

Defense (2)

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1 A sharp, eloquent tongue was loosed upon it — one of those sharp, eloquent tongues that distinguish the Ministry of Education. Al-Muqattam was the place where the revelation descended, the pulpit of eloquence, and the mirror of glorious defense for whatever the minister of education wishes to do with the university students and the students' union. For people know that there is a disagreement between the university students and the minister of education — if it is right to call it a disagreement between a people who control nothing of their own affairs and a man who controls everything.

2 The first and last subject of this disagreement is the students' stance on the Piastre Project. Certain people were bent on pushing this project forcibly into politics, forcing it in, and harnessing it to certain passions and purposes having nothing to do with economics, but everything to do with the rivalry between parties. The Piastre Project was a work of the students' own making; they took it up, bore its burdens, kept it apart from politics, and brought it, by means of this, to a far-reaching success. When the students saw that certain people wished to drag them into politics, they refused and resisted, believing they were performing their national duty, carrying out the law, and observing the ministry's own order forbidding students any contact with politics, near or far.

3 But some suspicion is sin; for politics is forbidden to students only on condition that it does not benefit the ministry, and does not harm those who oppose it. But if politics means support for the ministry, and war upon the opposition, then it is sin for students to turn away from it, or to lose interest in it, or to turn their fellows away from it, or to make their fellows averse to it. And this is exactly what the students did: they turned away from the Piastre Project, not knowing that in doing so they were warring upon a politics that ought not to be warred upon, and resisting a politics that benefits certain parties, even if it does no harm to other parties for whom some wish evil, and for whom some hope misfortune — though they shall gain nothing of what they wish.

4 Whatever the case, the students have sinned in the eyes of the minister of education, because they resisted the Piastre Project, and every sin has its punishment; so with what speed the minister of education dealt harshly with a group of these sinners, expelling them from the university in a manner that observed neither order nor law, nor recalled the university's independence — for the university's independence died, God rest it, long ago. It was not the minister of education's right to expel university students from the university without their being tried before the university disciplinary councils, for the very law the minister of education himself issued requires and mandates this; but who said that laws bind ministers, and bind the minister of education in particular? Laws bind only the likes of you and me, among God's servants created to be subjects who must hear and obey; as for ministers, they are licensed to enforce these laws whenever and however they please, and to disregard them whenever this neglect suits them.

5 And so the minister of education punished these students, expelling them from the university without right, and the university accepted the minister's overriding of its own laws, and the minister's disregard of its independence. But these punished students were not alone in their sin; others, it seems, shared in it, yet the minister's hand did not reach them, and no punishment came their way.

6 The minister of education is firm, but he is also wise; and the minister of education punishes, but he prefers to cut off the causes of punishment, and to forestall evil before it occurs. And so the minister of education looked into the causes that had driven the students to resist the Piastre Project, and learned that they have a union, that this union of theirs enjoys some measure of freedom in managing its own affairs, and that it meets in a club located in Cairo. He therefore judged — and his judgment is the highest, since he is the highest head of the university — that the union's regulations should be changed, and recast in a form that would make its resistance to the Piastre Project impossible, and its submission to the ministry's authority a foregone conclusion.

7 There the minister asked the university to fashion for him the fetters and shackles with which to bind the students' feet, and chain their hands and necks; and the university hastened to do what the minister wanted — and when has the university ever been slow to do what the minister wanted, and when has the university ever refused the minister? — and the Faculty of Law fashioned for the minister the fetters and shackles he wanted, in the form readers have seen when the new

regulation for the university union was published for them.

8 A few of the university's professors grew angry, and the body of students grew angry, in their various groupings, and the newspapers published some fragments of this; so the Ministry of Education saw no choice but to defend this new regulation, and some official within it fed al-Muqattam yesterday a glorious defense, whose substance was that this regulation will be issued soon — and we never doubted that it would be issued, whether the university was content or indignant; indeed, we were the ones who announced and confirmed this, for the will of the minister of education admits of no reversal, whether from university men or from anyone else.

9 The official who fed al-Muqattam then claimed that this regulation would be like the regulation of the union established at the School of Engineering. Glory to Him who turns things entirely upside down, and makes the follower the followed and the followed the follower! For the School of Engineering used to seek to imitate the university, and to be joined to the university, coveting the freedom the university used to enjoy; and now the university — praise God — finds itself driven to imitate the School of Engineering, out of love for the fetters and shackles that weigh it down.

10 And do not say: the School of Engineering is subordinate to the Ministry of Education, neither independent nor anything like independent, while the university is independent, apparently. Say none of this; for the independent has become mixed up with the non-independent, and the subordinate to the ministry with the separate from it, and so long as the person of the minister of education oversees the one just as he oversees the other, it makes no difference. Both this and that must submit to the command of the minister of education; and the official who fed al-Muqattam issued a challenge to the minister's opponents — God forgive us — or rather, to his opponents and his supporters alike, declaring that the regulation would be issued even if the students and professors rejected it, declaring that the club would be moved to Giza even though the students were keen for it to remain in Cairo, and declaring that the union's purposes need fear nothing so long as those purposes are plain, clear, and free of concealment.

11 The meaning of this is that this official supposes that some of the union's purposes are at times concealed — that is, something the ministry does not wish to exist, something connected to the politics the ministry so

dreads — and for this he changed the regulation and put in its place this new regulation, which subjects the students to a close and wide-ranging surveillance, as they put it. How great is the ministry's fear and its dread of mere illusion, its terror of mere fancy! And the strange thing is that those who study the history of universities, and the relation that once held between students and professors there, notice something worth noticing now, because it is truly amusing: the affairs of universities in the Middle Ages belonged to the students, not to the professors, because it was the students who founded the university, and it was they who hired the professors to teach.

12 The professors were subject to the authority of their students and pupils, and it was these students and pupils who tried the professors; then there was struggle and contention between the two bodies, ending in the professors' winning freedom and independence, and their escape from the students' control. The professors came to manage their own affairs themselves, and a professor came to be disciplined only before his colleagues; then the authority of despotism grew strong in the state, and in the church, and in the university as well, so that the professors came to monopolize all of the university's affairs, until, in the age of modern democracy, matters returned to a measure of moderation, and students now manage their own private affairs themselves in their clubs and associations; and if the professors take part with them in managing these affairs, it is on a footing of equality.

13 The students' standing has risen still further in this modern age in which we live, so that they are now represented on the university council in France. In Egypt, however, matters follow another course: the students had no standing at all, then they won a free standing, and now it is wished to strip them of their right to this free standing they have earned, and to subject them, even in their private affairs, to the authority of professors who are themselves subject to the authority of the minister. But we are confident that all we are now going through amounts to nothing more than vanity, and that no great span of time will pass before matters are set right, and before the students come to enjoy their free union, suited to university life in this modern age.

14 So let the minister of education issue his regulation; we assure him that this regulation's life will not be long.