

The Greater Responsibility

Al-Gumhuriya, 28 October 1961

It falls upon those very rebels in Damascus, and upon those who lent them their own standing, those who supplied them with money, and those who openly supported them, from outside Syria, and from within her.

It falls upon all of them alike — since they cooperated first among themselves, and then assisted the colonizers afterward, in shattering unity, emboldening the enemy, and tempting those lying in wait with exactly what they themselves had long wished for, yet never managed to achieve on their own.

It falls upon all of them alike — even though their own consciences care nothing whatsoever for consequences, concerned only with securing immediate advantage, and their own private ends, entirely indifferent to Arab unity, to Arabs' own genuine interests, or to whatever might secure them a dignified life, and genuine honour, in their own countries.

It falls upon all of them alike — yet its own fire scorches, instead, those very Arabs subjected to humiliation in Palestine, living out lives of genuine misery, abasement, and suffering, and those other Arabs, driven from their own homes, forced into a life resembling nothing so much as genuine displacement. Its own fire scorches, too, every single Arab who genuinely feels his own dignity, refuses indignity, and whose own heart fills with genuine compassion for these same wretched people, wronged without any real cause, exposed to every variety of abasement, and disgrace. Yes — this is indeed a genuinely great responsibility, one that would weigh heavily even upon a genuinely mighty band of men — were it not that those now bearing it have already hardened their own hearts, hearts like stone, or harder still, and dulled their own consciences, consciences no longer capable of feeling the sting of disgrace, no longer sensing the bitterness of injustice, feeling no genuine sympathy whatsoever toward the wretched, knowing nothing whatsoever of the taste of compassion for the tormented — thinking, rather, only of themselves, and of themselves alone.

These very reports now carried by the broadcasts, published by the newspapers, and flashed by wire across every country of the earth — that colonialism's own pawn in Palestine has already begun diverting the very course of the Jordan River — she undertook exactly this, genuinely

reassured, genuinely secure, genuinely content within herself, her own hope stretching toward the distant future. For, once Arab unity had already shattered, and real anxiety had already spread, until it encompassed every Arab people alike, she found herself genuinely reassured, and felt her own strength, and her own might, once granted leave, or genuinely emboldened, by those who had once stood between her and that same cherished ambition of hers: to prosper at the wretched's own expense, to flourish at the suffering's own expense, and to insult Arab dignity itself, giving no thought whatsoever to anyone, hoping for no one's genuine respect.

How very often the Arabs have declared that the very course of the Jordan River remains genuinely sacred, touched only by those who expose themselves to the very greatest, the very harshest of disasters; how very often the Arabs have warned of relentless war, should colonialism's own pawn ever dare to tamper with this same river's own course. And yet, despite all of this, colonialism's own pawn has already begun tampering with exactly this same course — sacred, only yesterday, now become, today, plunder freely available to Israel, to tamper with exactly as she pleases, and alter exactly as she wishes. The very elements controlling the Syrian army, meanwhile, remain preoccupied with mere politics, genuinely determined to protect their own rebellion through war against the Syrian people themselves — so power might remain in their own hands, so they might continue enjoying the support of those who lend them their own standing, and supply them with money, standing ready to wage war upon the Syrian homeland herself, and subjugate the Syrian people themselves, should these same rebels ever find themselves exposed to any danger, external or internal.

And so the Arabs now witness, and the Syrian army itself witnesses, and its own supporters and backers witness, exactly this same audacity of Israel, this same tampering with the Jordan River — yet find in it no sting whatsoever within their own hearts, no pain whatsoever within their own consciences, no genuine sympathy whatsoever for their own brothers, among those subjected to humiliation in Palestine, and those Palestinian refugees suffering hunger, and fear. Everything has grown genuinely cheap to them, except their own rebellion — and who knows? Perhaps they themselves genuinely tempted Israel toward exactly what she is now doing, pushing her toward it, offering her the Jordan River as the very price of her own indifference toward them, and granting them some measure of assistance, and support, in return.

And who knows? Perhaps what Israel is now doing amounts to nothing but the very first step, among colonialism's own steps — perhaps other steps still will follow it, tomorrow, or the day after. Colonialism, after all, is never satisfied merely with Israel growing stronger — what genuinely concerns her is weakening the Arabs themselves. Nor is she satisfied merely with Israel growing stronger — what genuinely concerns her, before all else, is the Arabs' own suffering. Indeed, she is not even satisfied with Israel prospering, with Jewish immigration increasing, with Israel growing ever stronger, ever more secure — what genuinely concerns her, rather, is that the Arab peoples themselves suffer, and openly reveal their own need of colonialism's own assistance, so that all of this together might enable the colonizers' own return to the Arab homelands, to exploit them tomorrow, exactly as they exploited them yesterday, subjugate their own peoples tomorrow, exactly as they subjugated them yesterday, and enjoy the Arab homeland's own riches, exactly as they once enjoyed them yesterday.

All of this remains entirely possible — and all of it stands as genuine proof that the rebels' own rebellion, in Syria, was never made by the rebels alone, nor by their own Arab supporters alone, but shared in, too, by the colonizers themselves, through their own money, their own incitement, and their own support.

Let the leaders of this same movement, then, take genuine joy in disgrace, after honour, in humiliation, after dignity — and let them prepare themselves for the ambitions of the ambitious, not in Syria alone, but across other Arab countries besides. And Abu al-Tayyib al-Mutanabbi spoke true, when he said:

*Whoever accepts disgrace once, finds disgrace grows ever easier after —
for no wound, after all, can ever truly pain the dead.*

And God spoke true, when He said to the Muslims: "And do not dispute among yourselves, lest you lose heart, and your own strength depart."

Nor do the rebels' own mouthpieces, in their own newspapers, and their own broadcasts, feel the slightest genuine embarrassment in filling the whole world with clamour, and outcry, as though we were treating them unjustly, and saying of them anything but the truth. They disputed, after all, when we said their own rebellion had torn apart Arab unity, shattered Arab solidarity, and sown between Arabs exactly the kind of suspicion, and ill-will, that ought never to exist among brothers. They

disputed, and disputed insistently, when we said they had disbelieved God's own blessing upon them, and grown arrogant, once God had granted the Syrian people ease, and prosperity, in their own Syrian homeland, and in the Egyptian homeland too. And they disputed, and disputed insistently, when we said this same union had secured the Syrian people within their own homeland, protected their own borders from aggression, and spread throughout it real security, and real reassurance.

They disputed all of this, and disputed it to excess — will they dispute now, though, that their own dissolution of the union, without any genuine referendum of the Syrian people, without any real notice to Egypt, has exposed Syria herself to real danger, and emboldened Israel against her, driving her to attack Syrian soil? How could they possibly dispute this, when they themselves see it, and hear it? Or do they, perhaps, genuinely accept it, find genuine comfort in it, preferring intimacy with Israel over intimacy with a fellow Arab people? Do they genuinely mock the displaced refugees, ridicule the Arabs persecuted in their own homeland, subjected to real trials in their own countries — feeling no real objection whatsoever to being coveted by powers other than Israel, no real objection whatsoever to colonialism itself dominating them, directing them exactly as it pleases, managing their own affairs exactly as it wishes — for no reason at all, except that they themselves monopolize the mere trappings of power? They will count for nothing whatsoever, in the real substance of governance, the moment the colonizers' own hands reach out toward them — but the proverb never lies, when it says: "If you feel no shame, do exactly as you please."