

Lessons

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Lessons have indeed been given — there is no doubt of that — but who gave them is a matter of doubt, their circumstances not known with the clarity and plainness one would wish. The most apparent of these lessons concerns the relationship between the prime minister, the good man, and the new High Commissioner. The new High Commissioner reached Egypt, and the good man received him at the Cairo station, and then did not see him again until he flew off to London. And people asked themselves about this negative relationship between the good man and the new commissioner: how had it come about? Why had it come about? And how could it possibly last? People said that the good man himself was the first to ask. Then yesterday the newspapers reported that the Acting High Commissioner called upon the good man in person, and spoke to him of this negative relationship, laying before him a picture of how things had traditionally stood, and of what the English would like to see between High Commissioners and prime ministers. We note, in passing, that the Acting High Commissioner rather overstepped himself, exceeding the bounds somewhat, in lecturing the good man on tradition — when tradition has its own minister, from whom such matters ought properly to be drawn, and to whom anyone speaking of them ought properly to address himself; so we think that those who give people lessons in tradition ought, before anything else, to uphold these very traditions themselves, and we think that neither the Acting High Commissioner nor the High Commissioner in person will, from this day forward, speak of tradition to the good man, or to anyone other than the good man, without first going back to the minister of tradition and asking his leave.

Let us close this parenthesis now, and return to the thread of our talk; for people agree that a lesson was given yesterday when the Acting High Commissioner met our ministry's head, the good man, but they differ on who gave it. Some claim that it was the good man who gave the lesson to the High Commissioner yesterday — or, more precisely, that it was he who gave the lesson to the High Commissioner in person, and to the British Foreign Office, when he protested Sir Miles Lampson's remissness in paying him a visit; and that the Acting High Commissioner called on him yesterday only to inform him that the English had heard

this lesson and taken it to heart, that they apologize for their High Commissioner's remissness, and that they ask the good man to excuse him, since he is new to Egypt and had arrived bringing with him the manners of China; he had known that there were traditions governing the relationship between a prime minister and a High Commissioner, but had not known that the good man stands above tradition, being too strong, too forceful, and too jealous of his own dignity to submit to such traditions.

These same people claim that the good man relented only after holding out, and forgave only after refusing, and exacted from the Acting High Commissioner a pledge that the High Commissioner in person would be the first to call on him upon his return to Egypt. And the matter ended there; it was laid before the council of ministers, which approved it, and esteemed the good man for his fine conduct and his admirable firmness.

Still other people claim that it was the Acting High Commissioner who gave the lesson yesterday, for he explained to the head of the ministry of tradition the true nature of tradition, and alerted him to something he ought to have already taken note of: that he holds two distinct capacities, exactly as the minister of tradition does. For just as the minister of tradition has declared in the Senate that he is, on one hand, minister of education, and, on the other, the supreme head of the university, and that, by virtue of these two capacities, he performs duties that are distinct yet joined, and has his work assessed by standards that agree and yet diverge — so too the good man is prime minister and foreign minister both; and it falls to him, as foreign minister, to receive the High Commissioner at the Cairo station, and it falls to him, as prime minister, to call upon the High Commissioner at his residence, after which he may then wait for the High Commissioner to call upon him at his office. The good man discharged one of these two duties, and then the matter became confused for him, so that he supposed he had discharged both, and waited for the commissioner's visit, which never came. And if God has blessed Egypt with a ministry that is, at present, a ministry of tradition, the English ministries are, every one of them, ministries of tradition too; and if the Egyptian ministry does not care to be careless of its traditions, the English ministries hold to theirs still more jealously. They were, therefore, displeased at the good man's neglect of the traditions underlying Egypt's relations with the High Commissioner. The holders of this view say that the good man took this lesson to heart, and

pledged never again to do what he had done, and to be the one to call first, when the High Commissioner returns to Cairo; that the English representative relented only after holding out, and forgave only after refusing; and that the matter was then laid before the council of ministers, which approved it and praised the good man's skill and resourcefulness, and his knowledge of how to extricate himself from a predicament and free himself of difficulties. Still other people — and I am among them — have doubts about all this; they do not deny that a lesson was given, but they do not know who gave it, or who received it, and they do not pronounce decisively on its outcome, but wait rather for the days to reveal it. And who knows — perhaps the days will reveal consequences of some weight, which the good man and his supporters cannot foresee. It is sometimes said that the greatest fires spring from the smallest sparks. Nor is this lesson — whose giver and receiver remain unknown — the first of its kind; for there was another lesson given after the chief justice's speech, which the newspapers claimed had been delivered to the good man by the French minister plenipotentiary; then other newspapers claimed that the French minister plenipotentiary had meant to deliver it, but the good man silenced him outright, and delivered to him and his colleagues an eloquent lesson of his own; then the correspondent of the Diba agency came and flatly denied all this, affirming instead that the French minister plenipotentiary had given the Egyptian ministry a lesson in good taste, and that the good man had heard the lesson, taken it in, and made no reply to it, as had been said.

There are other lessons too, touching our domestic politics, given every day, and given with particular frequency since this feast; and people differ on who gives them and who receives them. A lesson was certainly given in Mansoura; some say it was the Wafd leader who gave it, teaching the ministry that it is too weak to withstand the feelings of the people, and that the people are too strong to submit to the good man after having refused to submit to Sidqi Pasha. The ministry says it was the minister of the interior who gave this lesson to the Wafd and its men, teaching them that the people have turned away from them entirely, and have renounced them entirely, and that it would be well for them to seek out another people in another country, from whom to seek patience and support, for every bond between them and Egypt has been severed. And serious lessons were given yesterday in Qalyubia, in Shubra, at the Siryaqus bridge, and at the Qanatir al-Khayriya; and people differ on who gave them and who received them. The Wafd claims, and a very small handful of Egyptians, numbering perhaps five or six, claims along with it,

that it was the Wafd who gave these lessons, teaching the ministry that it is truly bankrupt, unable to live or endure except by violating the constitution, departing from the law, squandering liberties, and employing its violent material force — and this is bankruptcy entire. The minister of the interior claims, and with him the People's Party, the Unionists, and the Liberals — which is to say, with him all of Egypt and all of Egypt's newspapers — that it was he who gave the lesson, teaching the Wafd that its affair is finished, that its time has run out, and that so long as Egypt has soldiers, Egypt will have no Wafd.

And other lessons, which the minister of the interior has without doubt given, by the agreement of all, were not given to Egyptians at all, but to foreigners — and especially to those foreigners in whose own countries political strife occurs. The minister of the interior has taught the French, for instance, that their skill at suppressing demonstrations is quite limited; they have the Seine running through Paris, with bridges spanning it, and yet it has never occurred to them to raise one of these bridges, or to line it with ranks of motorcars, so as to cut off the connection between the people of the two banks. There is no doubt that the French residents of Egypt wrote up their reports yesterday, and wired them to Paris, that the minister of the interior there might profit from them in suppressing those demonstrations that never cease in the City of Light.

And there is no doubt that the Ahram's telegraphic dispatches will tell us tomorrow, or the day after, that the Parisians have seen their bridges raised or blocked for the first time in a very long while. And perhaps the most eloquent of all the lessons Egyptians have been giving themselves, and the whole world, these past days, is this lesson the minister of tradition has given concerning the Piastre Project; for our students are nothing beside foreign students when it comes to political engagement — the royalist students in France keep the minister of education there awake at night, and we need not even mention the university students of Austria, Germany, and Spain, who have gone beyond every bound in their political engagement; yet God has not opened to the ministers of education in those countries what He has opened to the minister of tradition, the author of the Book of Sale, by way of expelling students from universities and schools. There is no doubt that the minister of tradition's decision was wired to them by telegraph yesterday, and no doubt that they will imitate the master of tradition; and it seems most likely that he will become a member of every learned

society in Europe, as a reward for this splendid invention.

As for closing the university club, that is a lesson without equal, and Europe will prove unable to reward it adequately, though it will certainly not prove unable to make use of it; for the clubs of Europe's universities will be closed from this day forward, and the students will be brought back to their senses, and will learn how ministers come to master the hearts and minds of the young.

Have you seen, then, that Egypt is the center of earnest life on earth, and the wellspring of light for the whole world?! But Egyptians are a people nothing pleases, not even fasting in Rajab; they still think ill of themselves, still demand further progress, and refuse to believe that they are the masters of the whole world in every branch of life.