

The Mother and Her Son

Al-Jumhuriya, 30 May 1958.

As though the two of them had made an appointment: the tender mother — that is, France, as she is called in certain Lebanese circles — is in revolt in the west of the sea, occupying the world with her revolution; and the dutiful son — that is, Lebanon, of course — is in revolt in the east of the Mediterranean Sea, likewise occupying the world with his own revolution.

The outward form of the two revolutions differs, as far as the eye sees and the ear hears, but their ultimate aim is one and the same, and the days to come will reveal the consequences of these two revolutions. As for the western side of the Mediterranean, it was the army that began the revolt in Algeria, demanding that Charles de Gaulle take up the burdens of government; and for Charles de Gaulle to take up the burdens of government means the suspension of constitutional life, the dismissal of the deputies and senators to attend to their own private affairs as they wish or as they are able, the dismissal of the President of the Republic to attend to his own private affairs as he wishes or as he is able, and General de Gaulle's monopolizing of all affairs of government, seizing them by force and running them by force, dominating the French people with a domination of firmness and resolve, so as to teach it what obedience is and what submission is, and then to direct it afterward toward crushing the revolution in Algeria, and toward holding on to what remains to France of her colonies with a severity that would teach them to submit and obey, to despair of freedom, and to restrain themselves from aspiring to independence; and then — so he claims — to restore to France her might and her prestige, and to impose reverence and awe of her upon the whole world, and to discipline those lands that had once been subject to France's authority and then won their independence in days of weakness and languor — to discipline them in a manner that would deter them from demanding the withdrawal of French troops from Tunisia and Morocco, and that would teach the countries of Indochina that life under France's shadow is more worthy of them and more useful and more profitable to them than life under independence.

This is likewise what General de Gaulle believes, and what his propagandists, followers, and aides believe; for the nature of things, the laws of progress and advancement, and those principles which call for

weak peoples to have their share of dignity, strength, and self-determination, all stand in his way.

None of these things hold up before General de Gaulle, for he is a man before whom no force, whatever it may be, has ever held up. Has he not, after all, created France anew, restored to her faith in her independence and confidence in herself, and driven out Hitler's armies? It matters nothing to him what history says, nor what people recount, namely that it was the American and British armies that drove the Germans from French soil, and that the remnants of the French army did not return to take part in the war until a late hour; for General de Gaulle has settled it within himself that he is the strong man whom no one resembles in firmness of resolve, soundness of judgment, confrontation of problems, resolution of difficulties, and penetration through crises, and that, for this reason, upon assuming power he need do no more than carry out what fate has charged him with: saving France from herself, delivering her from her weakness, and restoring her to what she once was, or to something better than what she was before defeat overtook her. But the French people itself does not want this salvation, nor does it wish for anything but to remain as it is, and to be rid of these absurd external troubles in which the blood of its sons is spilled and its free wealth is spent; it wishes for nothing but to live purely for the life that pleases it, a life of ease, prosperity, and enjoyment of the good things of life, wherever it finds a way to that enjoyment.

The army, then, together with General de Gaulle, are two rebels against the people — not against this or that government of France — two rebels who wish to impose strength upon this people against its will, and to restore to it a might and a power which it has renounced and turned away from.

And the people wishes to resist, and to defend its calm, contented, tranquil life, yet it possesses no means of resistance but shouting, clamor, protest, denunciation, demonstrations, and gathering in the streets of Paris.

Such is the condition of the tender mother. As for the dutiful son in the east of the Mediterranean, his affair differs in outward appearance, though in truth it resembles his tender, compassionate mother's affair: the outward appearance of his affair is that the people is in revolt against the government, wishing to remove the President of the Republic and his ministers from their posts.

And to that end he gathers crowds, seizes the cities and villages, and all but confines the President of the Republic and his ministers to the capital, and talk arises of marching upon the capital itself. The government defends itself with what force it possesses and with what aid it can draw from its sympathizers and supporters in the Arab East and in the American, British, and French West as well — were it not that the tender, compassionate mother is occupied with her own affairs and unable to come to her son's aid with force, so that she aids him instead with opinion and counsel; but the true state of affairs in Lebanon does not differ from the true state of affairs in France.

And the revolution in Lebanon does not, in truth, come from the people; rather, it comes from the Head of State and his ministers, for the people did not wish to change the constitution, nor to alter anything in the affairs of government; it was the President and the ministers who set their minds upon it and all but carried out what they intended.

And the question that must be posed, and to which the answer must be plain and free of ambiguity or obscurity, is this: who holds the right to change the constitution and alter the order of things — is it the people, who are the source of all authority, and for whom the constitution was laid down and in whose name it was issued, and who are the source not only of legislative authority but of executive and judicial authority as well?

And it is likewise a settled principle that the people is the master, and that the President of the Republic and his ministers are servants of this people. If, then, the servants wish to tyrannize over their master and to alter his life against his will, the people's right to resist, and its right to remove those who have transgressed against it, to bring them to trial, and to punish them for what they have intended — this right is plain, and none but fools would dispute it.

And the strangest thing about the Lebanese revolution is that the servants who have risen against the people, who scheme against it and transgress against its right to sovereignty, call upon other governments for aid; and these hasten to their rescue, sending them men and instruments of killing and destruction, without these rescuers, Easterners and Westerners alike, feeling in themselves any embarrassment at aiding injustice against justice, falsehood against truth, and the oppressor against the oppressed.

Nor do the servants of Lebanon feel in themselves any embarrassment at this foreign intervention coming between them and their master, the people; so that when the United Arab Republic maintains neutrality and takes the side of right and justice, refusing to interfere in the affairs of an independent country, the servants of Lebanon complain of her, first to the Security Council, and then to the Arab League, because they believe that whoever is not with them is against them; and had the United Arab Republic hastened instead to their rescue, sending them men and arms, they would have thanked her most sincerely for it, praised her most handsomely for it, and lauded her most eloquently for it. And I do not know why the tender mother did not do as the dutiful son has done, and complain of the United Arab Republic to the Security Council — for who knows, perhaps the president of this Republic has incited the French army in Algeria and General de Gaulle in France to revolt, or perhaps he has incited the French people to resist this revolution; for this Republic and her president are, it seems, the origin of every trouble that is stirred up, or that might be stirred up, anywhere on earth, East or West.

And how I would have loved for the mother to do as her son has done, and complain of us to the Security Council as well, for the life of people in these days stands in need of something to laugh at. Or for the son to do as his mother has done, and desist from this folly, and cease convening the Security Council and the council of the League to no purpose.

But the minds of people are not in our hands, nor in theirs, but rather in the hands of these differing, contradictory passions.

So let us laugh now at what the son has done, and may it please the mother to make us laugh with some similar deed, or with something still more deserving of laughter and amusement.