

Test

Sawt al-Umma, 6 September 1946.

Egypt's political character has never been tested as it is being tested now, and Egypt has never failed so grave a test as the one it is failing now. It is enough to note that talk of the negotiations began between us and the English back in the past year, and that it has not yet come to an end, nor does anyone know when it means to come to an end. The source of this is simple: it is the weakness of political character among a certain party of Egyptians, who do not speak to the English as an equal, confident in his right, speaks to an equal who has usurped that right, but speak to them rather as the weak and exhausted man, capable of nothing — yet still wishing, for all that, to go on living — speaks to the strong and composed man, who fears nothing, needs nothing, and holds in his own hands everything that concerns this weak man's fate.

It was for this reason that al-Nokrashi Pasha hesitated, and hesitated excessively, before asking the English to take up the negotiations, until Sidqi Pasha pressed him and pressed him insistently to hurry, and until Makram Pasha warned him and warned him insistently, and until public opinion grew heated and very nearly exploded. At that point al-Nokrashi Pasha came forward, politely and bashfully, conceding more than half the right at the outset, and the English answered him coolly and coldly, holding fast to the very right that had been handed to them. Had al-Nokrashi Pasha and his supporters possessed a strong political character, they would have demanded the right before ever going to San Francisco, before the war had even laid down its burdens, and before being driven to this demand by prodding, pricking, and shoving, as though they were being led, eyes open, to their own death.

Had al-Nokrashi Pasha and his supporters possessed a strong political character, they would have demanded the right whole and undiminished, and demanded it in a firm, decisive tone, free of exhaustion or bashfulness. But they were newcomers, granted power without deserving it, and they preferred themselves to their nation, and preferred the continuance of their own happy era to evacuation and the unity of the Nile Valley. Then the storm swept away al-Nokrashi Pasha and his supporters, and the present ministry rose to the burdens of power, and it was expected of its head — who had so pressed and hurried until he wearied himself and wearied others, and so insisted until he grew

weary of insisting and wearied others of hearing it — it was expected that he would be plainer in speech and firmer in resolve, and more eager to secure the right without hesitation, delay, or procrastination. But he rose to power in February and has achieved nothing, and here we are now in September, because his own political character, and that of his supporters, is no stronger than the political character of al-Nokrashi Pasha and his supporters. The only difference between the one group and the other was that one party was in power, and power revealed in their character what had been hidden, and when the others leapt into power, power likewise revealed in their character what had been hidden.

*Love halted me where you are, and I am left neither able to lag behind it
nor advance beyond it.*

But God willed that Egypt be tested in its political character, and tested by the men of this blessed era — those who regard everything as permissible and lawful except stepping down from power, and being placed where God has placed them, in the rank of the minority that ought never to represent the people, nor speak with its tongue, nor speak in its name, nor decide its affairs, for it possesses none of its trust, and representing the nation ought never to be anything but the result of pure and complete trust.

Our gentlemen today monopolize the affairs of government and politics out of resentment, not out of trust, and they themselves bear witness to this when they hurl accusations of electoral fraud at one another.

They are resentful on account of our internal rights, just as the English are resentful on account of our external rights; what wonder, then, that the matter should prove difficult for usurpers of both kinds? And what wonder that the English should be wary of breaking off the negotiations and losing their opportunity, since agreement with the few is easier than agreement with the many?

And what wonder that our politicians should be wary of breaking off the negotiations and losing the opportunity that allows them to remain in power and enjoy whatever standing and authority that power grants them? The whole matter comes back to the weakness of political character. Had political character been strong, our politicians would have preferred their nation to themselves, and would never have consented to place themselves and their nation in this harmful, humiliating position

before the English. And what do you make of a people who submit to the English a memorandum that formally registers the Protectorate upon their own homeland, and then, when they sense refusal and arrogance from the English, do not dare to break off the negotiations, but merely delay and prevaricate, casting one eye toward the paradise of power and the other toward the fire of being deprived of it — delaying and prevaricating, and adding more delay to delay and prevarication to prevarication, until the whole matter has become nothing more nor less than mere quibbling?

And who, then, can blame the English, if they have grown coy and coquettish and excessive in their coyness and coquetry ... while leaving our seasoned politicians to simmer slowly over a low flame?

A lion toward me, but in wars an ostrich — fluttering, bolting at the whistler's whistle.

I did not see any harm, then, in sharing with him the burdens of power.

As for the Constitutional Liberals, they are nowhere to be seen in all this, for they are, as the ancient poet says, an easy, yielding people, answering every summons, hurrying to every table, tasting of every dish, pleased so that they might later be displeased, and displeased so that they might later be pleased — a people too easy a matter for any Prime Minister, whoever he might be, to be troubled by. The thing dearest to them is power, and the thing most hateful to them is withdrawal from power; so they share power with al-Nokrashi Pasha, and they share power with Sidqi Pasha, and they share power with the two men together when they agree — and there is no harm to them, either, in sharing power with al-Nokrashi Pasha alone, or with whichever head of government you please, should God decree that Sidqi Pasha is to rest, and let others rest too.

It has been said that the Constitutional Liberals are angry because Sidqi Pasha wishes to dislodge one of them from his post, and they remain angry until their eyes turn red with rage — until it becomes clear to them that their anger will avail them nothing at all. At that point they become entirely content, and receive whatever posts of government are offered to them smiling and grateful, or say, rather, joyful, merry, and glad. The strange thing is that among these very politicians there are Egyptians who know the old proverb: you cannot harvest grapes from

thorns.