

On Education

Al-Ahram, 6 April 1953.

The number of our university students this year is forty-three thousand, and it would be well for education if this number fell to half of itself. But, to our great sorrow — or to our great joy, as you wish — it will instead rise next year to fifty-three or fifty-five thousand, or more than that.

And it would be well for education next year if the number of students fell to less than half of itself. And if, the year after that, their number rises until it reaches seventy thousand, it would be well for education if this number sank to a third of itself. And the number will go on increasing in reality and decreasing only in our ideal, until God guides us to the straight path, the path of those upon whom He has bestowed favor, granting them mercy from Himself and preparing for them right guidance in their affair.

And this straight path is one upon which those who are rightly guided do not think to oppose nature and quarrel with the logic of life, nor to turn away from education a people that wishes to learn, nor turn away from the light a people that wishes to step forth into the light.

There is no nation on earth in which students crowd upon the universities or the secondary schools, and the nation turns them away from the universities and secondary schools out of concern for the soundness and excellence of education. The only path is rather to establish from among the universities, schools, and institutes of education whatever matches people's eagerness for assistance and their desire to increase it. I know of no country like Egypt in which people are vexed by the eagerness of the people's sons to learn, when by rights this ought to be a source of delight, contentment, and joy, not a source of regret, sorrow, and gloom. Our elders taught us, from the earliest times, that knowledge is light, that ignorance is darkness, and that the good lies in bringing people out of ignorance into knowledge, and out of darkness into light.

Thus we were taught, and to this we called, and people heard us and responded to our call, and came forward seeking knowledge until its institutions, in all their variety, grew too narrow to hold them. So people complain of the scarcity of these institutions, and those responsible for

education very nearly complain of the abundance of those seeking knowledge, were it not for some measure of shame that restrains them from calling for ignorance, let alone from holding people back in it.

We must, then, seek God's guidance and set our affairs in order, and confront the facts as they are and as men ought to confront them, and try to establish whatever institutes, schools, and universities we need, so that the people may learn with ease, and without finding any difficulty in this noble aspiration to a noble life.

And I would wish the cultured and the leaders of opinion to practice some measure of modesty, moderation, and restraint, for God has not made them guardians over the people, but has made them counselors and guides to it. It is their right to advise it and counsel it and say to it: this is good, so pursue it, and this is evil, so turn away from it! — and then to leave it its freedom thereafter; if it wishes, it may follow them, and perhaps it will be rightly guided, and if it wishes, it may oppose them, and perhaps it will not err; for the cultured among guides, leaders, and counselors are not immune from error, and it may well be that they see the good and point to it, and yet the good does not lie in what they saw, but lies rather in some other direction than the one toward which they went.

And they are, in any case, guides and leaders, not guardians or controllers. And God said to His Messenger: "Indeed you do not guide whom you love, but God guides whom He wills."

And He said to him as well: "So remind, for you are only a reminder; you are not over them a controller." It is fitting, then, for the cultured and the leaders to know that they are reminders, not controllers, and guides, not guardians or overlords. And the age in which men of opinion controlled the people's fate has come to an end, and we now live in an age in which the people controls its own fate.

So let us counsel it and advise it, without dominating it or compelling it toward anything other than what it wants. And it wants to learn, to learn in the secondary and technical schools and in the universities, so let us prepare for it the learning it wants, let us guide it toward what we believe to be good, and turn it away from what we believe to be evil, but without harshness or hardship toward it, for that may drive it out of its natural temper, and the consequence of that would be evil for it and for all of us.

We must, then, seek God's guidance and set our affairs in order, and proceed with clear insight, and establish from among the schools, institutes, and universities whatever this aspiring people needs. For Egypt was not created for ignorance — she who made known to the peoples the path of knowledge. Nor was she created for baseness — she who was first to attain eminence and guided other nations toward it. Nor was she created for stagnation — she who was the first great state known to history.

And the leader of the revolution has felt all of this with powerful feeling, and has expressed it with powerful expression, when he said: Egypt will not be satisfied until she becomes one of the great powers. And Egypt will not become one of the great powers when her university students number forty-three thousand among a people whose number has exceeded twenty million. How, then, when there are among us those who would wish this number reduced by half?!

The only path to Egypt's greatness is for all her sons to be educated, each according to his capacity and inclination, and within the bounds of his freedom and his readiness.

And the only path to Egypt's greatness is that there should be no form of knowledge, no branch of learning, no kind of activity, in which some of her sons do not have a share and a part. The only path to Egypt's greatness is for the whole world to feel Egypt's strong participation in its knowledge, its art, and its activity, in all the various forms that activity may take.

The Egyptian people aspires, by its nature and instinct and by its hidden and manifest will, to be a great people. And it was a great people in many ages of its long history, so what prevents it from renewing its greatness and resuming its course in a free, noble, fertile, productive life? We ought not to be vexed that the number of university students has reached forty-three thousand — indeed, we ought not to be satisfied when this number reaches a hundred thousand — but we must establish the universities that provide for this number and for the numbers to come: productive study, useful learning, leisure for proper acquisition of knowledge, contact with professors, and ample scope for research.

And I know full well that the state's budget is narrow, and that its financial capacity is limited at present. But its budget will not remain narrow forever, nor will its capacity remain limited in this fashion to the end of time. For God has made, after every constriction, a release, and

after every hardship, ease, and the people possesses capacity — capacity indeed — to assist the government and to establish, from among the schools and institutes of learning, what the hand of the state falls short of establishing. So why should it not be directed toward that, why should it not demand it, why should it not press insistently for it?!

Let the government believe me, and let the revolution believe me too, and let this experiment I propose be undertaken. But we must undertake it in earnest and with resolve, determined and without hesitation, so as to decide that Egypt, in the next ten years, needs a specific number of secondary schools and a specific number of universities and higher scientific institutes. And let us set forth clearly each region's share of these schools, institutes, and universities. And let us set forth for the people what the state is able to undertake to establish of them, and what the regions themselves must undertake to establish, and let us call upon them to be first in this good work. For whatever region is first to establish what it needs of schools and universities shall have its reward — indeed its reward — once the government undertakes to receive these schools and universities and to enable students to attend them and professors to teach in them. That is more fitting to make the people feel its duty and its right, to stir it to discharge its duty and earn its right, and to teach it that a living, alert people does not wait for good to descend upon it from the sky, but earns this good through the unity that enables it to cooperate in righteousness and good works, through the order that keeps its efforts from scattering and its activity from becoming confused, and through the work that enables it to produce usefully and lastingly through time.

And thus these three words, which the leader of the revolution made the slogan of this revolution, become words filled with meaning, pointing to something real and realized, not spoken by tongues alone, but throbbing in hearts, reflected upon by minds, spoken by tongues, and enacted by hands, so that they become realities seen by eyes and touched by hands and inherited by generations, through which Egypt arrives at being a great country inhabited by a great people.

Let us then set aside this fear that melts our hearts with dread when we see the eagerness for secondary and higher education; let us rather rejoice in it and encourage it, and urge the people to turn, besides this, to other kinds of learning and other forms of activity. Then let us reconcile what we do with what we say, and what we do today with what we wish to do tomorrow, and let us strive not to deceive ourselves about the truth,

nor flatter ourselves with illusion and fancy.

The Education Policy Committee decided, for instance, to reimpose fees upon the examinations for the preparatory and secondary certificates, and I opposed this and did not succeed, and that was among the reasons that drove me to resign from this committee, because I could not go back on a right the people had already won.

So what do I read today in the newspapers? I read that the Ministry has decided, this year, to abolish examination fees entirely, without exception.

The Ministry decides, this year, to abolish the fees, despite what we know of the budget's narrowness, and it has done well. But how am I to understand this abolition of fees this year, alongside their inclusion in the new draft law?

And the government grows strict at the start of the year in collecting this fee or that, pressing this strictness to excess, only to end, in the end, by exempting these fees — and it does well when it shows the people such kindness, but would it not be better to begin with kindness, so that people might meet their year smiling, without hardship, without difficulty, without constraint?!

And the universities grow strict in their fees, exceeding in this strictness until they push it to its utmost, until the leader of the revolution and the head of government come to know the realities of the life people actually live, whereupon this strictness turns to leniency and indulgence. Why not take leniency and indulgence as the foundation for the bond between rulers and ruled, from the start?

And the universities grow strict about the number of students they can admit, until, having burdened people with hardship in this matter, a word of good descends from on high, and hardship turns into ease, and constraint into relief. Why do we not reconcile our deeds with the logic of life, sparing people, and sparing ourselves, much difficulty and constraint, and keeping our efforts pure for work and production, free of worry, resentment, grief, and toil?

That would be more apt to grant our efforts a greater share of fruitfulness, a broader capacity for good, and to make all our affairs even and consistent, free of crookedness and disorder.

Would that we might greet all matters of education with the contentment, delight, and smile that befit them, and recall the noble saying in all that we attempt in the people's affairs: "You were sent to ease, not to burden."