

Husain The Great Martyr

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PREFACE

“And speak not of those who are slain in Allah’s way as dead: Nay, they are alive, but you perceive not” (Quran, 2:154).

The early history of Islam is replete with examples of men and women who patiently put up with all sorts of persecution and willingly laid down their lives for the sake of truth. However, the later-day Muslims needed a more stirring example to serve as an eternal reminder that social and political ills cannot be held in check without paying a really heavy price. Allah willed that this supreme example be set by the grandson of the Messenger of Allah.

The martyrdom of **Hazrat Husain** has a significance of its own. He stood firmly, against overwhelming odds, for what he believed to be the right cause in the interest of Islam. He had no delusions about the outcome of the struggle. But the grim outlook only added to the strength of his resolve.

The supreme sacrifice of **Hazrat Husain** exalted him to a position of glory, which the mightiest of emperors might well envy. **Hazrat Husain** became a symbol of the eternal struggle of right against might. Whenever and wherever men feel overawed by the forces of evil, their thoughts turn to **Hazrat Husain**. They take heart from his example and carry on the fight with a renewed faith.

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CHAPTER 1

EARLY LIFE -Birth

Hazrat Ummi-Fazl, the aunt of the Prophet and the wife of his dear uncle, Hazrat Abbas, saw a strange dream one night. She saw that a portion of the Prophet's body flew off and fell into her lap. In great fright she awoke and could not sleep the rest of the night. In the morning she hurried to the Prophet and told him all about the dream.

"Hazrat Ummi-Fazl," he explained, "you have had a very good dream. The meaning of the dream is that Hazrat Fatima will give birth to a son who will grow up in your lap." The explanation made Hazrat Ummi-Fazl very happy. She eagerly waited for the happy day when her dream was going to be realized.

At last the great day came. On the fifth of Shaban 4 A.H. Hazrat Fatima gave birth to her second son. Its angelic looks captivated the heart of everybody. When the news reached the Prophet, he hurried to Hazrat Fatima's house. Hazrat Safia, an aunt of the Prophet was also present. "Let me have a look at my little son", he said to Hazrat Safia who immediately wrapped the child in a piece of white cloth and put it in the Prophet's lap. The little baby fixed its gaze on the Prophet's face as he said the Azan in both its ears. The bright looks of the baby filled the Prophet's heart with joy. He thanked Allah for the favour. Then he put the baby in the lap of Hazrat Ummi-Fazl. Her dream had come true!

Hazrat 'Ali named the child Harb. The Prophet did not like this name. He named him Hazrat Husain. On the seventh day after the birth, the child was circumcised and a feast was given.

Little Hazrat Husain grew up under the loving care of his parents, his grandfather and the ladies of the household. He was loved very dearly not only by Hazrat Ummi-Fazl but also by Hazrat Ummi-Salma, a wife of the Prophet, who kept the child with her most of the time. Hazrat Fatima took him away only when she had to feed him. Hazrat Husain was suckled by no other woman except his own mother.

The Prophet's Love

The Prophet had unbounded love for his two grandsons, Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husain. The mere sight of them filled his heart with joy. It was to get this joy he daily visited Hazrat Fatima's home. He usually took with him something for them to eat and fed them with his own hand. He set them on his knees and caressed them with extreme fondness. He liked to see them cheerful. The slightest sign of distress from them made him unhappy. One day as he passed by Hazrat Fatima's house, he heard Hazrat Husain

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crying. This made him feel uneasy. Stepping inside he said, "What makes my darling cry, Hazrat Fatima! Don't you know that his weeping distresses me?"

It sometimes happened that while the Prophet lay in prostration one of his grandsons would mount on his back. He did not rise till the boy got down. One night the Prophet came to the mosque for prayer, carrying one of his grandsons in his lap. He made the child sit near him and himself stood for the prayer. Once, as he put down his head in prostration, it went on rather too long. After the prayer was over, people asked, "Messenger of Allah, how is it that one of the prostrations took up so much of time? Were you receiving a revelation?"

"Oh, no!" replied the Prophet, "my son got on my back and I did not like to put him down."

One night Hazrat Osama called on the Prophet, who came out carrying in his arms, something wrapped in cloth. The two talked for some time. Before he left, Hazrat Osama asked, "Messenger of Allah, what is this you are carrying in your arms?" The Prophet lifted the cloth and Hazrat Osama saw Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husain beneath it. Then the Prophet said, **"Both of them are my children and the sons of my daughter. O Allah! I love them both. So you too, love them as well as those who have love for them."**

One day the Prophet stood on the pulpit, giving a sermon. Presently both his grandsons entered the mosque. They wore red shins and looked extremely lovely. Being too small, they toddled on towards the grandfather. The sight so much touched the Prophet that he could not help stepping down and helping them on the pulpit. He seated them by his side. Then he remarked:

"How true is the word of Allah! Verily, children and worldly goods are the test for a man. When I saw these children toddle I could not help stopping the sermon and running towards them."

Early Training

Hazrat Husain was only seven-and-half when the Prophet passed away. This was a very severe shock to him as well as to his elder brother, Hazrat Hasan. So far, the two had been brought up under the loving care of the fond grandfather. The security of this love was no more now. This had a visible effect on the natural cheerfulness of the two brothers.

Six months later, Hazrat Fatima also passed way, leaving Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husain without motherly love, Hazrat 'Ali was an exceedingly kind father. He did all he could to make up for the motherly love that was no more. However, this was an impossible task. Nothing could fill the void created in the lives of his little sons. Despite all his efforts, a gloom seemed to hang on them. No longer were they their old selves, bubbling with boyish activity.

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The education of the two brothers began at home. They learned how to read and write. They grew up in the most stimulating environment. Their parents were the models of human virtue. They belonged to the holiest family and passed their time in an ideal home. Their father was the bravest and the most learned man of his time. Their mother, too, was the noblest lady of her time. These factors provided young Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husain with an environment that no youngster ever had. Their unusual natural gifts enabled them to get the maximum benefit from this environment. Slowly their growing minds absorbed the family traditions of lofty virtue, unflinching truthfulness and unbounded love for Allah and men, In course of time they grew up to be the noblest youths of Islam.

High Merit Recognised

The Companions had the highest regard for the relatives of the Prophet. All of them loved Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husain with the same tenderness with which they had been loved by their grandfather.

Hazrat 'Ali did not take the oath of allegiance to Hazrat Abu Bakr for about six months. He thought that being the nearest relative of the Prophet, he should have been elected the Caliph. However, there was no ill-will between him and Hazrat Abu Bakr. Hazrat 'Ali soon realised that he should respect the choice of the people. As he took the oath of allegiance, Hazrat Abu Bakr declared: **"By Allah! The relatives of the Prophet are dearer to me than my own relatives."** Hazrat Abu Bakr really meant what he said. He had the greatest regard for Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husain.

Hazrat Abu Bakr was followed by Hazrat 'Omar who also had great regard for the grandsons of the Prophet. His was a period of rapid expansion. His armies overran Iran, Syria and Egypt. This brought a constant flow of riches into Madinah. When distributing these riches, Hazrat 'Omar was far more mindful about the grandsons of the Prophet than about his own sons.

Once rich booty came into the public treasury at Madinah, Hazrat 'Omar distributed it among the people. Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husain got ten thousand dirhams each. Hazrat Omar's own son, 'Abdullah, got much less. This seemed strange to 'Abdullah. He complained to his father, saying: "I am one of the early converts to Islam. I am also one of those who migrated to Madinah. How is it that these two youngsters have been rated higher than me?"

To this Hazrat 'Omar replied:

"'Abdullah, your remarks have pained me. Don't you know that your grandfather stands no comparison with their grandfather! Do you think your grandmother can equal theirs? Has your maternal uncle the same standing as theirs? Can your maternal aunt compare with their aunts? Is your uncle of the same rank as theirs? Can your paternal aunt be a match for theirs?"

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Once fine dresses were received from Yemen. Hazrat 'Omar distributed them among the people. Soon people were going about in these dresses. Presently Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husain passed by. They did not have the Yemeni dresses on. The thought made Hazrat 'Omar very unhappy. "What a pity!" he exclaimed, "that these two boys who are responsible for giving people these fine dresses, should themselves be without them."

Hazrat 'Omar at once wrote to the Governor of Yemen asking him to send two dresses for the grandsons of the Prophet. The order was carried out. When Hazrat 'Omar saw the two boys clad in Yemeni dresses, he cried out. "Now I am really happy."

When Iran was conquered, a princess, Shah Bano by name, was among the prisoners of war. She was brought to Madinah. The Caliph's son expressed a desire to marry her. "How dare you make such a request?" exclaimed Hazrat 'Omar. "She is a princess and can only be married to a prince." Saying this, he called Hazrat Husain and gave the princess to him.

One day Hazrat 'Omar sat surrounded by the Companions, Hazrat Husain was also present. Addressing the Companions, the Caliph said, "By Allah! Whatever honour we may have in this world and in the world to come, is due to the grace of Allah and to the bounty of the Prophet and his family. But for this, we would have been without any hope.

Taking Part In Jihad

Like his great father, Hazrat Husain was a dauntless soldier. He had such an overpowering passion for truth that he never made the slightest compromise with untruth. In this, he was very different from his elder brother, Hazrat Hasan, who was unusually peace-loving.

Hazrat Husain was a young man of twenty when Hazrat 'Osman became the Caliph. The North African campaign began shortly afterward. Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husain took part in this holy war. They also joined the army that conquered Tabristan.

The two brothers were in the forefront in defending Hazrat 'Osman against the rioters. They stood guard at his gate during the stormy days that culminated in his tragic assassination. It was their father who assigned them this duty. One day Hazrat 'Osman got on the roof of his house in a bid to argue with the rioters. But the rioters were in no mood to listen to reason. In reply to the aged Caliph's pathetic appeal, they showered volleys of stones. This caused a sharp encounter between the rioters and the guards at the gate. Hazrat Hasan got wounded in the encounter.

This alarmed the rioters: They did not want to provoke a fight with Banu Hashim. That could wreck their plans. So they decided to act with despatch, Jumping over back-wall, they entered the house and assassinated Hazrat 'Osman. The guards at the gate knew nothing about it. Hearing the cries of the Caliph's widow, the guards rushed in. By then

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the murderers had made good their escape and Hazrat 'Osman lay in a pool of blood. The guards could do nothing.

The news shocked Hazrat 'Ali. He immediately hurried to Osman's house and was very angry with his sons. He slapped them both, demanding, "Where were you when the rioters broke in? How did they succeed in killing the Commander of the Faithful when you stood guard at his gate?"

Hazrat Husain took a notable part in all the battles fought during Hazrat 'Ali's Caliphate. He fought valiantly in the battle of Jamal, Siffin and Nehrwan.

It was usual in those days to have single combats before general fighting began. In one of the battles, Hazrat Husain offered himself for the combat. His adversary, who was a famous warrior, asked, "Who are you, young man?" "Hazrat Husain told him who he was. "Sonny!" exclaimed the warrior, "You better go back. One day I saw the Messenger of Allah going to Quba from Madinah. He rode a camel and you sat in front of him. I don't want to meet the Prophet with my hands red with your blood."

Father's Parting Advice

The murderous assault on Hazrat 'Ali took place on the 19th of Ramazan and he died of the wounds in the evening of 21st of that month. Before he passed away, Hazrat 'Ali called Hazrat Hasan and Hazrat Husain and gave them the following advice:

"I want you to fear Allah always. Don't feel sorry for what you cannot get. Be good to the people. Help the weak against the oppressor."

The dying Caliph then turned to his third son, Muhammad bin Hanfia and said, "Have you heard the advice given by me to your brothers?"

"Yes," came the reply.

"I want you, too, to act upon this advice," went on the Caliph. "I also advise you to be good and respectful to your brothers. Never do anything against their wishes."

Turning again to the two elder sons, Hazrat 'Ali said, "My will is that you be good to him. He is your brother and your father's son. You know how your father loved him. So you, too, love him."

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CHAPTER 2

HASAN'S ABDICATION

Hazrat 'Ali was succeeded by his elder son, Hazrat Hasan. Muawia's troops advanced toward Iraq and easily defeated Hasan's men. Hazrat Hasan was an extremely peace-loving man. He also knew how unreliable the people of Iraq had proved. His father suffered terribly at their hands. Hazrat Hasan could expect nothing better. So he decided to make peace with Hazrat Muawia. He took the initiative and wrote to Hazrat Muawia making the peace offer.

Hazrat Muawia was quick to seize the opportunity. He had enough power to force a decision upon Hazrat Hasan, but it was unwise to press matters too far. So he addressed the following letter to his peace-loving rival:

"On grounds of piety and high morals, you undoubtedly enjoy a position of eminence. If only I could be sure that you would run the caliphate smoothly and would be able to defend the people against all dangers, I would be the first person to pledge allegiance to you. The present conditions demand that you give up the caliphate. I, in return, undertake to give you anything you ask for."

The letter was accompanied by a blank paper, bearing Muawia's seal. Hazrat Hasan was asked to write on it anything he wanted.

Hazrat Hasan was impressed by the generosity of the offer. He abdicated in favour of Hazrat Muawia. In return he demanded handsome pensions and estates for himself and his relatives and a general amnesty for the people of Iraq. Hazrat Muawia readily conceded these demands.

Hazrat Husain did not like his brother's soft policy. He urged him not to trust Hazrat Muawia. Husain's views were shared by several others Hashimites. However, Hazrat Hasan had had such bitter experience of his Iraqi followers that he could no longer trust them. Risking a war with Hazrat Muawia was not the path of prudence. So Hazrat Hasan rightly chose the path of peace and thereby saved Muslims the horrors of a prolonged civil war.

Hazrat Muawia succeeded in winning over the hearts of the Syrians. They solidly stood behind him. But things were different in other parts of the Muslim empire. A large section of the people supported the cause of the Banu Hashim and considered Hazrat Husain entitled to the caliphate. There was yet another group of people who were opposed both to the Omayyads and the Hashimites. These were the Kharijites. Their view was that the caliphate is not hereditary. They thought that the Caliph must be elected by the free vote of the people.

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CHAPTER 3

YAZID'S NOMINATION

Hazrat Muawia was the greatest diplomat of his time. He knew full well how to go ahead with his political plans. With amazing forethought and tact, he started preparing the ground for the caliphate of his son, Yazid- However, he wanted that Yazid's name be suggested by some one else, preferably by a group of people.

As Hazrat Muawia grew old, people naturally started thinking about his successor. But even his loyal Syrians thought that he would be led by the example of the earlier Caliphs. They hoped that he would either leave the election of the Caliph to the people or would nominate some one on the basis of piety and ability.

One day Hazrat Muawia sat in the court. Addressing those present he said: "You see I am grown old. I want to nominate a successor. Suggest some name."

To his amazement people suggested the name of 'Abdur Rahman, the son of Hazrat Khalid bin Waleed. 'Abdur Rahman was a capable officer. He inherited many qualities of his great father and was very popular with the people. But Hazrat Muawia did not consider 'Abdur Rahman fit for the high office of Caliphate. So he kept quiet.

Mughira bin Shuba was the governor of Kufa. In 56 A.H. he persuaded forty leading men of the city to wait on the Caliph as a deputation. The deputation reached Damascus and begged Hazrat Muawia to nominate a successor so that Muslims might be saved the threat of a civil war after him. The deputation added: "'We suggest the name of Yazid. In our opinion, he is the ablest and the most experienced politician in the empire. We propose that people be asked to take the oath of allegiance to him, in your own lifetime."

Hazrat Muawia gave very patient hearing to the deputation and promised to consider the proposal. Then he called his advisers and put the proposal before them. Most of them were shocked by the very idea. Pledging loyalty to the coming ruler in the lifetime of the present one was a daring innovation. The plan was disliked by many of the advisers. However, it was approved ultimately. Yazid was nominated his father's successor.

The Oath Of Allegiance

A vigorous campaign was now set afoot to get the oath of allegiance for Yazid. Even in the Omayyad stronghold, Syria, this was not an easy task. A powerful propaganda drive began, telling people that Iraq and other parts of the empire had already taken the oath. This persuaded the Syrians to accept Yazid as their next ruler. The same kind of propaganda did the trick in other provinces.

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Last of all Hazrat Muawia turned to Hijaz, the cradle of true Islamic traditions. Orders went out, calling upon the governors of Makkah, and Madinah to win over people for Yazid. Marwan, the governor of Madinah addressed the people, saying; "Like Hazrat Abu Bakr and Hazrat 'Omar, Hazrat Muawia also wants to nominate his successor. He has nominated his son, Yazid."

"This is not the tradition of Hazrat Abu Bakr and Hazrat 'Omar," spoke back 'Abdur Rahman son of Hazrat Abu Bakr. "They did not nominate any relative of their own. This is the practice of the Iranian and Byzantine emperors."

Similar remarks were made by Hazrat Husain, Hazrat 'Abdullah bin Zubair, Hazrat Abdullad bin Abbas Hazrat 'Abdullah bin 'Omar and several others. In Madinah, Makkah. Kufa and Karbala many people were reluctant to pledge allegiance to Yazid.

Seeing that outstanding public figures were opposed to Yazid, Hazrat Muawia himself toured Hijaz. He talked to Hazrat Husain and others, who took a bold stand in the matter. "Do what you will," remarked Hazrat Muawia, "the inevitable must come to pass."

Hazrat Muawia complained about these gentlemen to Hazrat 'Aisha telling her that they did not accept the verdict of the people. "All I can say in the matter," replied she, "is that you should not force anything on these gentlemen against their will."

Ha-zrat Muawia next visited Makkah. Here he had a talk with Hazrat 'Abdullah bin 'Omar, who had come for the Hajj. Abdullah's reply to Hazrat Muawia was:

"There have been Caliphs before you. They, too, had sons. Your sons is in no way better than theirs. But they never wanted for their sons what you want for yours. Their sole concern was the welfare of the Muslims. As for me, I am only a member of the Muslim brotherhood. If all others choose a course, I, too, will follow."

In a bid to make Hazrat Muawia see his mistake, Hazrat Husain and others waited on Hazrat Muawia one day. They put before him the following proposals:

- (i) Follow the example of the Prophet. Nominate no one. Let the people make their own choice.
- (ii) Follow the example of Hazrat Abu Bakr. Nominate some one who is not related to you but possesses high merit.
- (iii) Follow Hazrat Omar's example. Appoint a committee of electors to choose a caliph after you are dead.

Hazrat Muawia refused to entertain any of these proposal. He insisted that a large number of people had already pledged allegiance to Yazid.

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Muawia's Death

On the first of Rajab 60 A.H. Hazrat Muawia passed away, at the age of 75. He had been Caliph for over 19 years. Before death, he gave Yazid the following advice:

"My son! The whole of Arabia lies at your feet. I am leaving for you a fabulous treasury. In thankfulness for these favours, be kind to the people of Hijaz because you stem from them. Treat very kindly the visitors from Hijaz. Also be considerate towards the Iraqis. If they want you to transfer their governor each day, do it. It is far easier to transfer an officer than face thousands of drawn swords. Be good to the Syrians and share your secrets with them. Rely on their support in case of danger. When they have beaten back the enemy, send them back to their homes. Residence in other cities might change their outlook.

"Only four men from among the Quraish can challenge your right to be the Caliph. These men are:

Hazrat Husain son of Hazrat 'Ali, 'Abdullah son of Hazrat 'Omar, 'Abdullah son of Zubair, 'Abdur Rahman son of Hazrat Abu Bakr. Hazrat 'Abdullah bin 'Omar is too preoccupied with the world to come. When others have accepted you as Caliph, he, too, will do it. Hazrat Husain is simple minded. The people of Iraq are sure to incite him. If he rises against you and you win, forgive him. He is a near relative of ours and as the grandson of the Prophet, is entitled to respect. 'Abdur Rahman is of easy temperament. He will do what others do- But beware of Hazrat 'Abdullah bin Zubair. Anyway, avoid bloodshed as best you can."

CHAPTER 4

MUSLIM BIN AQIL

Hazrat Husain Goes To Makkah

Immediately after stepping into the shoes of his father, Yazid sent urgent orders to Waleed bin Uqba, the governor of Madinah to secure the oath of allegiance from Hazrat Husain and Hazrat 'Abdullah bin Zubair. Muawia's death had not yet become known in Madinah. Waleed sent for Hazrat Husain. When he came, he put Yazid's letter before him. Hazrat Husain expressed regret at Muawia's death. As for allegiance, he declared that a man of his status could only take the oath publicly. He asked Waleed to summon the leaders of public opinion. Their decision would be followed by him.

Saying this, Hazrat Husain left. Marwan the former governor of Madinah was with Waleed at that time. "What a pity!" he exclaimed, "you have let off Hazrat Husain so

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easily. Call him back even now. If he refuses to pledge allegiance to Yazid, strike off his head.”

“What!” exclaimed Waleed, “do you want me to slay Husain? On the Day of Judgement, his murderer will be a great loser.”

Waleed next summoned Hazrat ‘Abdullah bin Zubair and conveyed Yazid’s order to him. He asked a day’s leave to think over the matter. The same night he left for Makkah. The governor sent his men after ‘Abdullah, but they failed to overtake him. On the following night, Hazrat Husain, too, went away to Makkah with his family.

Call From Kufa

There were many in Iraq and especially in Kufa, who professed to be the supporters of Hazrat ‘Ali and his descendants. The news of Muawia’s death raised new hopes in the minds of such people. When they learnt that Hazrat Husain had refused to pledge allegiance to Yazid, they met in a secret meeting. Spirited speeches were made. Finally it was decided that Hazrat Husain be invited to Kufa and on his arrival there should be a general rising against Yazid. Accordingly, the following letter was addressed to Hazrat Husain:

“We are at present without a leader. Please come so that we might come together for the sake of truth. The governor of Kufa, Numan bin Bishr, lives all alone in his palace. We don’t say our Juma prayers or Id prayers behind him. If we can be sure that you would be coming, we can drive away this man to Syria.”

A special messenger carried the letter to Makkah. Two days later, as many as hundred and fifty leading men of Kufa wrote letters to Hazrat Husain- Many more letters followed in quick succession.

These letters set Hazrat Husain seriously thinking. He consulted his friends and relatives. The general opinion was that the people of Kufa should not be trusted. It was they who had left Hazrat ‘Ali in the lurch. Again it was they who took the oath of allegiance to Hazrat Hasan and went back on it. If their invitation was to be accepted at all, it was necessary first to make sure of the actual situation at Kufa. So it was decided to send to Kufa Muslim bin Aqil, Husain’s cousin. He was to make on-the-spot study of the affairs of Kufa and make a report. Hazrat Husain was to base his decision on this report.

Muslim in Kufa

Muslim got a warm welcome from the supporters of Hazrat ‘Ali. They thronged round him and swore that they would lay down their lives to throw off the yoke of Yazid, They started taking the oath of allegiance for Hazrat Husain. In a few days as many as eighteen thousand men took the oath. Muslim was impressed by this show of sincerity. He wrote to Hazrat Husain asking him to come to Kufa.

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The governor of Kufa, Numan bin Bishr, was a kind-hearted man. He took a lenient view of the things. However, he warned people not to flout Yazid's authority so openly that he might be compelled to take stern action. The Omayyads did not like the governor's soft policy. They wrote to Yazid telling him that if he wanted to retain Iraq he should appoint some strong man in place of the present governor. Yazid removed Numan and replaced him by Obaidullah bin Ziad, a spirited haughty young man who was also to retain the governorship of Basra. He had already won fame by ruthlessly wiping out the Kharijites.

On an unusually hot day, Ibn Ziad rode into Kufa, in the company of some men. He wore a black turban and his face was covered. Mistaking him for Hazrat Husain, people gathered around him and shouted out: "O son of the Messenger of Allah! you are most welcome." Ibn Ziad rode on, till he reached the Government House. The people then knew who he was.

On the following day, the new governor summoned the people in the Juma mosque and gave them a stern warning, saying:

"It is the duty of the headman of each street to bring before me any stranger or Kharijite or any suspect who might be living in his jurisdiction. If he fails to carry out this order or takes any part in anti-government activities, he will be hanged in front of his own door. People living in such a street shall forfeit their stipends."

The warning had immediate effect. Most of the people who had pledged loyalty to Hazrat Husain lost their enthusiasm. Seeing this, Muslim came to a powerful chief of the city and sought his protection. The chief, whose name was Hani, replied: "Since you have stepped into my house, I feel honour-bound to grant you protection. Please walk in."

Hani's house now became the meeting place of the supporters of Hazrat Husain. However, every precaution was taken to see that the secret did not leak out. But the governor knew that Muslim had gone underground. He was determined to flush him out. He engaged a spy and gave him a large sum of money for laying the trap.

Two Opportunities Missed

After a long search, the spy got track of an old man who often visited Muslim. As the old man finished his prayer in the mosque one day, the spy approached him, with tears in his eyes and whispered. "I have come to know that you are a supporter of Hazrat 'Ali. I am also one. I very much wish to visit Muslim, present to him this sum of money and pledge allegiance to Hazrat Husain. If you don't consider it safe to take me to him, then let me, for the time being, take the oath of allegiance before you."

The old man felt impressed. He took the oath of allegiance and narrated the story to Muslim who permitted the old man to bring the man with him next time. Thus the spy

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entered the circle of the supporters of Hazrat Husain. He was the first to come to the meeting and the last to leave. He won such confidence that Muslim told him everything. He, in turn, conveyed all these secrets to the governor.

As a leading man of Kufa, Hani was expected to make a call on Ibn Ziad, the new governor. But Han had given asylum to Muslim. He feared that a visit to the Government House might make his position difficult. So he pretended to be ill and stayed indoors. Learning of his illness, the governor himself called on him one day. As Ibn Ziad sat in his house, one of Hani's friends advised him to slay the governor. Hani replied that it was against his code of honour to kill a guest.

Another leading man of Kufa, Shuraiq bin Aur, also fell ill. He was a close friend of Hani and was staying in the latter's house. The governor sent word one evening that he was making a call on Aur. Aur at once conveyed the news to Muslim, saying, "Here is a capital opportunity. When Ibn Ziad is busy talking with me, fall on him from behind and cut off his head. After that you can easily occupy the Government House." Muslim liked the plan.

At night the governor came. He sat for quite some time and talked about different things. Muslim made no attempt to carry out his plan. After the governor had left, Aur asked Muslim why he had allowed the opportunity to slip by. "I did make up my mind to finish with the fellow," replied Muslim, "but I suddenly remembered a saying of the Messenger of Allah. He has forbidden a surprise attack on a Muslim. I had, therefore, to stay my hand." A few days later, Aur died.

The Open Encounter

The secret reports of the spy told Ibn Ziad all about the activities of Muslim and the role Hani was playing. One day as he sat in the court, he asked the other chiefs, "How is it that Hani does not come here?" "He is ill," replied one of the chiefs.

"No, he is not," roared the governor. "He is perfectly all right. Go and fetch him."

Thereupon some of the chiefs hastened to Hani's house and brought him before the governor. The moment Ibn Ziad set his eyes on Hani, he shouted out, "So you are plotting against the Caliph! Muslim bin Aqil lies hidden in your house and you are collecting arms for him. His supporters meet at your house and prepare plans. Did you think you could befool me?"

"I have nothing to do with any conspiracy," replied Hani, "nor is Muslim hidden in my house."

"You lie," Ibn Ziad roared in anger. "I am going to uncover your plot right here." Saying this he called for the spy. Then addressing Hani, he said, "Do you know this man?"

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Hani at once knew that he had been betrayed. He had to state facts. "I did not call Muslim," he said, "he himself sought protection which as a man of honour, I had to give."

"All right!" said the governor, produce him in the court."

"This is impossible!" spoke back Hani. "I can't produce my guest for being killed. By Allah, even if Muslim lay hidden under my foot, I won't move my foot to expose him."

The reply sent Ibn Ziad in a fury. He held a stick in his hand. With it he beat Hani so mercilessly that his nose began to bleed. Hani tried to seize the sword of a guard so that he could hit back, but he did not succeed. Thereupon the governor sent him to the prison.

The only course before Muslim now was to come out in the open and have an encounter with the governor. In a few days, four thousand men gathered under his flag. One day Muslim marched to the Government House and threw a cordon round it.

The governor's position was precarious. Inside the Government House there were only 30 guards and some chiefs of Kufa.

Ibn Ziad made use of a clever stratagem. He sent out two of the leading chiefs asking them to wean away their tribesmen from Muslim. In this they easily succeeded. A few hundred men deserted the ranks of Muslim and entered the Government House. But even now Muslim had enough men to bring the governor to his knees. It was evening by now. The governor sent out the rest of the chiefs to exert their influence on their kinsmen. "Look!" pleaded the chiefs with their men. "The Caliph's troops will be on you in no time. The governor will stop your stipends. Have pity on yourselves and sit in your homes quietly."

These threats worked. The people surrounding Muslim melted away rapidly. As he stood for the evening prayer, only thirty men stood behind him. When the prayer was over, there was not a single soul to be seen around. Muslim did not know what to do or where to go. He roamed in the streets in utter despair.

Muslim Slain

Wandering on and on. Muslim came to the cottage of an old woman. He felt awfully thirsty and asked the woman for some water. After quenching his thirst, Muslim still lingered at the door. "Why don't you move on?" asked the woman in amazement. "It is improper to linger at a lonely woman's door."

"Gentle lady!" answered Muslim. "I have no place to go to. I have neither a home nor a family in this city. If you permit, I may make a request. Some day I may be able to repay your kindness."

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“What is it that you want!” asked the woman in amazement.

“I am Muslim bin Aqil,” came the reply. “The people of this city have forsaken me. I want refuge in your home.”

The old woman thought for a second. Then she made a sign to Muslim to follow her. She led him into the back cell. Then she brought him food.

Shortly afterward the old woman’s son, Bilal, came home. Seeing the mother going back and forth towards the back cell, he asked what the matter was. The mother hesitated to tell. But when the son pressed her, she told him the whole story. However, she took a promise from the son that he would keep the thing to himself.

Bilal was just back from the public meeting called by the governor in the Juma mosque. In this meeting the governor had declared:

“Look! Muslim bin Aqil tried to stir unrest. The result is before you. The man, in whose house he is found, will not be allowed to live. Fear Allah! Stick to your oath of allegiance. Don’t try to disturb the peace.”

After this declaration the governor ordered the chief officer of the police to search each house in the city.

All night long the words of the governor rang in Bilal’s ears. He could hardly sleep. Early next morning he reported the matter to the police. Immediately seventy policemen rode off toward Bilal’s house.

The tramp of hoofs and the noise in the street warned Muslim of the coming danger. Drawing his sword he stood at the entrance of the house.” Muhammad bin Ashas, one of the governor’s men, cried out: “Don’t kill yourself. Surrender and I will grant you protection.”

Muslim paid no heed to the offer. But when the offer was repeated, he asked Ashas, “Do you really promise to grant me protection?”

“Yes, indeed,” was the reply. Others also gave the same assurance. So Muslim gave himself up to the enemy.

As soon as he rode a mule, the policemen seized his sword. Muslim at once knew that he had been betrayed and he exclaimed: “Allah’s will be done!”

As he said this, tears dripped down Muslim’s eyes. This drew a jeer from one of the men. “Do you think I weep for fear of death?” retorted Muslim, “By Allah, I am not afraid of being slain. I weep for my kinsmen who will soon be here. I weep for Hazrat Husain and his family.”

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Then turning to Ashas he said, "I am sure you will not be able to save me from death. I have a request to make. Pray, send some one to Hazrat Husain to inform him about my fate. Tell him not to trust the people of Kufa. His father, Hazrat 'Ali, desired all his life to get rid of these people. Tell Hazrat Husain that the people of Kufa have turned against him. He should go back with his family."

Ashas at once wrote down this message and sent a man to deliver it to Hazrat Husain.

Muslim was brought before Ibn Ziad. "He is under my protection," remarked Ashas. "Who are you to grant protection?" lashed out Ibn Ziad. "You were sent to arrest, not to grant protection." Then turning to Muslim, he said. "By my life! I must slay you."

"Will you allow me a little time to make my will to someone?" asked Muslim.

The governor nodded consent. 'Omar, the son of Hazrat Saad bin Abi Waqqas sat in the court. Muslim called out to him. Taking him aside, Muslim said:

"While in Kufa I borrowed 700 dirhams from the people. The debt is still unpaid. Sell my sword and coat-of-mail and pay off the debt. Send my dead body to Hazrat Husain so that he may go back. I wrote to him that the people of Kufa were with him- He is expected here in a few days."

Hazrat 'Omar told Ibn Ziad all that Muslim had said. The governor permitted him to do what he had been asked to. Then turning to Muslim he said:

"As for Hazrat Husain, if he does not challenge the authority of the government we will leave him alone."

After a pause he went on. "Ibn Aqil! The people lived here so peacefully but you came and sowed disunity among them, setting brother against brother. Why did you do it?"

Muslim's reply was: "You tell an untruth. I never came with evil designs. I came here to establish the rule of justice and to shape the lives of the people according to the Quran and the Sunna."

Ibn Ziad was red-hot with rage. "Take him to the roof of this building," he shouted out. "Cut off his head and hurl down his body on the highway."

Muslim calmly went to the roof and to the last breath repeated the prayer: "Lord! Thou art the judge between us and the people who betrayed us." He peacefully met his end on the 9th of Zul-Haj, 60 A.H.

Ibn Ziad ordered that Hani be executed in the central square of the city. This noble man paid with his life the penalty of giving shelter to Muslim.

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CHAPTER 5

MARCH TO KUFA

Letter From Basra

The flood of letters from Kufa prompted Hazrat Husain to enlist the support of Basra also. He sent his servant, Sulaiman, with a letter addressed to some leaders of that city. They met together and after discussing the matter, sent the following reply:

“We understand fully the importance of the task in which you seek our co-operation. It will be our good fortune if we can carry out your wishes and be of help to you. It shall be a matter of great pride for us. Allah never deprives the world of good rulers. You are at present the sign of Allah and His trust in this world. You are the graceful blossom of the blessed olive tree of which the Messenger of Allah was the root. You are most welcome here. You will find the heads of Banu Yamin bent before you. They will carry out your orders with an eagerness greater than the eagerness of the thirsty camel for water. You will find Ranu S’ad, too, equally obedient.”

Hazrat Husain was already inclined to go to Kufa. This letter turned the inclination into a firm resolve.

Advice Of Well Wishers

Husain’s friends and well-wishers pleaded with him in the strongest terms not to go of Kufa.

“Stay here in Hijaz,” said Hazrat ‘Abdullah bin Zubair “and carry on a campaign to further your cause. Tell your Iraqi supporters to come here and help you. We, too, will support you in every possible way.”

“I beseech you in the name of Allah!” pleaded Hazrat ‘Abdullah bin Abbas, “to give up this idea. Don’t dig your grave with your own hands. If the people of Iraq are, really keen to have you, they should kill their governor and occupy the capital. In that case you would be justified in going to Kufa. But if they invite you while Yazid’s governor is still in power and his officials are collecting the taxes, then surely they only want you to become the scapegoat. They will leave you in the lurch just as -they did in the case of your father and your elder brother.

When even this earnest appeal produced no affect, Hazrat ‘Abdullah bin Abbas said, “If go you must, please go alone. Don’t take the women and children with you, lest you be slain, like Hazrat ‘Osman, before the eyes of your family.”

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Hazrat 'Abdullah bin 'Omar also did his best to dissuade Hazrat Husain. However, nothing could shake Husain's resolve. On the 8th of Zul-Haj, he set off to Kufa with all the members of his household.

Irresistible Pull Of Karbala

Husain's cousin, 'Abdullah, son of Hazrat Jafar, was at Madinah. The news that Hazrat Husain had left for Kufa very much disturbed him. He sent his two sons, Aun and Muhammad, with a letter. The two young men overtook Hazrat Husain a few halting stations beyond Makkah. They delivered the letter which said:

"I request you most earnestly to discontinue the journey, the moment you get this letter. Death and destruction await you and your family in Iraq. Allah forbid that you die. In that event the forces of darkness will be unleashed in the world. At the present moment, you are the central arc of the edifice of truth and virtue. Don't hurry with your plans. I, too, will be coming very shortly."

After sending this letter, 'Abdullah went to Amr bin Saeed, the governor of Madinah, and begged him to write to Hazrat Husain, requesting him to come back to Madinah. The governor asked 'Abdullah to write the letter himself, below which he affixed his official seal. The letter read as follows:

"I wish you should give up the course you are following. I am told that you are leaving for Iraq. Pray, give up the path of disunity because it will lead to disaster. I am sending 'Abdullah bin Hazrat Jafar and my own brother, for heaven's sake, come back with them. I grant you amnesty. I will have full regard for my relationship with you and will treat you well. I will do all I can to make you happy and comfortable. Allah is my witness and He is the best surety and the best protection."

'Abdullah personally took the letter to Hazrat Husain, who went through the letter but reiterated his resolved to proceed to Kufa.

'Abdullah bin Hazrat Jafar saw that any further argument was useless. He let Hazrat Husain march on and told his two sons to accompany their uncle.

Two Martyrs

Reports reached Kufa that Hazrat Husain was on his way to the city. Ibn Ziad, the governor, at once posted police pickets on the road, at some days' distance from the city. Reaching Hijaz, Hazrat Husain sent his messenger Qais, with a letter addressed to the people of Kufa. The messenger was intercepted and brought before the governor, who ordered him to go on top of the Government House and curse; Hazrat Husain. Qais stood on the top of the building and shouted out:

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"O people! Here is a letter from Hazrat Husain, son of Hazrat 'Ali. He is the son of the Prophet's daughter, Hazrat Fatima, and is the best man in the world. I am his messenger to you. He has reached Hijaz. It is your duty to respond to his call."

After this announcement, Qais heaped curses on Ibn Ziad. The governor was beside himself with rage. He ordered that Qais be killed by being hurled down the roof. The order was carried out.

Continuing his march, Hazrat Husain reached an oasis. Here he met Ibn Muti, who was coming from Iraq. "O son of the Messenger of Allah!" shouted out this man. "May my parents die for your sake! Why did you leave the sanctuary of your forefathers?"

"I have been invited by the people of Kufa," came the reply.

"I implore you in the name of Allah, the Almighty and in the name of Islam to give up this venture. Caliphate at present belongs to the Omayyads. If you lay claim to it, you will be slain. If the Omayyads slay you, they will spare no one else. This will lead to endless bloodshed."

"Well," remarked Hazrat Husain, "whatever has been decreed must come to pass." Saying this, he continued his march.

At Thalbia, Hazrat Husain received the news of Muslim's tragic death. The account was so shocking that some members of the party pressed for discontinuing the march. However, Muslim's brothers exclaimed. "By Allah! we must avenge the death of our brother or perish like him."

"Life without these dear ones will not be worth living." declared Hazrat Husain and continued the journey.

A little way on, the two messengers charged with the duty of conveying Muslim's last will met Hazrat Husain. They gave details of the betrayal by the people of Kufa and of the tragic death of Muslim and Hani.

It was now clear that Hazrat Husain and his party were walking into the jaws of death. So Hazrat Husain called together his followers and said: "Muslim and Hani have been slain. Our friends have gone back upon their assurances. Each one of you is free to part company with me. Any one who chooses to go back has my blessings."

The announcement persuaded a good many people to bid good-bye to their leader. Only the members of the household and a handful of faithful comrades stayed on with Hazrat Husain.

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CHAPTER 6

AT KARBALA

Hur's Army

On the first of Muharram 61 A.H. Hazrat Husain crossed into Iraq. Clouds of dust in the distance showed that an army was advancing to meet him. Hazrat Husain at once knew that Ibn Ziad's troops had arrived. So he camped at the foot of a nearby hill.

Government troops encamped right in front so as to block the way. Their commander, Hur, had orders to check Husain's advance. Hazrat Husain ordered that water be offered to the thirsty troops and the horses of Hur. The order was obeyed. When time for the early afternoon prayer came, Hazrat Husain took his stand in front of the enemy troops and said:

"I have come because you wrote letters inviting me to come. You declared you had no leader. You requested me to come and unite you for the cause of truth and justice. Now I have come. If you give assurance of your support, I am willing to accompany you to the city. If this is not so and you dislike my presence here I am ready to go back to the place I have come from."

No one made a reply. When the congregation was about to begin, Hazrat Husain asked, "Will you pray with us or separately?"

"We will pray together," answered Hur. Hazrat Husain led the prayer; Hur and his troops prayed behind him. The late afternoon prayer was also offered in the same way. After this prayer, Hazrat Husain addressed the congregation, saying:

"O people, fear Allah, Let the rightful man have his right. That will please Allah. We, the members of the Prophet's household have a greater right to the caliphate than those who have just usurped it and are ruling over you unjustly. If you don't like my visit here, if you don't recognise my claim, and your views are now different from what you said in your letters and your messages, I am ready to go back."

Hur stood up and said, "We know nothing about the letters and the messages you are talking about."

Hearing this, Hazrat Husain emptied two bags and a big heap of letters lay on the ground.

"Well," observed Hur, "we never wrote these letters to you. We have orders not to let you go till we have produced you before Ibn Ziad."

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Hazrat Husain ordered his party to march back. Hur blocked the way. "What is it that you want after all?" inquired Hazrat Husain.

"I want to take you to Ibn Ziad," replied Hur.

"That is impossible," declared Hazrat Husain.

Then followed some hot words between the two. At last Hur said, "I have no orders to fight with you. I have orders to conduct you to Kufa from wherever I find you. The best course seems to be that you take a route that leads neither to Kufa nor to Madinah, In the meantime I will write to Ibn Ziad. Maybe, some safe solution can be found and I can be saved the unpleasantness of dealing with you."

Hazrat Husain accepted the proposal and set off in a northerly direction, towards Nineva. Hur followed him with his troops. On the way, Hazrat Husain addressed the people thus: "Each one of us owes a duty to Allah and man to raise his voice and to take practical steps against an unjust, cruel ruler. He who fails to perform this duty, shall enter hell along with the tyrant. I am Hazrat Husain, the son of Hazrat 'Ali and the Prophet's daughter, Hazrat Fatima. I embody the true values of Islam. If you treat me the way you treated my father, my brother and my cousin, then surely Allah will enable me to do without your help."

Hazrat Husain Honours His Word

Presently four horsemen came galloping from Kufa. Hur tried to put them under arrest but Hazrat Husain protested saying that they were his men. Hur permitted them to Join Hazrat Husain. One of these men, Tarmah bin Adi, said to Hazrat Husain, "You have only this handful of men with you. Even Hur's troops are enough to overwhelm you. We have left in Kufa the largest army that ever came together in that city. That army is ready to swoop down upon you. I implore you not to advance an inch but to follow me to the mountain fastness of Aja. It is as impregnable as a fort. He who is inside that mountain fastness, can never be 'defeated. As soon as you are there, supporters will throng around you. In ten days' time you will have as many as twenty thousand followers. They will lay down their lives for you."

"May Allah reward you and your people!" replied Hazrat Husain. "But I have given these people my word. I can't go back upon that word. Allah alone knows what turn this affair is finally going to take."

The Fateful Battle-Field

Continuing his march, Hazrat Husain reached Nineva. Here he unpacked and set up tents. Hardly a few hours had passed when a rider came galloping from Kufa. He brought Ibn Ziad's letter for Hur. The letter said that Hazrat Husain should be forced to camp where there was no water or grass. The messenger had orders to report back whether the order had been actually carried out.

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Hur showed the governor's letter to Hazrat Husain who exclaimed, "Leave us alone. We will camp in Nineva or any where else we please."

"I am helpless in the matter," replied Hur. "The messenger has orders not to leave till I have complied with the governor's wish."

The situation made some of Husain's companions desperate. One of them remarked. "Hardships are growing at every step. O son of Messenger of Allah! Let us fight Hur's troops. It is far easier to fight this army than to fight the hordes that are expected to pour down soon."

"I will not be the first to start the fighting," replied Hazrat Husain.

"All right let us go to yonder village on the bank of the Euphrates," suggested the men. "It is a very safe place."

"What village is this!" inquired Hazrat Husain.

"Aqr," came the reply.

The word 'Aqr' means 'slaughter'. So Hazrat Husain said, "I seek Allah's protection against Aqr."

Marching on and on, the party reached the fateful plain of Karbala, some distance from the Euphrates. Hur rushed ahead and blocked the way. Reluctantly, Hazrat Husain had to camp here.

Ibn S'ad's Mediation

On the following day, Ibn Ziad sent a reinforcement of four thousand troops, under the command of Hazrat 'Omar bin Saad, the son of the conqueror of Iran. Ibn Saad was unwilling to march against Hazrat Husain. However, the threat of dismissal compelled him to do what he disliked at heart. Immediately after arrival, he started peace talks. Hazrat Husain pointed out that he had been invited by the people and was now ready to march back. This gave Ibn Saad the hope of a peaceful solution. He wrote to the governor for orders.

But Ibn Ziad was adamant. "I know what you are driving at," he wrote back. "Tell Hazrat Husain and his followers to take the oath of allegiance to Yazid. Other things will be considered afterwards. Cut off the water supply of Hazrat Husain."

Ibn Saad complied with the order. On the seventh of Muharram, a picket of 500 troops was posted at the bank of the river. When thirst became unbearable, Hazrat Husain sent his step-brother Hazrat Abbas, with fifty other men to fetch water. Despite resistance they succeeded in fetching twenty skin-bags of water.

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That night Ibn Saad and Hazrat Husain had a long talk. They met again on the following day. Ibn Saad summed up the result of the talks in the following letter, addressed to the governor.

“Allah be thanked that He has put out the flames of disunity and has brought about unity. Hazrat Husain has agreed to do one of the three things: (i) He is ready to march back to Hijaz. (ii) He is ready to march to any frontier of the empire and start fighting against the non-Muslims, (iii) He is ready to go to Yazid and discuss the matter with him.

“I hope you will like these proposals because they will promote the well being of the people.”

Shimar, The Accursed

The letter impressed Ibn Ziad. He was inclined to accept the proposal. Shimar bin Ziljaushan who sat by the governor stood up and exclaimed: “By Allah! If Hazrat Husain escapes without taking the oath of allegiance, he is sure to become powerful quite soon. You will then be helpless.

“Don’t let him gain time. Force him and his followers to lay down arms. I am told that Ibn Saad and Hazrat Husain have been conferring secretly.”

These words changed the governor’s mind “You have given very sound advice,” he said to Shimar. “Take my letter to Ibn Saad. Tell Hazrat Husain and his party to surrender. If they agree, conduct them here, otherwise attack them. If Ibn Saad complies with this order, work under his command. If, on the other hand, he disregards it, you take up the command and strike off Ibn Saad’s head.”

Saying this, the governor addressed a letter to Ibn Saad, telling him what he had told Shimar. The letter also stated that he had been sent not to plead on behalf of Hazrat Husain, but to deal with him firmly.

“Woe to you. O Shimar!” exclaimed Ibn Saad, as he read the letter, “and cursed be the plan you have prepared. By Allah! It seems you poisoned Ibn Ziad’s mind against my proposals. I looked for peace but you have destroyed that hope. By Allah! Hazrat Husain will never give in. He is extremely self-respecting.”

Ibn Saad now had no choice but to carry out the governor’s orders. He made over the command of the infantry to Shimar. By the evening of the 9th of Muharram, preparations for a full dress attack were complete.

Shimar’s paternal aunt was a wife of Hazrat ‘Ali. Her four sons were among Husain’s party. Shimar called them and told them that he had obtained the governor’s pardon for them. “Cursed be you and your pardon!” exclaimed Shimar’s cousins. “You extend

protection to us but allow no protection to the son of the Messenger of Allah! Be gone! we don't require your protection."

Love For Allah

On the ninth of Muharram Ibn Saad called on Hazrat Husain early in the morning. He told Husain's men to choose between unconditional surrender and an armed encounter. Hazrat Husain thought for a moment. Then he sent his half-brother, Hazrat Abbas, to request Ibn Saad to wait for one more day, so that he might spend another night in prayer and supplication. "Allah is my witness," he added, "that I have such a passion for prayer and repentance."

Hazrat Abbas conveyed this message. Ibn Saad consulted his men. All agreed to wait for another day.

Bracing For The Great Trial

A little after evening, Hazrat Husain gathered together his men and thus addressed them:

"All praise is for Allah. Whether in comfort or in trouble, I always thank Him. I thank Allah for having honoured our household with Prophethood. He granted us all kinds of favours, the knowledge of the Quran and the understanding of the faith. O Allah! Make us Thy grateful servants. I have not known better and more faithful companions than my own. I have not known better and more loving relatives than my own. May Allah give you all a goodly reward. Tomorrow is going to be the fateful day for me and my enemies. The enemy is interested in me alone. I gladly permit each one of you to go back. I won't have the least complaint against any one. Darkness is coming on. Avail of it and make good your escape along with my family. Save yourselves from death."

"What charm will there be left in life when you are no more?" exclaimed all the hearers with one voice. "We don't want to live to see that day."

The full-throated devotion of his followers warmed up Husain's heart. He asked them to prepare for the final struggle. As rest of the men were busy in preparations, Hazrat Husain started repeating the following verses:

"Woe to you, O Time! What an undependable friend you are! You cut short the careers of countless people, every morning and every evening. Time favours no one, nor does it accept any one in place of another. Now everything rests with Allah! Every living man is treading the path of death."

His sister, Zainab, over-heard the verses. She was so overcome with emotion that she ran to him and throwing her arms around his neck started crying.

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“Dear sister!” exclaimed Hazrat Husain. “Let not the devil snatch away your patience and dignity.”

“Are you going to leave me alone!” she gasped.

“By Allah, the very thought of it breaks my heart.” Saying this, she fainted.

Water was immediately sprinkled on her face. When she recovered, Hazrat Husain said,

“Dear sister, fear Allah. Get peace of mind from Him. Know well that all living things are to die. Nothing in the universe will live for ever. All, except Allah, must taste death. The Messenger of Allah is a model of virtue for me and for every other Muslim. Learn from his example how to be calm and patient. I implore you in the name of Allah, my dear sister, not to raise hue and cry, nor to tear your hair or your dress after I am dead.”

Hazrat Husain then went inside his tent and spent the rest of the night in prayer and supplication.

CHAPTER 7

MARTYRDOM

Warning To The Enemy

The morning of the 10th of Muharram, 61 A.H. was heralded by a weird redness on the horizon. The dull disc of the sun rapidly mounted into a brassy sky. Hazrat Husain drew up the handful of his men so as to keep his tents at the back. They consisted of 32 horse and 40 foot. Soon they were to hurl themselves at the huge army of Ibn Saad, divided into four battalions.

As the two armies stood poised against each other, Hazrat Husain stepped out and addressed the enemy thus:

“O people, be not hasty. Listen to me very carefully so that I may discharge the duty of explaining the truth to you. Understand well the cause of my journey. If you do justice to me, you will be very fortunate. If you don’t do so, it is entirely up to you. Let you and your comrades try all means and do against me all you can. Allah is my helper and He, indeed, is the real friend of good people.”

At these words the ladies of Husain’s household began to cry aloud. Hazrat Husain sent his half-brother, Hazrat Abbas, to tell them to keep calm and remarked: “Ibn Hazrat

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Abbas was right when he advised me not to take the womenfolk with me." When the weeping stopped, he continued.

"O people, recall to your minds the family to which I belong. Remember well who I am. Then consider whether it becomes you to slay me. Am I not the grandson of your Prophet and the son of his cousin? Was the Great Martyr, Hamza, not my father's uncle? Was Hazrat Jafar Tayyer not my uncle? Don't you remember that the Messenger of Allah described me and my brother as the leaders of the young in heavens? Despite this all, does it behove you to meet me with drawn swords? Won't you be stopped even by the saying of the Messenger of Allah from spilling my blood?"

Similar appeals were made by some followers of Hazrat Husain. They suggested that Hazrat Husain be sent to Yazid, who might deal with him as he thought fit. These appeals fell on deaf ears. The only exception was Hur, the commander of the troops that had conducted Hazrat Husain to Karbala. He crossed over to Husain's side and exclaimed: "O son of the Messenger of Allah! I am the miserable wretch who stopped you from marching back and drove you to this gloomy waterless hell. By Allah, I could never imagine that these people will treat you thus! I am come to you to offer my repentance before Allah. I will fight for you to the last breath. Perhaps that might atone for my sin."

"Allah will surely accept your repentance," assured Hazrat Husain, "and He will pardon your sin."

Tough Resistance

The battle began by single combats. The justness of their cause had given Husain's followers such iron nerves that they cut down their adversaries one after the other. Seeing this, the enemy made a general attack. Shimar led a headlong charge. However, with superhuman courage, Husain's small army beat back the attack. Enemy troops got so unnerved that Ibn Saad had to send a reinforcement of 500 archers.

By mid-day, Ibn Saad's army could make no visible gain. Getting infuriated. Shimar made a wild attack. He succeeded in reaching the tents and ordered that they be set on fire. "Will you bum alive the women and children?" exclaimed Hazrat Husain, May Allah roast you in hell fire!"

Shimar was cut to the quick and shrunk back quickly. His henchmen, who were trying to set fire to the tents, were driven back.

Prayer Under The Shadow of Swords

By the hour of the early mid-day prayer, most of Husain's followers had been slain. However, this did not make his unmindful of the prayer. He cried out that fighting be stopped for the prayer. Finding no response he, with the few followers that still remained, offered the prayer.

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Before long, none but Husain's own relatives remained to fight for him. One by one, they hurled themselves at the enemy and dealt staggering blows falling to death.

Husain's son, Hazrat 'Ali Abbas, fell upon the enemy with stunning suddenness. He sowed death all around but was finally killed. The sight drove Zainab mad. She ran out frantically and threw herself on the corpse. Hazrat Husain sent her back and placed the dead body in front of his tent.

The sons of Muslim bin Aqil and 'Abdullah bin Hazrat Jafar sacrificed themselves likewise. Now it was the turn of Qasim, the son of Hazrat Hasan. He was an extremely handsome young man. An arrow pierced his neck and he shouted out: "Good-bye uncle!" Hazrat Husain at once flew at the wretch that had shot the arrow and cut him down. He then carried back to the tent door the dead body of Qasim and exclaimed: "Perdition overtake the people who slew you. How are they going to face your grandfather on the Day of Judgement?"

Hazrat Husain now had only his four stepbrothers to fight for him. One by one, they struck at the enemy and died fighting gallantly, till only Hazrat Abbas, the eldest of the four was left.

Tired and riddled with wounds, Hazrat Husain felt awfully thirsty. There was not a drop of water even to moisten his lips. The Euphrates flowed within sight, but the approach was heavily guarded by the enemy picket. However, Hazrat Husain was desperate. He and Hazrat Abbas succeeded in fighting their way to the river bank. Hazrat Husain filled a cup with water and raised it to his lips. But before he could take a sip, an arrow whizzed into his neck. A fountain of blood gushed forth as he pulled out the arrow. He cupped his hands and filled them with blood. Turning the blood skyward he exclaimed: "Lord I can complain only to Thee. See, what treatment is being meted out to the grandson of Thy Prophet!"

Both brothers had to get back thirsty. Before they could reach the tents, the enemy made a sudden swoop on Hazrat Abbas. He was pushed back by the weight of the attack and fell fighting valiantly.

Hazrat Husain was now without a comrade. He stood close to his tent. Enemy hordes stood gazing at him but dared not strike. However, the cruel Shimar made bold and taking some troops, led an attack with ferocity. Hazrat Husain drove back the enemy. Shimar turned round and threw a ring around Hazrat Husain. A wretch, Malik by name, gave a sword blow on his head. Husain's cap was drenched with blood. He pulled off the cap, and putting on a turban, started the fight again.

Seeing her brother in this plight, Zainab could no longer control herself. She rushed to his side and exclaimed, "Would that the sky should fall down!"

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Just at that moment, Hazrat 'Omar bin Saad happened to pass by, "Hazrat 'Omar," cried out Zainab, "will you allow Hazrat Husain to be slain before your very eyes?"

The pathetic question brought tears in Ibn Saad's eyes. However, he said nothing and quietly slunk aside.

Hazrat Husain is Slain

Hazrat Husain knew that his hour was come. Parched with thirst and riddled with wounds, he stood with a calm dignity that struck terror in every heart. The flash of his sword dazzled the eyes and threw the enemy ranks in disorder. No one dared to carry the burden of his blood. Hazrat Husain was whirling his sword and was shouting aloud: "Are you all bent upon killing me! By Allah! No man's slaughter will offend Allah more than mine. Surely Allah is going to exalt me. But He is going to punish you in a manner which you can't even dream of."

Shimar saw that every one hesitated to strike at Hazrat Husain. Getting impatient he posted the cavalry at the back of the infantry and ordered the archers to shoot. Then he howled out: "Woe to you! What is staying your hands? Why don't you slay Hazrat Husain?"

The goading did the trick. Shimar's henchmen at last fell upon Hazrat Husain. With one blow of the sword, Zara bin Shariq cut off the left arm. Another blow on the shoulder made Hazrat Husain stagger. Sinan bin Ans Nakhi's spear threw him on the ground. Seeing that no one came forward to cut off the head, Sinan himself jumped down from his horse and beheaded Hazrat Husain. According to some it was Shimar who cut off Husain's head.

Hazrat Husain was 55 at the time of his death. Seventy-two other men had laid down their lives for him. Of these eighteen were his own kinsmen.

Inhuman Atrocities

Husain's death should have ended the tragedy of Karbala. However, the people of Kufa pushed their treachery to inhuman limits. They stripped off clothes from Husain's body. Then they plundered his tent. Husain's younger son, 'Ali Asghar Zainal-Abidin lay ill in a tent. Shimar was going to slay him too. "Won't you spare this sick lad?" protested the blood-thirst Shimar's comrades. This saved the young man's life.

When Ibn Saad came to know about these atrocities, he issued orders that women and children not be molested at all and that whatever had been looted from Husain's camps should be restored.

Two days later, Ibn Saad marched back to Kufa, with the women and children of Husain's household. Pathetic cries and sobs rent the air of Karbala as the grief-stricken

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family marched past the unburied corpses of their dead. Zainab was the bitterest in her outcry.

Even the treacherous Kufis felt touched by these pathetic cries. They started weeping. They realised for the first time what grave wrong they had done.

This was the great tragedy known as the 'Tragedy of Karbala.' It constitutes one of the darkest chapters in the history of Islam.

CHAPTERS 8

THE AFTERMATH

In Yazid Court

When the grief-stricken family entered Yazid's court there ran a stream of tears from the eyes of Fatima and Sakina, Husain's daughters. Noticing this Yazid addressed the bereaved family and said, "All this took place without my knowledge. If I had been on the spot, I must have taken a lenient view of Husain's step and must have overlooked it.

Zainal-Abidin stood tied in chains and fetters. Yazid ordered these to be removed. Then he said, "O 'Ali, your father paid no heed to the ties of kinship with me. He overlooked my right and started a quarrel with respect to political power. The outcome of this course of action is before you."

In reply, Zainal-Abidin quoted a verse of the Quran. Yazid said no more. He ordered that a house adjoining the palace be vacated for Husain's family. He made inquiries from each lady and gave her double of what she had lost.

When Yazid's wife came to know that Hazrat Husain had been slain she felt so shocked that she rushed into the court and said: "Commander of the Faithful! Is it true that such sad fate has overtaken the son of the Messenger of Allah?"

"Yes" replied Yazid. "Cursed be Ibn Ziad. He took a very hasty step in the matter." Yazid's wife started weeping- She along with other ladies of her household called on Husain's family and did her best to console them.

After some days Yazid sent the bereaved family to Madinah with all the honour due to them. This took away some of their burden of grief. Husain's daughter Sakina often used to remark, "Of all ungrateful people I have known, Yazid is the most courteous."

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