

Defeat (II)

Kawkab al-Sharq (Hadith al-Massa), 29 March 1934.

There was no battle yesterday in Mansoura, but there was a communiqué — an official communiqué of the first rank, exquisite in its wording, exquisite in its meaning, light and nimble in spirit in achieving the purpose at which it aimed; and it is no wonder that this communiqué, once issued, should be marked by all these qualities, for its source cannot err, cannot say anything but the truth, and nothing it says can be touched by doubt — for it is the mudir of Daqahliyya.

And you know that the mudir of Daqahliyya is a man blessed in the most precise sense of that word, and had he not been blessed in the most precise sense of that word, he would never have accomplished this feat that will be recorded for him as the undying deeds of the undying good are recorded; for since last summer he has waged against the tarboosh a fierce war, admitting neither mercy nor softness, and has granted the turban a victory and a support admitting neither hesitation nor confusion.

And God has decreed for this blessed war, waged by this blessed man, a great triumph such as was never granted to any commander on any day of holy struggle: the tarbooshes fell from the heads, and in their place the turbans rose up like crowns; the jackets receded from the bodies, and in their place rose the jubba and the caftan; and the whole province of Daqahliyya turned into a thriving mosque, in which God is remembered when morning breaks, and God is remembered when night falls dark — until al-Azhar itself grew apprehensive that this province might rival it and surpass it in producing the virtuous, skilled in preaching and guidance.

And this zeal for the turban spread like fire through dry brushwood, until it reached the Ministry of Tradition, which fanned it into a blaze, stirred up in it flame and inferno, and brought to full boil within it a momentous decision, making the turban an unavoidable fixture upon every head wishing to engage in compulsory education, whether as teacher or as pupil. Do you suppose that a man who presses forward with such resolve, who accomplishes such a feat, who inscribes for himself such good deeds, and throws open for himself and for others the gates of paradise upon their hinges, could possibly err from the truth or depart from what is right in anything he says or does?!

No, no — the mudir of Daqahliyya is always correct, the mudir of Daqahliyya is always truthful, the mudir of Daqahliyya is always fortunate; the mudir of Daqahliyya is a radiant blaze upon the brow of this happy era, to whom no mudir can be compared, and it would require some effort, some endurance of hardship, and some forcing of the facts against their own nature, to liken this great mudir to his great minister, or to liken the great minister to this singular mudir; for none approaches the mudir of Daqahliyya save the Minister of the Interior — both are truly exceptional, both are always correct, both are blessed with the greatest good fortune, both are a necessity among the necessities of security, and a need among the needs of order.

And so every Egyptian is bound to believe the mudir of Daqahliyya, just as every Egyptian is bound to believe the Minister of the Interior; and it is said that the Director of Public Security stepped away from his due rest yesterday, and went to the Ministry of the Interior to get in touch with this province, which had been utterly calm, utterly at ease; and it is said that the Director of Public Security got in touch with this province and learned all its news, with nothing hidden from him, and returned home calm and at ease — because the province was calm and at ease — and settled into his repose with a quiet mind, because the mudir of Daqahliyya had informed him of the undoubted truth, and had related to him a story free of any blemish.

And there is no doubt that the story the Director of Public Security received from the mudir of Daqahliyya resembled, in every respect, the story the mudir of Daqahliyya dictated to one of the evening newspapers — a story the least that can be said of it is that it filled Egyptian hearts with security and ease, affirming that the present order has settled firmly, that people's hearts have come to trust in it, that the leader of the Wafd has become a solitary man with neither supporter nor helper in this country, and that he is compelled to leave Egypt in search of partisans and followers for himself and his doctrine on the slope of Mount Qaf, or upon its summit, or behind it, on one of those islands where heroes like the great and singular mudir of Daqahliyya never appear.

And what do you make of a man who claims the whole nation is with him, who then goes to a city like the city of Mansoura, and stands at its station for a quarter of an hour with no one paying him any heed, no one even sensing his arrival; who then wishes to walk through the city, hoping perhaps that people might notice him or turn toward him, only to be compelled, by order of the energetic mudir and bold champion, to get

into a car — and so he gets into it reluctantly, swallowing down his sorrow and his gloom in great gulps.

And the strange thing is that the leader of the Wafd — for all this, despite all this — does not scruple to deliver a speech in which he announces to himself, and imagines he is announcing to the people, that the people have triumphed over the administration, even though the people paid him no heed, and the administration took no notice of him at all.

There was no battle in Mansoura, but there was a communiqué issued by the mudir of Daqahliyya to one of the evening newspapers, informing it that everything was as it should be, and that this battle which never was, which never crossed anyone's mind, had nonetheless resolved itself into a triumph for the administration and a rout of its adversaries, who left behind spoils that the victors seized. And these spoils are papers and a piece of photographic equipment, snatched by the snatchers from the routed in a battle that never was, that never crossed anyone's mind — so said the mudir of Daqahliyya, and the mudir of Daqahliyya is always truthful in everything he says, and most likely he said this to the Director of Public Security just as he said it to that evening newspaper.

God have mercy on those who once felt shame, and who once knew their own worth; but the Director of Public Security faces one of two possibilities: either he heard from the mudir the very same thing we read in the evening newspaper — in which case, woe to public security from the administration of public security! And woe to order from the ministry of order, if those overseeing public affairs in the Ministry of the Interior receive from their own representatives in the provinces such counterfeit intelligence! — or else the Director of Public Security received from the mudir of Daqahliyya correct news, containing neither falsehood nor deceit, no tampering with facts, and no trifling with people's minds.

And so the mudir of Daqahliyya has two tongues: one tongue with which he speaks to his superiors, and tells the truth; and another tongue with which he speaks to the newspapers, and tells something other than the truth; he thus counsels the government while deceiving the public, and thus makes of himself two persons: one who scruples at reporting what did not happen, because he fears punishment, and another who does not scruple at reporting what did not happen, because he reckons with neither the nation nor the press.

And so the Ministry of the Interior — or the ministry of the good and honest man — is compelled to dismiss the mudir of Daqahliyya, if it truly holds God in reverence, truly holds integrity in reverence, and is truly intent on seeing its officials be sincere in word and deed. If the mudir of Daqahliyya told his superiors yesterday the very same thing the communiqué told, then he deserves dismissal, because he told his superiors something other than the truth; and if he told them something other than what the communiqué told, then he likewise deserves dismissal, because he announced to the people something other than the truth, and fell into a vice into which no honorable man ought to fall, and the ministry ought to entrust the people's affairs to none but honorable men.

For we are certain that what the mudir of Daqahliyya dictated to the communiqué yesterday was not the truth, nor anything resembling the truth, nor anything close to the truth; and the mudir of Daqahliyya is as certain of this as we are certain of it, and the mudir of Daqahliyya knew, as he spoke to the communiqué, that he was departing from the truth, and departing from it deliberately, by will and design — and he is, for all that, a partisan of the turban and an adversary of the tarboosh, and he is, for all that, among the guardians of tradition, among those who insist on preserving religion and its proprieties, and on avoiding whatever men of virtue, piety, and righteousness ought not to fall into. We should like to know, then, which of two positions the good man — whom no one doubts is good — wishes to take toward this senior official! Does he wish to let him stand uncensured for what he did yesterday?

It is not in the character of good men to let senior officials declare openly something other than the truth, and set for people this evil precedent — or does he wish to punish the mudir of Daqahliyya for what he did yesterday? If so, the people of this province may well prepare themselves to bid farewell to one mudir and welcome another; but what we do not doubt at all is that the good man will not touch the mudir of Daqahliyya with any harm — and indeed he has not touched him with any harm. He has a way out of this predicament: he can disapprove, in his heart, of what the mudir of Daqahliyya has done, without disapproving of it by hand or by tongue, and through this silent disapproval he can satisfy his own conscience; as for satisfying the people, that is the last thing on his mind now — and who, these days, concerns himself with satisfying the people?!

In any case, the mudir of Daqahliyya has recorded against the Wafd a defeat in Mansoura yesterday — we hope God grants the Wafd the like of it every day — and has recorded for the government a triumph — we hope God grants the government the like of it every day; for such defeats delight one's friends and enrage one's adversary, and such a triumph fills the hearts of the victors with sorrow and grief, compelling them to depart from decency, and to proclaim something other than the truth when they speak to the evening newspapers.