Contagion

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1 The protection of tradition has become a contagion running through the ministry's members as flame runs through dry stubble; scarcely a minister can resist it these days, scarcely a champion of government escapes it. And it appears that the source of this strange spread of the tradition-protecting contagion is that the head of the ministry has changed, and Abd al-Fattah Yahya Pasha has taken Sidqi Pasha's place.

2 It appears that Sidqi Pasha was strong and violent, excessive in strength and violence, and did not confine these to his rivals but carried them beyond them to his friends, and then to his colleagues among the ministers; Sidqi Pasha managed to confine the malady of tradition to the ministry of education, and refused to let it leave that ministry or spread to any other, and the minister of education remained the sole holder of tradition, love of tradition, and protection of tradition, until the great dictator fell, and the new ministry was formed, and suddenly tradition spread abroad, and the protection of tradition passed to the interior minister, then to the minister of justice, then took hold of all the ministers and came to dominate the council of ministers.

3 Without some such explanation, we cannot understand this new crisis that the council of ministers created on Thursday evening, when it issued its formidable, alarming communiqué to the lawyers' syndicate, commanding and forbidding it, urging it and prohibiting and barring it from electing a certain group of lawyers, on the pretext of fearing that tradition might be insulted, and worrying that tradition might come to harm from above or below or from any of those directions from which malady steals toward the healthy.

4 Yes; without some such explanation, there is no way to understand this new crisis the ministry stirred up on Thursday. It added a heavy new burden to the other burdens it was already carrying from Sidqi Pasha and Sidqi Pasha's shadow, and opened for itself a new door of activity, and opened upon itself a door of weakness, and something worse than weakness, graver in its consequence and uglier in its effect. Had the interior minister not grown jealous and stepped in to protect tradition,

banning the performance of a batch of licentious and indecent tales, people would not have sensed that the matter of tradition had swelled to such enormous proportions as to now threaten grave harm.

5 Barely had a few days passed since the interior minister's jealous zeal, barely had the old minister of tradition managed to school himself into tolerating his new rival in the protection of tradition, when the minister of justice appeared as a rival to both men at once, demanding that the traditions of the legal profession be protected. No sooner had he made this request to his colleagues than love of tradition ran through them all as the intoxication of song runs through the limbs, and love of tradition coursed through them all as the breath of life courses through the veins, and behold, they were all guardians of tradition, all its defenders, all its advocates, all its zealous keepers, all pronouncing this word so dear to their souls, so cherished in their hearts, so sweet upon their tongues, so delightful to their ears: tradition, tradition — tradition must be protected, tradition must be preserved.

6 People found themselves, on Thursday evening, faced with the council of ministers warning all the lawyers, because it had learned that a group of those who had disciplinary judgments against them had put themselves forward as candidates for the syndicate, and that the council of ministers rejects and refuses this candidacy, and will under no circumstances allow it to reach its conclusion, with the candidates elected and becoming syndicate members; for the traditions of the legal profession do not permit this, and forbid that anyone against whom a disciplinary judgment has been issued should speak for lawyers or represent them. Nor does the council of ministers stop at this warning; it adds that the government will be compelled to issue legislation that imposes these traditions by force, secures for them whatever protection and preservation they require, and bars these candidates, should they be elected, from representing lawyers or speaking on their behalf. This means the government will issue the legislation and drag it backward over the past, to rid itself of these members whom we would rather not see as a mirror for lawyers, or a mouthpiece for lawyers.

7 No sooner had people read and heard this communiqué than a strange astonishment seized them at this strange zeal for tradition, and some said to others: since the council of ministers is so devoted to tradition, why has it not protected the traditions of the constitution, which are graver in danger and further-reaching in their effect on people's lives than the traditions of the legal profession? And some said

to others: why did the council of ministers not verify the matter before rushing to issue this grave warning, when it may well appear that the traditions of the legal profession suffered no harm and met with no misfortune, and it may well appear that a group of civil and religious-court lawyers once had disciplinary judgments issued against them, and this never prevented them from representing the profession within the lawyers' syndicates, nor did it occur to the ministry then in power that these lawyers' putting themselves forward, their colleagues' acceptance of this candidacy, and their colleagues' electing them as syndicate members constituted any touching of tradition, any assault upon it, or any violation of it. And some said to others: among these lawyers who had disciplinary judgments issued against them, some amounting to reprimand and some to worse than reprimand, were men who had served as deputy head of the civil lawyers' syndicate, and as head of the religious-court lawyers' syndicate for many long years. Tradition never complained of them, was never troubled by them, was never harmed by their election, the public prosecution never turned against them, and no one ever ran in alarm from them to the council of ministers.

8 They said these things to one another, and smiled at one another as they said them, and then all of them laughed once they had finished saying them; for they had understood what could not but be understood, had become certain of what admitted no escape from certainty, and had come to know that tradition is nothing but one of politics' many veils, and that the government grows jealous over tradition only to prevent its rivals from having their fellows acknowledge their worth, or declare their trust in them, or take them as their representatives.

9 People understood all of this, smiled at all of this, laughed at all of this. Then, late in the evening of that Thursday, some said to others: what a ministry, missed by good fortune! Had God intended good for it, He would have kept it from hurling itself into this arena, from which it will reap nothing but harm.

10 A ministry created to resist Sidqi Pasha, and spending all its effort resisting Sidqi Pasha, while Sidqi Pasha goes on maneuvering and outmaneuvering it, appearing before it so that it shrinks back, then vanishing from it so that it puffs itself up again — and in the very midst of this maneuvering and outmaneuvering, this shrinking and puffing up, it now adds burden upon its burden, weight upon its weight, and to its war against Sidqi Pasha adds a war against the lawyers.

11 A resolute, prudent, sound man is one who does not create difficulties for himself, does not load himself with more than he can bear, does not distract himself from one matter with another, and does not entangle himself in one battle before freeing himself from another. But our ministry believes itself strong, is certain of its own formidable standing! And why not? Does it not have the backing of deputies who swore their most solemn oaths to elect whomever they had agreed with it to nominate, and then went to the Chamber of Deputies the next morning, only for the vote to go one way and the ministry another?

12 The ministry has a long reach that can catch up with Sidqi Pasha and drive him bodily from his party, and cast him bodily out of parliament. What, then, keeps it from reaching Makram and his companions, driving them out of the syndicate and barring them from it? The ministry is strong, formidable, long of reach — but the ministry is not fortunate; for the hand that catches the People's Party men may prove powerless to catch the Wafdists, and the force that frightens Sidqi Pasha and his companions may stir nothing in the lawyers' souls but mirth, may call forth nothing on the lawyers' lips but a smile; it may forbid, and the lawyers do what it forbade; it may command, and the lawyers disobey what it commanded. The truly prudent, sound man is one who, wishing to be obeyed, asks only for what can be achieved. The prudent, sound man is one who does not treat the Wafdists as he treats the People's Party men, who does not expect of the Wafdists what he expects of the People's Party men, who knows full well that if the People's Party men are afraid, the Wafdists are not afraid, who knows full well that if the People's Party men scatter away from Sidqi Pasha to please the government, the lawyers will gather around Makram even if it angers the government.

13 This is the sound man — but God did not decree for the ministry, this time, any more than He decreed for it in its war against Sidqi Pasha, the smallest measure of good fortune. The lawyers set out to vote on Friday morning, and their outgoing head had scarcely finished reading them the government's communiqué before they hastened to elect their new head, and declared to the government, with resolve and pride and defiance, that they rejected its interference in their affairs, and refused to receive from it any lessons in respecting the traditions of their profession.

14 And each of them said to himself, and to his companions, that whoever wishes to teach others must teach himself first, and that whoever wishes to hold others to respecting tradition must himself begin by respecting tradition. And within a matter of hours, Mr. Makram was

head of the lawyers, in spite of this long, sweeping, weighty communiqué, and his companions were syndicate members, in spite of this long, sweeping communiqué, and it was declared to the ministers and to all the people of Egypt, and to other peoples beyond Egypt, that Egyptians remain as they were before the great dictator rose from their soil — holding themselves in honor, refusing indignity, guardians of order and law without evasion or equivocation, without pretext or contrivance, without leaning toward caprice or being swept along by ulterior ends.

15 Yes; and within hours, the lawyers had declared to the ministers, to all Egyptians, and to foreigners in Egypt and beyond it, that the fear imposed upon Egyptians for more than three years had changed nothing in their nature, had not softened their resolve nor blunted their edge, and had found no way in to them; they are not afraid today, in spite of Sidqi Pasha and his successors, just as they were not afraid yesterday, when they had endured the English despite their power — for surely they can endure a group of feeble Egyptians.

16 Yes; and within hours, the lawyers had declared to Sidqi Pasha that Egypt possesses character, and had declared to the prime minister that if he needed more than two months, and all the power and reach in his hand, and all his ability to help or harm, merely to win over the People's Party men, and still fell short of all he wanted from them, then another man — Makram, say — with no power and no reach in his hand, capable of neither helping nor harming, moving neither hastily nor slowly, plotting by night nor calculating by day, could nonetheless win, only yesterday, the unanimous trust of hundreds of lawyers, despite the fierce and sharp communiqué the council of ministers had issued, and despite these lawyers' full awareness that the council of ministers is capable of changing and altering, of erasing and confirming.

17 Yes; within hours, people knew where Egyptian strength truly lies, and where weakness lies; where steadfastness lies, and where surrender lies; where victory lies, and where defeat lies.

18 Then, last evening, people fell to talking among themselves, and some said to others: is it not strange that the ministry should fail to rally a hundred and fifty deputies around it, while Makram and his companions needed no effort at all to rally hundreds of lawyers around them? And some said to others: there is nothing strange or novel in this; here is one kind of people, and there is another kind of people. And some said to others: what do the sound, sensible elements make of these hundreds of

lawyers who trust a man who is not himself one of the sound, sensible elements? And some answered others: the lawyers are not among the sound, sensible elements at all — they belong to the common run of people, and they trusted a man from the common run of people; there is nothing for the sound elements to fear in the common trusting the common, and the general run of people gathering around the general run of people. Then earnest gravity spread its shadow over the talkers, and some said to others in confidence: dawn has broken, the truth has become clear, and people now know that these fruitless experiments, in which the unjust waste their own time and Egypt's, have produced nothing and can produce nothing.

19 Here is the high commissioner returning, defeated; here is the dictator withdrawing, defeated; here is the prime minister, met by the lawyers with what they met him with yesterday, surrounded by his own patrons and supporters with this troubling doubt. And the strange thing is that the prime minister and his companions still hope they are able to endure.