

Since Today

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jaridat al-Siyasa, 6 July 1932

It is a settled fact that we are free, as free as anyone could wish to be, for the constitution has guaranteed us freedom in all its various colors and all its various kinds. We are free in thought, for freedom of opinion is guaranteed in the constitution. We are free in speech and writing, for freedom of speech and writing is guaranteed in the constitution. We are free in movement and travel, for freedom of movement and travel is guaranteed in the constitution. We are free, as free as anyone could wish to be. And if Egyptians knew what others endure, in many other countries, of tyranny in its various colors and humiliation in its various kinds, their tongues would never cease praising the Prime Minister. I nearly called him the Dictator, but held back, for his actual dictatorship only begins two days from now, once parliament disperses and the government effectively monopolizes both legislation and execution until parliament reconvenes. He is, then, Prime Minister until Thursday evening, and the Dictator thereafter. If Egyptians knew what others endure of tyranny and enslavement, they would praise the Prime Minister in the highest terms; but being ignorant of this, they remain unsatisfied with the bliss, honor, and happiness that is theirs. And with such insolence and ingratitude, they well deserve to be struck with what they dread.

Their situation regarding freedom is just like their situation regarding prosperity: they imagine their country is in crisis, though the Prime Minister has told them their crisis is nothing worth mentioning compared with the crises of other nations, and is closer to fancy than to fact. And they imagine their share of freedom is small, though the Prime Minister has told them their share of freedom is like that of other free, independent nations enjoying sound democratic government. The strange thing about these Egyptians is that they listen to the Prime Minister when he gives a speech, and read him when he writes or speaks to the newspapers, and then doubt what he says and place no trust in it! They believe themselves and disbelieve the Prime Minister — and that is sin and transgression enough, insolence and ingratitude enough. What is this? Is it because they feel hardship and privation, and the great mass of them suffer from fear and hunger, that they believe themselves to be in crisis, and disbelieve the Prime Minister when he tells them their country

has not yet known hardship or privation, and that fear and hunger have not yet found their way to them?!

O God, I seek refuge in You from this temptation, and ask Your help against this trial, and beseech You to spare me what these Egyptians have fallen into, these men who count themselves more truthful than the Prime Minister. O God, I declare that the Prime Minister is always truthful — truthful when he tells me I am free while I am in chains, truthful when he tells me of prosperity while I am in crisis, truthful when he tells me of security while I am afraid, truthful when he tells me of plenty while I am hungry, truthful in everything he tells me about myself, whatever I may find, whatever I may feel, whatever I may sense, and whatever my own self may tell me to the contrary — for he is the Prime Minister, and God forbid that I should be right and the Prime Minister wrong, or that I should speak truly and the Prime Minister speak falsely!

We are, then, as free as anyone could wish to be, and had Mustafa Kamil, God rest him, lived to see these very days we live in, he would have been the happiest of men, the most delighted, to see his cherished wish become reality. For we have become, thanks to the Prime Minister, free in our own country, gracious hosts to our guests, free to think as we please, to say what we please, and to travel as we please. Parliament does not convene to condemn what we think or say, nor does the sheikhdom of al-Azhar demand our books be confiscated or burned. The police do not trail us when we come and go, nor does the Ministry of the Interior report on every movement and stillness that befalls us. Our trains are not diverted off the main road into the desert, no trenches are dug before us, no snares are laid for us. We are free to think, speak, and travel as we ourselves wish, not as the government wishes for us. And do not believe the Liberal Constitutionalists, nor the Wafdists; both alike only slander the government and speak of it less than the truth. And we are gracious hosts to our guests — how generous we are to them, how liberal our hand! We shower them with money for as long as they remain among us, and should they ever leave us, our money follows after them, just as under the old order.

Consider our solicitude toward foreigners, official and unofficial alike. Do we not impose the stamp-duty fee on officials? The Egyptian pays it meekly, while the foreigner pays it only for form's sake, and then has his salary raised by just enough to cover it. And should the foreigner ever leave us, our money follows after him in various guises. Do we not lend to the Sudan (that is, to the English) while we ourselves stand in

need of a lender?! Do we not pay a certain sum to the Daily Telegraph to publish a special supplement on Egypt?! We are free in our own country, gracious hosts to our guests, thanks to the Prime Minister, who has known how to make Mustafa Kamil's dream a reality beyond all doubt or question.

But the constitution that guarantees freedom insists on regulating it too, and so laws must be legislated for it, and bounds set upon it; nor is it the Prime Minister's fault that our constitution should be like the constitutions of other nations, setting up for freedom whatever bounds and dams prevent it from tyranny and transgression. We have tried freedom with no bound or dam set upon it, and seen the results of that experiment to be shameful and detestable. We have seen people doubt what the Prime Minister says, disbelieving that they are free, disbelieving that they are prosperous. We have seen them think ill of the government, condemning its works, doubting its words, and criticizing parliament — and what sin equals criticizing parliament?! It is therefore necessary to set bounds and dams before this tyrannical freedom. The people of Egypt must be brought to the same conviction people always hold in the advanced countries that know freedom and democracy: that the government is forever right, incapable of error; forever truthful, incapable of falsehood; and that deputies and senators are sacrosanct — whoever assails them with criticism has wronged himself, transgressed against his homeland, and exposed himself to the harshest punishment.

The free men of Europe know this, for their acquaintance with freedom and constitutional rule is old. But Egyptians are new to both, and so stand in need of upbringing and discipline; the government must teach them what experience ought to have taught them, and formal legislation must take the place of taste, sensibility, and feeling.

Have you ever seen a Frenchman deny what Herriot says, or mock the Chamber? Have you ever seen an Englishman doubt what MacDonald says, or criticize the House of Commons? Do not believe the French or English newspapers when they report to you what Tardieu or Henderson, or the partisans of this man or that, have said. For these Frenchmen and Englishmen are a crafty lot, who issue two different editions of their newspapers: one, the true one, published in France and England, representing the opposition in its true form, deferential to the government, trusting and believing in it, granting it every victory and every support. The other, a false and misleading edition, sent specially to Egypt and the East in general, to corrupt their minds, their taste, and

their sensibility — this one portrays the opposition as hostile to the government and to the parliamentary majority, criticizing both with the harshest criticism and denouncing both with the ugliest denunciation. And what else would you expect these Europeans to send us, in their newspapers, magazines, and books, but what corrupts our minds and teaches us to criticize ministers, deputies, and senators, and to doubt what they say and do? We are, then, wronging ourselves. And our government is sincere in its love for us, well-meaning toward us, when it disciplines us with the discipline of advanced nations, setting before our tyrannical freedom such bounds and dams as teach us how to believe the Prime Minister when he speaks, and obey him when he commands, and how to hold deputies and senators sacred, trusting that they are infallible, forever bound to be right.

The ministry has now legislated for us a new code of law, teaching us how to be truly free; the Chamber of Deputies approved this new code some days ago, and I have no doubt the Senate will approve it tonight. For the senators' zeal on our behalf is no less than the deputies'; and so, from this day on, we shall be truly free. And from this day on, writers, orators — if the opposition is still permitted to orate at all — and journalists will know the bounds and dams set up before them, that they may guide the people toward true freedom and sincere democracy.

Perhaps the French writer Beaumarchais portrayed these very bounds and dams best of all, when he gave voice to them through his hero Figaro, in his famous play "The Marriage of Figaro." The journalist has his freedom of speech and writing, on condition that he touch neither authority, nor religion, nor politics, nor morals, nor persons occupying distinguished positions, nor respected bodies, nor the Opera, nor the theater in general, nor anyone connected with any undertaking whatsoever. If he avoids all of this, and then submits to two or three censors besides, he may say whatever he likes.

O writers, orators, and journalists: these bounds have been drawn for you from this day on; know them, and beware of overstepping them, and say after that whatever you wish. Describe the beauty of nature, the clarity of the sky, the mildness of the climate, and beware of doubting that you are free! For you are free, as free as anyone could wish to be. So the Prime Minister tells us, and when the Prime Minister speaks, his word is the truth, whatever you may feel, whatever you may sense, whatever you may believe.

Learn, from this day on, how free writing, free oratory, and a free press are made. Whoever transgresses after this transgresses only against himself, and whoever does good does good only to himself. As for me, I have found my own way: from this day on, the Prime Minister shall hear from me nothing but praise and commendation. And who among men deserves praise more than the Prime Minister?! Has he not guaranteed us true freedom and sincere democracy under the shadow of his new constitution?!