

Inducement

Kawkab al-Sharq, 5 August 1933

Christianity had been spreading across the regions of the earth with great speed for eighteen centuries. Embracing Christianity at that time was a crime punishable by the Roman law with death. People were entering this religion in secret, concealing their faith in it and their observance of its rites. They informed on one another, plotted against one another, and denounced one another. Many denunciations were sent up to a governor of the provinces of Asia concerning the many people who had entered this new religion, and this governor found himself in a position of hesitation and perplexity regarding these denunciations: should he heed them or disregard them? He wrote to Rome seeking its opinion, and Rome answered him with this magnificent reply: whoever informs against another is not of us, and it does not befit the informer's denunciation to be one of the means by which we govern. If a charge is brought before you against someone that he has entered this religion, and the evidence against him is established before you — then enforce against him the ruling of the law. Otherwise, do not make for yourself a way over people in this matter.

The governor carried out this instruction: he did not take up denunciations, did not listen to the whispers of informers, did not plant spies or observers among the people, did not spread secret agents to discover from their affairs what would normally need to be discovered — for entry into the new religion was a violation of the laws of the state, a squandering of the worship and veneration that the Emperor had the right to demand of people's necks, and an abdication of another duty no less grave than this one: the duty of rising to defend the safety of the Empire.

This was in the reign of the Emperor Trajan, and the governor was Pliny the Younger, and the date of the story was the beginning of the second century of Christ. The Emperor and his governor were pagans. And the world had not yet reached the level of advancement and civilisation it has now reached through the growth of reason and the expansion of its authority over people's lives and over things, nor had the world yet reached the level of religious and moral advancement it has now reached through the spread of the revealed religions and their dominance over minds and hearts, and their influence on the conduct and thought of people and on their public and private policy alike.

And in this century in which we live — after reason has reached the level of advancement it has reached, and after the light of the revealed religions has spread among people and revived hearts and souls, and has shown the path of good and the path of evil and made clear to people the road of right conduct for them to walk, and the road of wrong for them to avoid —

In this twentieth century, a certain category of crimes has multiplied in a certain country, and a certain government has proved incapable of suppressing these crimes because it proved incapable of identifying the criminals. When the matter became too pressing, ingenuity failed it, and its ways were blocked — it concluded that the clearest path to apprehending the criminals and bringing them before justice to receive their punishment for the sins they had committed and the wrongs they had done was to encourage informers to inform, snitches to snitch, schemers to scheme, corrupters to corrupt, and those who tamper with morals to tamper with morals.

This government had at one time succeeded in laying hands on a group of sinners who had informed on one another, and brought them before the courts, which applied the ruling of the law in their case with firmness and severity, without leniency or softness. This ruling frightened people other than these sinners, and denunciations ceased, informing stopped, innocent people were safe from being flung into the depths of prisons for months until justice established their innocence, and the affairs of the criminals became obscure to the police — whose own resources were not equal to identifying the criminals by itself. It therefore strove and pressed in its striving, asked and pressed in its asking, until a pardon was issued for the most heavily sinful of these evildoers, the most deeply sunk in informing, denunciation, and scheming. The chains were smashed from him, the shackles dissolved, the prison doors swung open, and he walked free to enjoy what people enjoy of life, light, and open air — and was granted his share of a reward that had been set aside for whoever would lead the police to the evildoers.

He had been sentenced to fifteen years of hard labour; he served eleven months of it. He came out, and there was a thousand pounds waiting for him at the prison gate or in one of the administrative offices — to taste the comfort of easy living after its harshness, the pleasure of life after its sorrows, to be wealthy after poverty, at ease after misery, happy after wretchedness. Pardon is one of the virtues, and people commend those who choose it — especially when they choose it while capable of severity and force. It is right, therefore, to commend this government for seeking a pardon for this wretched prisoner, when it was capable of keeping him in prison. Generosity is one of the virtues, and people commend those who practise it — especially when they practise it at a time of need. It is right, therefore, to commend the government when it grants this wretched man a thousand pounds, when he was deprived and found nothing to spend after the prison doors swung open for him.

But pardon is a virtue when it is sought for its own sake and when the face of God is intended by it. And generosity is a noble deed when it is sought for its own sake and when the lifting of grief from the grieved and the warding off of affliction from the afflicted is intended by it. But if you sought the pardon in order to induce behaviour like that for which this man

for whom you sought the pardon had been entangled — informing, denunciation, and scheming — and if you gave the bounty in order to induce behaviour like that for which this man on whom you bestowed it had been entangled — informing, denunciation, and scheming — then you have not chosen pardon, you have not fashioned generosity, but have exposed morality to a great evil, placed people's consciences in the markets for buying and selling, and opened upon innocent and peaceable people abominable gates of evil that cannot be shut except after effort and toil, hardship and tribulation, and after the justice of the courts has acquitted itself in this matter with a great, complex, and highly tangled performance. You have made virtue a means to what is not virtue, and right conduct a means to what is not right conduct. You have corrupted people's values, cast people into doubt regarding good and evil, and rendered them liable to despise rectitude and prefer crookedness, to shun virtue and prefer wrong — and to ask themselves: which of the two should we believe? Is it what the books of religion and ethics tell us — that piety, goodness, right conduct, good character, and upright endeavour are things that befit the dignity of honourable and pious people and guarantee them God's approval and reward? Or is it what such a pardon and such generosity tempt us toward — preferring informing and denunciation, loving intrigue and scheming, and setting traps for the innocent? Which of the two should we listen to and heed? Is it this — that the government in an enlightened and faithful country was established to establish justice among people by justice, not by injustice; to ward off people's evil from people by equity and not by wrong; to encourage people toward good, assist them in it, and enable them to do it? Or is it this — what such a pardon and such generosity plant in our minds: that the end justifies the means, that pardon can be paid as the price for scheming, and that generosity can be used to purchase informing, denunciation, and evil?

All these thoughts have been troubling the souls of all Egyptians since yesterday, beating in the hearts of all Egyptians since yesterday, and on the tongues of all Egyptians since yesterday. For this step that the Ministry took when it procured a pardon for this wretched prisoner may prove useful — though with much doubt about that — in assisting the police to identify the evildoers it has been unable to identify. But it will do more harm than good, corrupt more than it will reform, tempt people toward evil more than it will restrain them from it, and encourage people in sin more than it will turn them away from it. It is enough that it will cast people into a dreadful and frightening doubt regarding what flows from the tongues of preachers, the pious, teachers, and moral guides about doing good and praising it, and about commending good character and purity of conscience. We would have liked the Ministry to think well, to reflect well, and to ask itself which of the two is more deserving of care and attention: the rectitude of public morals and the purity of people's consciences, or the assistance of the police along a crooked and tortuous path toward what it has been unable to reach.

As for us, we hold without any doubt whatsoever that the Ministry had a duty which it fell short of — that of identifying the causes that led to the police's incapacity and changing them. The most likely explanation is that these causes lie within the police itself and in the system it operates under; and had the Ministry changed what appeared to be the source of this incapacity in the police's system, this would have been better for the nation and the government alike, and more preserving of people's religion, morals, and views on the value of religion and morals.

How fitting it would have been for the Ministry to reject the counsel of those advisers who give it the illusion that it was created for itself and not for the people, and that any means whatsoever is legitimate as long as it enables it to survive and endure. This step the Ministry has taken is chafing against something — it wants to extricate itself from this chafing without thinking about the value of the means it is adopting for this extrication.

This step that the Ministry took yesterday is clear evidence that it prefers its own survival and comfort over the security, comfort, and peace of mind of the people — their peace in what religion commands and what morality commands.

Now that the Ministry has opened this gate, it can be sure from this moment that it has opened a great gate of evil, and that many innocent and peaceable people will encounter varieties of scheming and forms of intrigue that will embitter their lives, and that the courts themselves will encounter forms and varieties of effort and hardship in rescuing the innocent from the snares of informers and denouncers, and in distinguishing between those who may be brought before them unjustly — and may taste the torment of imprisonment unjustly — and those who will be brought before them and who deserve the punishment that the law has ordained for evildoers.