

A Lesson

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Our Prime Minister is a professor, whose students are the ministers; he teaches them how to govern, and how to conduct the affairs of the people in accordance with the policy he has charted, or which has been charted for him, and he oversees their governance and their management: whoever among them excels, he retains; whoever among them falls short, he dismisses.

And our Minister of the Interior is a professor, whose students are the directors, the governors, and the rulers of the provinces; he teaches them how to administer their provinces according to the policy which the Prime Minister dictates to him, or which the Prime Minister conveys to him. He gathers them to himself whenever an occasion for meeting arises, and he communicates with them if he cannot manage to meet them; and whether he meets them assembled or reaches them individually, he delivers lessons to them, and puts questions to them. Whoever understands the lessons, and answers well, and demonstrates this through a satisfactory record of practice in the governance and administration of the provinces, him he promotes. And whoever shows no quickness of understanding, no skill in answering, no vigor in practical conduct, him he leaves where he is until his excellence should appear.

And whoever shows crookedness in his understanding, deviation in his answers, and distortion in his conduct from the charted policy and the known plan, him he demotes to a lesser province than his own, or wrests him bodily from the governance of the provinces.

Yesterday was a day of lessons, and a day of examination: the directors gathered before their new professor, the Minister of the Interior, and heard from him, and spoke to him, and received questions and answered them. It is not easy to determine in detail the subject of these lessons and this examination, though the newspapers said yesterday and today — as they always say — that public security was the subject of discussion in this and that; but it is likely, if not certain, that the lesson delivered on Saturday morning to all Egyptians, and to the ministers of the entire world, and to its men of administration, was the subject of discussion in yesterday's lesson.

You will perhaps recall that this lesson was delivered in the open air, and was not a lecture in which words abound, nor a debate in which argument grows tangled, but rather a practical lesson, more akin to the drills by which students are taken through their classroom exercises. And its subject was somewhat complicated.

A leader, or two leaders, visit a people who love them, and the people receive them with the most magnificent displays of love, and of indignation against their enemies. And the government resents the people's love for its leaders, and dreads the people's indignation against the masters who oppress it, and wishes to spare itself these displays of love for the leaders, and of indignation against the oppressors — for such a demonstration gives the lie to all that has spread and circulated and filled every ear, that has encompassed the horizons of the world, and echoed through the vaults of heaven: namely, that the people has left to it but one single leader whom it loves and to whom it remains faithful, for whom it would sacrifice mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, all it once possessed in days of plenty, and all it no longer possesses since misfortune struck it — and that this leader is the Prime Minister. How, then, to be rid of this demonstration? And how to arrive at banishing the two leaders from this people, whom the government had imagined loved it, and stood behind it?

But when its two old leaders appeared before it, it became clear that the people had merely been toying with the government, or that the government had been toying with itself, and that this people remained, as ever, faithful to its leaders — fond of them, and responsive to them.

This was the problem that formed the subject of Saturday's exercise, and you know how the Minister of the Interior solved it! And how the kidnapping of the Leader and his companion solved it for him. And this ingenious solution fell — no doubt — strangely upon the souls of the students among the directors and provincial rulers; for they had known that political necessities permit a class of forbidden things which the constitution refuses, which the law denies, and from which order recoils. They permit the striking of men's hands, rightly or wrongly. They permit harassing them and bullying them. They permit throwing them into prison without investigation. They permit subjecting them to torment without reckoning. They permit conscripting their money to aid the parties, and conscripting their persons to fete the ministers, and signing their names to what they love and what they detest.

They knew all this, and did what necessity called for, or advantage required, or need touched upon, and perhaps threw themselves upon it eagerly, and raced toward it, so as to secure from the Minister's satisfaction with them, his fondness for them, and his high regard for their competence, whatever they desired. And perhaps they believed there was no harm in any of these forbidden things, for they are but a manifestation of power, a shade of authority, and were, indeed, familiar in Egypt before Egypt adopted modern methods of administration and governance. A return to the old order is, from time to time, a thing to be desired, for it renews vigor and restores youth, and revives the memory of the past — and man is sometimes enamored of returning to the past. But they had never, in all their days, imagined that kidnapping and embezzlement might be fit to serve as methods of governance.

For kidnapping is a manifestation of weakness. And strength is the very thing governments are most anxious to be distinguished by among their manifestations. And in kidnapping there is a most conspicuous affront to morals. And governments are most careful to display — if only to deceive the people — some semblance of protecting and safeguarding morals. And kidnapping is a thing the laws count among the gravest of crimes, and are severe in punishing its perpetrators, scarcely distinguishing them, perhaps, from highwaymen. It had never occurred to the directors that the famous maxim, "the end justifies the means," would suffice to permit kidnapping as a method of governance and of preserving the dignity of governments.

So when the Egyptian government kidnapped the leader of the Egyptian nation and his companion, the souls of the directors were thrown into turmoil, and their opinions grew confused — save, of course, for the select few among them — and they began to ask themselves: what are we to do from this day forward? Are we to kidnap, or not to kidnap? Are we to rob the people, or not to rob them? Until yesterday's lesson came. And it is most likely that kidnapping is a thing for which individuals and groups are punished, but which is permitted to governments — constitutional governments especially.

This explanation must surely have been elaborated at full length; for the intelligence of students varies — some are satisfied with a mere hint, others require the simplest of reasoning. And a professor who attains the degree of skill of our Minister of the Interior is obliged to pitch his lesson to those of moderate intelligence, neither to the excessively clever, nor to those excessively lacking in it!

He must, then, have divided the governments for them into two kinds: the first, these weak governments which face difficulties from the front rather than from behind — the hesitant governments, which meet their adversaries with candor rather than with maneuvering and cunning — the naïve governments, which do not impose themselves upon the people by force, but establish themselves among them only insofar as the people love them; so that, should they sense in the people any aversion, they withdraw from the seats of power. This type of government Egypt was once afflicted with, in an age gone by, and its condition worsened, its affairs fell into disorder, and chaos very nearly ruined it; it is a type familiar to Europeans and Americans, who take great pains over it, and reap from it nothing but harm and disgrace!!

As for the second kind, these are the strong governments, which do not receive difficulties but turn their backs upon them — the resolute governments, which do not love candor, but prefer to it maneuvering and evasion — the gentle governments, which rule the people whether they wish it or not, and which never relinquish power except by having it wrested from them by force.

The first kind of government, then, has no love for kidnapping. And the second kind loves nothing else.

Were the students convinced by these views? Or did they leave the lecture hall as they had entered it, their souls still troubled, their opinions still divided? This knowledge lies with God, and with the directors. But the one thing beyond doubt is that they showed conviction and reassurance, and will obey, and obey well; will execute, and execute well; and will keep, for themselves and for governments yet to come, whatever private opinion they may hold.

And so the leaders will be exposed to kidnapping wherever they travel, and wherever they turn. But necessity is the mother of invention, as the ancients used to say. And since the government has made kidnapping one of the instruments of governance, who knows? Perhaps the leaders will not lack some means of guarding themselves against being kidnapped, and against being carried off by train at a speed which the very birds could not match, and from which no harm can be guaranteed.