Shock

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1 This is the mildest word we can use for what happened yesterday at the religious court, where the religious-court lawyers gathered to elect their head, and to elect whichever members the syndicate needed.

2 For the ministry received from these religious-court lawyers a violent shock that did not pass without leaving scars and marks upon it. The number of lawyers present was vast, their resolve was firm throughout, and they had come from every corner of Egypt, near and far, determined to make the ministry understand, and to plant in its supporters' minds, that while some men grow servile and submissive and fear power when it turns unjust, others feel a sense of honor and dignity, and fear no injustice however great, and dread no wrong however excessive, and will not submit to authority in matters where authority commands no obedience.

3 And before this, the ministry's warning had already reached the civil lawyers, who, once gathered, read it, then rejected it, then cast it aside and went on their way, heeding nothing but the right, holding to nothing but their dignity, and standing on nothing but honor and pride.

4 Yes; and before this, the civil lawyers had elected their head and their members, turning away from the ministry's threat and rejecting it, and no sooner had news of their election reached the ministry than it grew earnest and exerted itself, and put others to a like earnestness and exertion, to carry out the threat and repay the shock; and so it drew up this strange legislation and announced it among the people, and looked for signs of the effect of all this lightning and thunder, this warning and banishment, and found nothing but shaking of heads, shrugging of shoulders, fits of laughter, and a persistent turning away.

5 For however hard misfortune presses upon people, and however heavy an ordeal weighs on them, they cannot regard mockery the way they regard earnestness, nor can they regard a policy that issues from individuals to strike at individuals the way they regard a policy that issues from the ministry to set right the affairs of a nation; and people know the ministry, the ministry's supporters, and the ministry's leanings too well to be persuaded by these feeble arguments and disjointed proofs

contained in the explanatory memorandum for this legislation.

6 People read the ministry's warning and knew that it was enraged at Makram and wished to remove him from the syndicate, so they laughed and then turned away; and people read the ministry's legislation and the memorandum it put forward to explain it and unravel its riddles, and knew that the ministry was enraged at Makram and wished to expel him from the syndicate, so they laughed and then turned away.

7 And the ministry had wished to make its justice comprehensive and complete, so that it would not stand between Makram alone and the syndicate, but would draw in a number of his companions as well; so it rejected a draft that had been prepared for it, and put in its place a new text, so that its love for the civil lawyers might be spread among all of them, apportioned to all of them; then love of justice grew still stronger in the ministry's soul, and its preference for equality grew still more powerful, so it was gentle with the religious-court lawyers, and showed them tenderness, and made them equal to the civil lawyers in the kindness and favor it bestowed; and it was not content to prepare a single law, but prepared two, nor content to issue a single memorandum, but issued two.

8 And these religious-court lawyers gathered yesterday, and read the ministry's warning, and read the two laws and the two memoranda, then laughed and turned away and proceeded with their elections as though they had read nothing, and as though the ministry had done nothing. God forgive us — rather, they proceeded with their elections precisely because they had read, and wished to show the ministry their rejection of what they had read, and to tell the ministry that it might issue warnings, and prepare laws, and excel in the writing of memoranda, but it would never be able to compel honorable men to be humbled, free men to submit, and proud men to accept indignity.

9 And people said that no sooner had the ministry prepared its two laws and issued its two memoranda than it felt itself girded with strength and might, and hope smiled upon it, and its bright light flooded over it, and it grew certain that it would achieve, in subduing the religious-court lawyers, what it had failed to achieve with the civil lawyers, and would erase, by its victory over the one, the marks of its defeat before the other; so it waited, confident — but after all that waiting, it won nothing but what happened yesterday.

10 And in what happened yesterday there is cause for sorrow, and a summons to despair, and grounds for submitting to fate, were people reasonable; and in what happened yesterday there is also cause for anger, for resentment, for provocation, driving one to sharpness, loosing tongues to a new warning, and casting into hearts the thought of a new law. Had the ministry's supporters been reasonable, they would have advised it to submit to God's judgment upon it; for in its weakness it will never achieve, over Egypt, what Sidqi Pasha, in all his strength and might, failed to achieve; but reasonable men are few.

11 And it seems most likely that some will advise the ministry to seek a means of voiding yesterday's elections, and there is no means but to add a new clause to the new bill; for yesterday's election took place after the law had been drafted but before it was issued, and is therefore a valid election, subject to the rulings of the laws already in force, and the ministry, should it wish to void this election, must alter its bill so as to drag it backward over the past, hauling it into the past just as it did with the law on the civil lawyers.

12 And nothing prevents the ministry from doing so; indeed, nothing can prevent the ministry from doing anything; for so long as it can void whatever it wishes to void by a law it drafts, it matters nothing to it whether that law is general or particular, reasonable or unreasonable — what matters to it is only that it achieve what it wants, full stop, as the minister of tradition would say, or that it achieve what it wants without fuss, as the minister of tradition would also say.

13 For everything is permitted to it, and everything proceeds smoothly for it; and do not ask the ministry to void this election, should it wish to void it, by the ordinary legal channels, by bringing the matter before the judiciary, should it find a way to do so. Do not ask this of the ministry; it is not a thing it likes or inclines to. Do you not see that it never thought to void the civil lawyers' election in this fashion, by bringing it before the judiciary, because it found no way to do so? And yet it wishes to void it, so let it void it by law.

14 And yet it respects the judiciary, and holds it in esteem, and reveres it, and is jealous on its behalf, and wishes to guard its sanctity and protect its rulings from any slight by the lawyers! Enough, people — when will you understand yourselves? When will you bring your deeds into keeping with your words? When will you know that esteem for the judiciary does not come by this path you tread, but comes only through

pure and sincere respect for the law? But what are you to say, and to whom are you to say it?

15 You are in one valley and the ministers are in another; you want justice, and right, and a calm, secure life under the shelter of justice and right, while the ministers want to win, to triumph, to show that they are ministers, that they are victorious and triumphant, and that they can punish whoever does not bow to them in obedience and submission.

16 As for me, I congratulate the ministry on yesterday's shock, coming after the shock of 15 December; for these successive shocks will bring the ministry back to some measure of good sense, so that people may be spared some of its excess — or else they will drive the ministry to anger and excess in it, doubling its errors, so that no sooner is it struck by one shock than it is exposed to another, and it goes on from blunder to blunder, and from predicament to predicament, until God's judgment upon it is fulfilled, and God's decree carried out, bringing it rest, and bringing rest to others from it.