart, and the members of one and the same nation become unable to understand one another; and for this reason it has been said that democratic nations must attend to this education with the fullest care, and must never be sparing of effort or money toward it." This is the language of democracy, and the language of the social scientists versed in the secrets of national progress. As for the educational theorists, they have said that compulsory education is the first stage and the gateway, and that one cannot demand the later stage before the first, nor the goal before the gateway. And if it is true that the first stage can stand on its own, the later stage cannot stand except upon the first; and for this reason nations must attend to the small beginners before they attend to the grown adolescents.

Nor is there any doubt that the teachers are the pillar and support of this education; for it is they who teach the great mass the discipline of this world and the discipline of religion, who transmit to the sons the heritage of the fathers, and who deliver, from the present generation to the generation to come, the trust of language, of morals, of patriotism, and of religion.

And it used to grieve me deeply to see the teacher stripped of his rights — so that if he retired, he faced bitter poverty and a wretched fate, and if he died, he left behind nothing but small children and a flood of tears. And I used to say to myself, as the educational and social theorists say, that a nation may not treat the minds and the efforts of its teachers as a market in which it profits while they are left among the losers, nor should it allow livelihoods to flow to others while the teachers themselves remain mired in mud and clay.

Yet the educational theorists brought nothing new in this; before them the wise poet had already said:

The teacher and the physician, both alike, cannot give sound counsel unless they are both honored.

And the teachers' demands long met a deaf ear, one whose very echo wearied whoever called out to it, until Mustafa al-Nahhas took up the reins of government, and the waters returned to their proper course, and the bow was given back to its maker; no sooner were the teachers' demands laid before him than he inclined toward them with favor. And but for his favor, they would have remained mere hopes, all but impossible of fulfillment. Mustafa al-Nahhas was created for the highest and most universal good, and he knows that he is the seat of every soul's hope, and the place of every heart's love. And when he took up the reins of government, his signs and his virtues appeared in every affair, and the Valley grew radiant and its quarters were set at ease, after its darkness had deepened and its calamities had grown heavy. And in proportion as darkness settled over the land, the light of Mustafa al-Nahhas grew only the more radiant and resplendent, so that the Valley shone forth and its glooms were dispelled. Nor is this any wonder — for when night's darkness deepens, its very stars shine only the brighter.

My brothers! It gladdens me greatly that the exalted President's favor toward your cause should be joined to the favor of Parliament in both its houses; for this favor has eased my own heart and settled your affairs and mine alike, and by it the appropriations requested for the teachers have become a binding and effective reality. And it is with still greater joy that I now read out to you the very text of the Finance Committee's report in the Chamber of Deputies on the affairs of teachers in general and of compulsory-school teachers in particular. The Committee said:

There is no doubt that the burdens placed upon teachers' shoulders and the responsibility they bear require that steps be taken to do them justice; for this is the body that carries out, with patience and fortitude, the gravest and most exacting of civic duties. And education cannot be sound, nor can its affairs run straight, merely by building schools, fixing curricula, and distributing books, unless all of this is joined to providing the teacher with material sufficiency in the same measure as his scholarly sufficiency. Without this, his spirit will not be at ease, his output will not be good, and he will not be able to instill in the young the love of

learning. As for the men of primary education, they are in more urgent need than others, given the meagerness of their salaries and the absence of any pension secured for them. And the truth is that undertaking the reform of compulsory education, together with filling the atmosphere of education with the spirit of national feeling, together with moving likewise toward establishing the full school day, and together with easing, for those who carry out this education, the hardships of livelihood by raising their salaries and introducing a system of child nutrition, all augurs that we are indeed proceeding along the path of the good.

My brothers! You placed your trust in the people's government to do you justice, and it was not for us to betray your trust, nor to fail to render you your due, you who fill the earth with learning and with light. It is not permissible that you should be wronged, nor that you should be like a lamp that burns itself away; and you shall, God willing, obtain the whole of your rights, now that Parliament has upheld them; for what Parliament directs is a duty that must be discharged, and its ruling is binding, never to be left unfulfilled.

And in closing, I thank you for your great generosity of spirit and for the gracious warmth of your welcome; indeed, I thank you for this radiant day, the like of which time rarely grants, and which no measure of praise or gratitude could ever fully repay.

And peace be upon you, and the mercy of God.