

The Betrayal in Kufa

Pin-drop silence prevailed in the mosque at Kufa where a large congregation had gathered to offer evening prayers. Outside the mosque the town-crier was reading out the proclamation. Every one of the congregation was straining his ears to listen to every word with rapt attention.

At the top of his voice the town-crier was shouting: "Be it known to the people of Kufa that Obeidullah, son of Ziad, has assumed the governor-ship of Kufa under the orders of the Khalif. He has noted with perturbation that the people of Kufa have extended their welcome to Muslim, son of Aqil, who has come from Medina as an emissary of Husain, son of Ali, who has declined to owe allegiance to the Khalif. It is hereby proclaimed for the information of all the citizens of Kufa that any person found associating with Muslim, son of Aqil, will be considered a rebel against the Khalif and, by way of punishment, he will be hanged, drawn and quartered, his entire family will be put to the sword and his property confiscated. In case of those who have hitherto extended their welcome to him, if they now repent and desist from doing so, amnesty will be given."

With bated breath every one listened to the proclamation. It was this same Muslim, son of Aqil, who was to lead the prayers that evening, and as the proclamation ended he arose to fulfil his duty. A few exchanged enquiring glances with their friends. Some others whispered some words to their neighbours. At this moment the call for prayers was given and Muslim silently rose to lead the congregational prayers.

When Muslim completed the prayers and turned back, he found the mosque empty, except for one person only Hanee Ibne Orwah at whose house Muslim was staying as a guest. The two looked at each other. No words were needed to tell Muslim why the people of Kufa had deserted him. The people of Kufa, who had so persistently asked Husain to come over to them and take up the responsibilities of their spiritual amelioration had, on hearing the proclamation, got scared out of their wits. These were the people who had in the past betrayed Muslim's uncle Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, and shown cowardice in times of trouble and tribulations. These were the people who had deserted Muslim's cousin, Hasan, son of Ali, in his hour of need.

Muslim stood for a while motionless. His face was full of anguish. He was not dismayed at the fate that awaited him, because a fighting death was the heritage of his family. He was only disconsolate at the thought that he had reposed confidence in these people's sincerity and written to his cousin, Husain, to come over to Kufa as their moral, mental and spiritual preceptor, to save them from sinking into the depths of moral degradation. How he wished he had not been hasty about judging these people!

A moment's reflection was sufficient to make up his mind. At least there was one man with him who could be relied upon. If he could only send a message to Husain through Hanee Ibne Orwah about the treachery of the people of Kufa!

With these thoughts Muslim turned towards Hanee. Before he could give expression to his thoughts, Hanee Ibne Orwah anticipated his words. In low whispers he said: "Muslim, my respected guest, I know what is uppermost in

your mind. If God enable me to leave this cursed town in time, I shall rush post-haste to warn our master and Imam to turn back." He hung his head down and, in a tone which was hardly audible, added, as if muttering to himself: "Muslim, my duty towards you as your host demands that I should remain here to protect you and shed the last drop of my blood in your defence. But I know that you would like me to attend to the higher duty which we both owe to our Lord, Husain Ibne Ali. There is hardly time to be lost and so I bid you farewell. May Almighty God protect you and your innocent sons from the fury of these treacherous fiends."

Hanee Ibne Orwah rushed out of the Mosque. He knew that he had to act quickly, if at all he was to succeed in his mission. Before leaving Kufa he had to do something for the safety of the two young sons of Muslim who had not yet reached their teens. He was quickly revolving in his mind how he could hide these innocent boys and where. He could not think of anybody known to him who could be trusted to give shelter to them. He hardly had any time at his disposal to make arrangements because his paramount obligation was to convey Muslim's message to Imam Husain. His quick-working mind decided that the children of Muslim must be warned to get out of the house where they were no longer safe and leave the rest to God.

On reaching his house, Hanee asked his wife to whisk the children out of the house by the back door for their safety. He asked his servant to harness his horse as quickly as he could. Hardly Muhammad and Ibrahim, the young sons of Muslim, had been put on the road to face the world and its turmoils in a strange and unfriendly city, the house of Hanee was surrounded by armed troopers sent by Obeidullah. Hanee realised that the hope he had cherished to leave the town and carry the message of Muslim to Husain was

completely frustrated. He unsheathed his sword and fell upon the hirelings of Obeidullah with the intention of selling his life as dearly as he could. The odds against him were too heavy. He was soon overpowered and chained and marched off to the court of the Governor.

* * * *

After Hanee's departure from the Mosque, Muslim reflected for a while. At first his mind was put at ease by Hanee's assurance that he would carry the warning to Husain about the happenings in Kufa. But on second thoughts he realised that there was every possibility of Hanee being captured before he could leave the town. What if that happened? He had fullest confidence in Hanee's sincerity, but how could he be so sure that Hanee would be able to make good his escape from Kufa? Although Muslim was fully alive to the lot that would befall his innocent sons on their capture, he realised that the right course for him was to find some other person whom he could trust to carry the message to the Imam. Kneeling down in prayer he muttered: "Merciful Allah, spare me for a while so that I can send the warning to my Imam."

He came out of the mosque slowly. He did not know which way to turn. He only knew that the whole town had turned hostile to him. As soon as he stepped out of the mosque, he saw groups of people collected hither and thither and engaged in animated conversation. On seeing him coming out they scattered and walked away as if they had never known him. Muslim realised that they were, one and all, mortally afraid of the reprisals that would befall them if they stood by him. Now he saw how difficult it was for

him to find a single person who could fulfil his purpose; where to look for him; where to find him?

With a heavy heart Muslim was now trudging the narrow by-lanes of Kufa. The sun was fast descending and the dark narrow lanes of Kufa becoming darker every moment. Making a hood of his gown, so as to cover his head to avoid identification, Muslim was walking on and on, almost aimlessly ambling. The deserted cobbled pavements were echoing his foot-steps. The only other sound to be heard was of the horses' hoofs as the soldiers were patrolling the streets and searching for him in all nooks and corners. Whilst walking aimlessly he was furiously thinking how to find someone who could carry his message to Husain.

Soon darkness descended on the whole town. As curfew had been imposed by the orders of the Governor, not a soul was venturing out. It became evident to Muslim that, if he walked on there was every possibility of his being arrested by the patrolmen and, if that happened, his last hope of finding a messenger would vanish. The events of the day had made him tired in body and soul.

He sat on the doorstep of a house, hesitating whether to knock at the door and ask for water. Whilst he was still wavering, he heard the opening of the door against which he was leaning. An old lady stood there with a flickering candle in her hands. From her enquiring eyes he could understand that she was wondering why he was seated there. Muslim turned to her and requested a glass of water. She asked him to wait for a minute and, going into the house, returned with a tumbler of water. Muslim drank it to the last drop and thanked the lady profusely. He again sat on the doorstep. The old

lady looked at him for a while and then asked him: "My son, why do you not return to your house? Do you realise how your wife and children must be worrying about you by your remaining away from the house in such troubled atmosphere Don't you have a house with wife and children?" A lump came into Muslim's throat with the recollection of his family and home.

Controlling his emotions and checking the tears which were gushing from his eyes he said: "Good lady, I have a house, but in a distant land. My wife and young daughters are at home and my sons are in Kufa but perhaps they will wait for me for ever." After a brief pause he added: "In this unfriendly town I have no home and nobody to whom I can turn for shelter."

These words of despondency moved the lady. Sympathetically she said: "From where do you come and why are you here in these troubled times?"

Muslim murmured in reply: "I am from the city of the Prophet. I came on the invitation of the people of Kufa as their request. Though thousands welcomed me on my arrival, there is now not a soul who will admit me into his house."

The venerable old lady was taken aback by this reply. She raised the candle she was carrying to bring it nearer Muslim's face. With an exclamation of recognition she bent down on her knees and said: "My God, you are Muslim, the emissary of my Imam, my beloved Husain, who is hunted by Obeidullah's soldiers. How did I not recognise you at the first glance when your words, your accent, your demeanour, all had the stamp of people of the Prophet's House?" Sobbing bitterly and overcome by contrition she added, "How will I face my Lady Fatima on the day of reckoning when she will ask me: "Taha, my Husain's emissary came to you, friendless and shelterless, but

you callously and relentlessly turned him out!" What reply will I give to her? The least that I can do for you is to give you shelter in my house till an opportunity arises for you to make good your escape from this cursed city whose people are steeped in perfidy."

Muslim felt reluctant to accept her offer for fear that the god-fearing old lady might be victimised for giving him protection. But on second thoughts he decided to stay in her house with the hope that, if he could avoid arrest for some time, he might be able to find some one to carry his message to Husain .

Taha asked Muslim to remain in the attic of the house. She gave him whatever food there was in the house but he could hardly partake of anything. How can a person in his predicament relish food He decided to pass the night in prayers as he had a premonition that this would be his last night.

Before retiring into the attic, Muslim told Taha about his desire to send a message to the Imam not to come to Kufa in view of what had transpired. She assured him that when her son, who was in the Government armed forces, returned from his beat, she would take him in her confidence and enlist his support in finding some reliable person for this mission.

Hardly a few hours had passed when Taha's son returned home. He looked tired and worn out. When Taha enquired from him the reason for his coming home so late, he told her that, along with other soldiers he was patrolling the streets in search of Muslim. She was aghast at the thought that her son, of all people, should be in the party searching for Muslim,

when she herself was so devoted to the House of the Prophet. She strongly protested to her son at the role he was playing. That cunning man turned round and assured his mother that, though he had in the course of his duty to pretend as if he was searching for Muslim, in reality he was as much devoted to Muslim, and the House of the Prophet, as she was. His disingenuous assurances carried conviction to the simple old lady and, after making him swear by his faith, she took her son into confidence and told him everything about the happenings of that evening. The crafty son of Taha was inwardly elated at the thought that he would be able to collect the prize placed on Muslim's head. His first thought was to behead Muslim achieved in his sleep but, coward that he was, he got scared at the fate that would befall him if Muslim would wake up before he accomplished his purpose. He thought furiously for a few moments and then decided to go and inform Obeidullah Ibne Ziad that he had Muslim in his house and he could be easily captured. His warped mind quickly invented an excuse for going out in the dead of night, without arousing the suspicions of his noble mother. He told her that, as in his presence, Hanees Ibne Orwah, at whose house Muslim and his two sons had been staying, had been beheaded and as the two young boys were roaming the streets of Kufa, he thought it his bounden duty to search for them and bring them home so that the father and sons could be reunited. He told Taha that he would also see one of his trusted friends and through him arrange to convey Muslim's message to the Imam for which he was so anxious. Taha was taken in by the guiles of her perfidious son. She felt elated that her son was so keen to do the good work that he could not wait till daybreak.

The avaricious son of Taha hastened to the Governor's house and lost no time in getting himself admitted to his presence. In fact Obeidullah was

awake waiting for the news of Muslims's arrest as he was mightly afraid that, if Muslim remained at large, he might succeed in rallying round him a few persons who could offer very stiff opposition to his forces and even upset his ugly plans. He felt relieved and overjoyed at the tidings brought to him by Taha's treacherous son. He immediately ordered one of the commanders of his forces to get together a well-equipped contingent for Muslim's arrest.

Accompanied by mounted soldiers, the traitor returned to his house for Muslim's arrest. Muslim was at that time engaged in prayers. When he heard the beating of several horses' hoofs on the paved roads, he understood that the soldiers had come for his arrest. He snatched his sword which was lying by his side and rushed out. Taha stood at the threshold of her house flabbergasted to see that her son had brought the soldiers for the arrest of her revered guest. She fell on Muslim's feet and cried: "Muslim, my prince, how can I explain to you that I have not betrayed you but my cursed son, whom I trusted and never suspected of such blatant treachery, has ruined me. I shall not let them cross my threshold except over my dead body." Muslim did not require to be told that Taha's averments were sincere. He gently told her, "My benefactor, I know that you have been very kind and considerate to me and the thought of betraying me cannot even cross your noble and pious mind. I do not in the least blame you for the treachery of your son. As your guest, who has partaken of your hospitality, I cannot allow you to be killed by these merciless brutes and let your house be reduced to a shambles. Let me go out of the house and sell my life as dearly as I can."

Muslim gently pushed aside Taha from the threshold and walked out sword in hand. By this time the soldiers had reached the house. They were taken by surprise at seeing Muslim emerging from the door like an enraged lion. The

lane was so narrow that two horses could not come up abreast. This gave Muslim the best opportunity for single combat. Though he was on foot and the soldier opposite to him was mounted, he possessed the prowess which was the heritage of Ali's family. One after the other the soldiers were tasting the sword of this warrior and falling down from their horses. In the process they were getting crushed and trampled under the hoofs of horses of their own men.

The leader of the band of soldiers, who had discreetly kept himself behind his men, sent word for more men. Though more and more soldiers were pouring in, the topography of the scene of this street battle was such that they could not attack en masse. Heads of enemy soldiers were falling like nine-pins. Hours passed but still Muslim was fighting his defensive battle most courageously.

When Obeidullah Ibne Ziad's couriers, who were bringing to him the news of the fight, informed him that Muslim was giving a fight the like of which had not been seen since the days of Ali, the Khalif, he got infuriated. He tauntingly asked his generals how many thousands of warriors they needed to capture one solitary person. One of them angrily retorted to him that he was forgetting that the person to be captured was not an ordinary home-keeping youth or shop-keeper but a renowned warrior of the House of Ali. He even suggested that if Obeidullah had no confidence in the generals, he could himself demonstrate his skill with the sword by offering combat to Muslim. This suggestion scared the wits out of Obeidullah. He, of all people, knew what it meant to cross swords with Ali's nephew. Swallowing the taunt, he replied: "My good general, I fully know what it means to fight with a person so desperate who finds himself at bay. Instead of letting our

men die by his sword in such large numbers, why cannot some one adopt some stratagem to make him leave his vantage position so that it may be easier to attack him from all sides?"

This suggestion appealed very much to the cowardly soldiers of Kufa. After some consultations amongst themselves, they decided to send soldiers to the top of the roof of an adjoining building and from there to hurl stones, burning embers and missiles at Muslim. It did not take them long to carry out their strategy. With showers of arrows, stones, fire and missiles, Muslim was so much wounded that he decided to give up his vantage position. He charged on the soldiers in front of him and they fell back. He went forward, wielding his sword, and in the process, sending those who were within its reach to the perdition and doom which they merited.

Once again hasty counsels were held among the captains of the army. Some one suggested that, since Muslim was now desperately moving forward, a trench could be dug on the road and covered up with straw so that it was completely camouflaged. The idea was to trap Muslim as he marched forward. It was realised that, without such subterfuge, Muslim could not be killed or captured without sacrificing the cream of the army.

The treacherous ruse proposed by Obeidullah's mercenaries worked as planned. While rushing on and wielding his sword dexterously, Muslim fell into the trench. Now those who were avoiding to come within the reach of his sword swooped down on him. With gushing blood Muslim could not regain his feet. He toppled over and lay unconscious in the trench. It was now a matter of minutes to capture him and soon he was chained and bound.

When Muslim regained consciousness, he found himself a captive. His wounds had accentuated his thirst. The dawn was now breaking and the call for prayers was raised in the mosques of Kufa. Muslim requested his captors to give him some water to drink and for ablution. Instead of acceding to his request, they mocked and jeered at him. Muslim was extremely surprised and pained to see that the people of Kufa, who were claiming to be the followers of the Prophet, were flouting the injunctions of Islam for kindness to all in a helpless predicament. Little did Muslim know that these same people would behave with utter callousness and beastliness towards Husain and his children in the not too distant future.

Before being marched off to the Court of Obeidullah, Muslim was paraded through the streets of Kufa with heavy chains on his hands and feet. The people of Kufa, who only a few days before were vying with one another just to have a glimpse of him, were now watching him from their windows with perfect equanimity, as if he was an utter stranger to them. Some devils amongst them were hard-hearted enough to pelt stones at him.

When Muslim was presented before Obeidullah he stood erect with dignity. The Governor asked him whether he knew the fate that awaited him and his master Husain Ibne Ali. With utter disdain Muslim replied "O mercenary of Yazid, I do not care what you do to me, but I do not like to hear your cursed tongue mentioning Husain's name."

Obeidullah Ibne Ziad felt crest fallen at this bold rebuke of Muslim. With intention of creating an impression of his magnanimity on the people who were gathered in his court, he said to Muslim, "According to the age-old

Arab custom I want you to mention your last desire before you are beheaded so that I may fulfil it."

A glint of hope came into Muslim's eyes. Could he take this man at his word and ask him to send the message which he wanted to be conveyed to his master? Like a drowning man who catches at a straw, Muslim decided that, if at all, this was his only chance. He immediately replied: "Obeidullah, if you are true to your word, fulfil my last wish and send a message to my master Imam Husain, asking him to go back to Medina and abandon the idea of his visit to Kufa."

Obeidullah had never expected this request from Muslim. He had thought that perhaps Muslim might request him to spare the lives of his two young sons when they were captured, as they were sure to be. For a while he was nonplussed; he was at a loss what to say. He knew that he could not fulfil this wish of Muslim without incurring the displeasure of Yazid; but to decline this request would betray him in his true colour. His crooked mind did not take long to find a solution to this problem. He beckoned to his executioners to take Muslim to the top of the Government House and to behead him. He immediately dismissed his court and hurried back to his apartment.

When the sword of the executioner was swaying over Muslim's head his last thoughts were with his master, Husain, whom he had loved and cherished more than anything in life. His only regret was that till the end he could not do what he wanted most, to warn Husain against the treachery of the people of Kufa. As the sword fell on his neck he silently muttered a prayer to God to so ordain that Husain might come to know of the happenings in Kufa.

This was the last prayer of the brave warrior who stood steadfast in death as in life.

Merciful God did not allow Muslim's last prayer to go in vain. He who listens to the prayers emanating from the hearts of sincere devotees like Muslim, enabled one witness to the ghastly enactments of that day, who had some sparks of faith in him, to go riding out of Kufa at the earliest opportunity. He reached the camp of Imam Husain a few days after Muslim's martyrdom. He conveyed the sad tidings to Husain who wept bitterly as if his heart would rend. He called the young daughter of Muslim, who was travelling with him, and told her that henceforth she should regard him as her guardian. He gave one pair of earrings to her and one to Sakina. When the messenger asked him whether he was turning back and returning to Medina in view of what had happened to Muslim, he replied: "I am going forward to meet my destiny; to fulfil the purpose of my life. My death is beckoning to me and so there is no question of my retracing my steps."

The Youths of Karbala

'The days of our youth are the days of our glory'. What hopes and feelings surge in young hearts during this time of life! How every nerve and sinew quivers with the joy of living! But there are some youths to whom the cup of life is dealt in another measure. There are some budding flowers that are destined to be swept away by the hot desert winds before they have the opportunity to bloom. Such was the destiny of Husain's three nephews who were gathered outside the tents on the eve of that eventful day of Muharram.

Qasim, Aun and Muhammad were gathered to discuss the part they would play on the following day in defense of their uncle. There was grim determination writ large on their young faces. They were watching the progress of the moon as it was marching slowly through that cloudless sky, anxiously waiting for the morrow to unfold its event. Each one of them had the desire to go first into the battlefield to shed his blood. Even the few words they exchanged amongst themselves pertained to their anxiety lest their uncle Hussain might hold them back. They were discussing amongst themselves how to secure the permission of the Imam to march off into the battlefield.

Their talks were interrupted by someone coming and informing Qasim that his mother Umme Farwa wanted him to see her. He hurried to the tent. As soon as he entered it, his mother put her arms round him and said: "Qasim my son, do you know why I called you? I want to remind you about your duty towards your uncle, Hussain. I want to tell you something about the unparalleled love and affection Hasan your father had for Hussain. The two of them were so much devoted to each other that they were always thinking

and acting in unison. The slightest pain suffered by one was instantaneously felt by the other as if they were twins from the same embryo. With the unique love your father had for Hussain, I can well imagine how he, if alive, would have felt today! He would have been the first to sacrifice his life for his beloved younger brother."

She stopped for a few seconds and then, in a soft tone, as if reminiscing, added: "I am sure he wanted you to deputise for him on this day. My child, when he passed away, you were too young to understand life. On his death-bed his last words to me were: "Umme Farwa, I entrust you and my children to God and Hussain. When Qasim grows up, you tell him that my dying desire was that he should stand by Hussain through thick and thin. I can see the clouds of treachery gathering against Hussain. A day may come when he may need the unflinching devotion and sacrifice of his near and dear ones. Though I will not live to see that day, as my last wish I want you to prepare Qasim for it from his childhood." Her voice choked with emotion, as she continued: "My Qasim, since that day your father breathed his last, Hussain has looked after you as his own son. Nay, he has treated you on all occasions better than his own sons. You know how he has fulfilled your every wish so that you may not miss the love and affection of your father. Now it is your turn to show that you can repay, to some extent, your debt of gratitude by laying down your life for him before any of his sons, brothers and kinsmen. Now is your chance to reciprocate his love and affection, by demonstrating to the enemies that you are a scion of the House of Ali and can wield the sword in defense of truth."

Qasim listened to his mother with his head bowed in respect. He felt very much relieved by what his mother had said to him because he had felt very

apprehensive as to how she would react when he approached her for her permission to go for the fight. He knew how his mother was attached to him after his father's death. He was well aware how restless she used to become, if she would not see him even for a few hours. He had thought that the very idea of her son marching out into the battlefield would make her demented. He felt as if his mother had taken a load off his head. He affectionately hugged her and said "My dearest mother, I know not how I can thank you for what you have said to me just now. My filial affection for my uncle Hussain is known to you. From my childhood I have not known what a father's love means but I know this for certain that even my father, if alive, would not have been so kind, so considerate, so affectionate to me as my uncle Hussain has been to me. He has not allowed me to feel even for a moment that I am an orphan. Thanks to him, in our house my every wish has been a command. How is it possible for me, the son of Hasan, to be oblivious of my obligations to him? For me death would be far better than life without him and my dear uncle Abbas, and my cousins Ali Akbar, Muhammad and others."

Umme Farwa felt elated at the brave reply of her brave son. A painful thought passed her mind—the thought that this dear child who was so devoted to her and in whom she had reposed all her hopes, would perish on the fields of Karbala. With great efforts she controlled herself.

On the departure of Qasim, Aun and Muhammad waited for some time for him to return. Then both of them returned to their tent to console their mother, Zainab, whose grief and sorrow defied description. As they entered the tent they saw her sitting on the ground with a candle in her hand looking intently at Ali Akbar, their cousin, whom she had brought up as her own son

and for whom her love and affection was without a parallel. When she saw both of them entering the tent, she beckoned to them to come and sit near Ali Akbar. Both of them did so according to her bidding. She turned towards them and said in a low tone: "My children, do you know what tomorrow has in store for us? It will be a day of trial; it will be a day when the blood of our family will flow like water; it will be a day on which all the vendetta nurtured by the enemies of the Prophet's house for all these years will be spilled out. I want both of you, my beloved sons, to defend your uncle Hussain and his children at the cost of your lives." After a pause she added: "When I was leaving Mecca, your father Abdullah asked me to take both of you with me so that, if an occasion arose you, Aun, could be the deputy of your father in seeking martyrdom, and you, Muhammad, could be my offering in the cause of Islam."

Hearing their mother talk in this vein touched both of them to the quick. How could they tell their mother Zainab that they were fully prepared for the doom that awaited them; that they were both coveting martyrdom in defense of the cause of Islam and its inviolable principles for which Hussain stood up so boldly and firmly in the face of odds! Aun was the first to speak. His voice was quivering with emotion when he said: "Mother, we both feel so elated to know that we have your permission to fight in defense of our uncle and his family. God willing, we both will show the army of Amr Saad that we are the grandsons of Jaafar-e-Tayyar whose prowess in battle had become legendary. We shall offer such fight tomorrow that, whenever you will remember us and mourn for us, your grief will be mingled with pride that we lived up to the reputation of our family."

Hardly had Aun concluded when Muhammad, the younger one, burst out saying, "My loving mother, do not think that we need any exhortation to fight valiantly tomorrow. I am itching to go out in defense of my uncle. From my childhood I have been . hearing about the valor of my maternal grandfather Ali, and paternal grandfather Jaafar-e-Tayyar. It is not for nothing that we both of us have learnt the art of single combat from our uncle Abbas. You may rest assured that, so long as we breathe, we shall not let the least harm come to our uncle Hussain or to any of his children."

With this reply of the brave youngsters Zainab felt reassured. It was not that she, for a moment, doubted their devotion or sense of duty. It was not that she considered it necessary to instill any courage in them, for she knew that both of them were brave and noble sons of a brave and noble father. Her love for her brave sons was surging within her. She was feeling as if her heart was getting squeezed when she was conjuring up the vision of these youths dying as martyrs.

Ali Akbar who was listening quietly to the talk between the mother and the two sons, looked at the face of the mother and then at the son's. With a faint smile playing on his lips he said: "We of the Prophet's family will go out to meet death as is our wont. In what order it will be, it is for God to determine." When he said this, perhaps he had the conviction that Hussain would never allow his nephews to die so long as he, Ali Akbar, was there. How rightly he had surmised, the events of Ashura would show!

Like all passing things, that night also passed away to become a chapter of history. The day dawned and with it began the gory events which make mankind, who have the vestiges of humanity, tremble with rage and grief. As

Ali Akbar had surmised that night, when the turn of members of the family came, Hussain came over to him and, with his hand on his heart, said to him: "My son, go forward to fulfill your appointed task." Much as Zainab and Umme Farwa protested that, so long as their sons lived, they could not think of Ali Akbar laying down his life, much as Abbas pleaded to let him be the first among the Hashimites to die fighting, Hussain insisted that he would send Ali Akbar as his own representative to be the first among his kinsmen. Ali Akbar went to the battlefield never to return from it.

Zainab was disconsolate on Ali Akbar's death. Now Aun and Muhammad were hovering round Hussain with entreaties to let them go.

Qasim was no less vehement in his supplication for the Imam's permission to die on the battlefield. To Qasim's repeated requests his uncle's reply was: "My dear child, how can I permit you to go when I know for certain that death awaits those who venture out. Your father, my beloved Hasan, had entrusted you to my care on his death-bed. My heart trembles at the very thought of sending you into the jaws of death."

This reply of Hussain broke Qasim's heart. He thought that his uncle would not under any circumstances allow him to share the fate of the other martyrs. With tears in his eyes he stood there, not knowing what to do to secure Husain's permission.

At that moment Zainab came over to her brother. With folded hands she said to Hussain, "My dearest brother, in my whole life I have never asked you for a favor. Now, for the first time, I am requesting you to grant me one wish; let my sons follow in the footsteps of Ali Akbar."

Hussain looked at Zainab and then at her sons. With his head bent, he replied; "Zainab; my dearest sister, I find it impossible to deny your first and last request, though my granting it makes my heart sink within me."

Turning to Aun and Muhammad he said: "My dear children, go forward and fulfill your heart's desire to die like heroes. I shall soon be joining you on your journey to eternity."

At this reply the two young heroes felt delighted in the midst of unbounded sorrows. They fell at their mother's feet and asked her for her blessings. Zainab's grief at the parting with these beloved children found its way through her tears which were now pouring from her eyes in torrents. She felt an urge to clasp her young sons to her bosom before they marched out on their last journey; but for fear that such display of emotion might unnerve them, she held back. She could not say anything to them in farewell. With suppressed sobs she whispered to them: "My beloved ones, may God be with you and may He grant you quick relief from the agonies that you are to endure. It is Zainab's lot to endure ignominies with no brothers, no nephews, no sons to console her. My last request to you is to fight bravely and to die bravely so that, in the midst of my unbearable sufferings in captivity, I may at least have one remembrance to console me: your bravery in the face of overwhelming odds."

She mutely watched her sons mounting their horses assisted by Husain. Her lips were moving in silent prayers; her eyes were following the horses as they galloped out into the arena. When they both got out of sight, with a sigh she sat on the sand near her tent as if lost in a reverie.

When Qasim saw that Aun and Muhammad had been granted permission to march out on the entreaties of their mother, he rushed to his mother's tent. Almost sobbing with disappointment, he told Umme Farwa that Aun and Muhammad had secured the Imam's permission on the intercession of their mother but he had nobody to plead on his behalf with his uncle. In utter despondency he said; "If I am not destined to be a martyr on this day, life has no charm left for me. Am I destined to be a captive and led through the streets to a prison cell?"

Seeing Qasim so bitter and dejected Umme Farwa burst into tears of grief. Controlling herself she began to think what to do to get Husain's permission for him. Her first reaction was to go over to the Imam and to implore him as his brother's widow and seek permission for Qasim. However, in a flash she remembered her husband's words to her shortly before his death. He had told her that for Qasim a time may come when he would find himself in the trough of despair and despondency and feel dejected and depressed beyond description. He had told her that, when this happened, she should deliver to him an envelope wherein he had kept a letter specially for this occasion. This she had carefully preserved and kept with her as her most cherished thing in a box. Fortunately for her, she had brought the box with her. She hastened to fetch the letter and handing over the envelope to Qasim she said: "Qasim, your present plight brought back to me your father's words that a day like this would come for you and when this happened, I should deliver the letter to you." With rekindled hopes and expectation Qasim took the envelope from his mother's hand and opened it. In it he found two letters—one addressed to himself and the other addressed to Hussain.

He anxiously opened the letter meant for him and read it aloud for his mother's benefit. Hasan had written in it: "My child, when this letter reaches you, I will be no more. When you read it, you will find yourself torn with a conflict between your desire to do your duty and fulfill your obligations and demonstrate your love and esteem for your uncle, and his love and affection for you compelling him to hold you back. My Qasim, I have provided for this event by arming you with a letter for my dearest brother Hussain. You may deliver the letter to Hussain so that he may grant you your heart's desire. There is much that I could say for this occasion but when you read this, you will find that time separating us is not long. So hurry along, my child, as I am waiting for you with open arms to welcome you."

When he had completed reading the letter, Qasim felt choked with emotion. His mother also stood speechless with feelings surging in her heart. Both were thinking in unison how loving and thoughtful it was of Hasan to provide a solution for their dilemma. Qasim reverentially bowed over the letter and kissed it. The tears rolling from his eyes fell on the writing but, instead of smearing the lettering, they lent glitter to it.

Umme Farwa was the first to get out of the reverie. She broke the silence and said: "My dearest Qasim, now that your father has come to your rescue even in death, take his letter to your uncle Hussain. I have no doubt that now he will not be able to refuse you his permission for laying down your life."

Qasim could now hardly contain himself. He rushed towards the tent of Imam Hussain with the letter in his hands. He found Hussain standing outside Zainab's tent looking intently towards the battlefield. Abbas was by

his side and Zainab was standing near the door holding up the curtain and looking at the faces of Husain and Abbas. Qasim knew that they were all watching the combats of Aun and Muhammad. How could he disturb his uncle at such a time? He stood quietly by the side of Husain and Abbas and gazed in the direction of the army pitted against his two young cousins. He could see from clouds of dust rising in the far distance that one of them had gone ahead of the other. Not so far away he could see the younger one, Muhammad, battling against a number of enemy soldiers clustered round him.

Hardly a few minutes had passed in watching the battle, when they saw Aun falling from his horse and giving a cry to his uncle to come to him and carry his body. Husain, who had already borne the afflictions of his companions' death and the loss of his dearest son, Ali Akbar, seemed to wince as if he had received a stab in his chest. He turned to Zainab to see her reaction on hearing her son's last cry. Abbas and Qasim rushed to her side to hold her. As if this blow was not enough, Muhammad also fell from his horse mortally wounded and similarly shouted to Husain to come to him. Abbas and Qasim knew that for Husain to reach his dying nephews, one after the other, was too trying even for a person of his mettle who had right through the morning performed this task himself. Abbas wanted to accompany Husain and assist him in bringing the dead brothers to the camp, leaving Qasim to attend to Zainab who had collapsed with grief and sorrow on hearing the parting cry of Muhammad. But Husain beckoned to him to remain with Zainab. Qasim tried to follow him but Husain asked him also to remain near Zainab and console her.

Husain first reached the place where Muhammad was lying mortally wounded. He bent over his body to find that, on account of loss of blood, his young life was ebbing fast. The child was gasping heavily. His throat was so parched that even with great efforts he was not able to speak clearly. Husain put his ear near Muhammad's mouth. In a faint, faltering voice the young lad said: "My last salutations to you, uncle. Tell my mother that I have lived up to her expectations and am dying bravely as she and my father wanted me. Give my last salaams to her and console her as much as you can." The efforts made by the child in saying these words appeared to exhaust him. He added after a few seconds: "I heard the cry of Aun before I fell. Now that I am beyond any help, uncle please go over to him and see if you can do something for him before it is too late." Hardly he had said these words, when his life became extinct. Husain was beside himself with grief. But he could not remain there long as he had to go over to Aun. He rushed in the direction where Aun had fallen. On reaching his body he found that he had breathed his last. He picked up his lifeless body and pressed it to his heart.

With a heavy tread, with tears flowing in torrents, the aged uncle began his march towards the camp with the body of his nephew in his arms. Abbas came rushing from the camp towards him and said, " Let me carry Aun's body to the morgue and you take Muhammad's body. My master, Abbas is still alive to share your burden and grief." Quietly Husain handed over Aun's corpse to Abbas and went over to pick up Muhammad's body. The two brothers, one old and one young, were each carrying the body of a young nephew. The sight was such as to evoke sorrow and grief in the hearts of the most hard-hearted persons.

On reaching their camp Husain and Abbas laid the bodies of Aun and Muhammad on the ground. Zainab who was waiting for them came over and fell on the two bodies of her sons. "My sons, my sons," she cried, "What mother is there to send her beloved ones to meet death as I have sent mine?" Her face was bathed in tears. With sobs she was saying: "My darlings, you have gone from this world with your thirst unquenched. Your grandfather Ali will be there to quench your thirst in heaven. My beloved sons, for Zainab there is still a long, weary, unending future to face without you two to lighten the burden with your brave talk." Overpowered by her grief and emotions she fell unconscious on the dead bodies.

Husain, Abbas, Qasim and the ladies who were all standing and crying by her side, gently picked up Zainab and took her to her tent. They all knew that in such a great tragedy as had befallen her, all words of consolation would only be in vain.

As was the practice of Yazid's army, they started beating the drums on the slaughter of the two nephews of Husain, to herald their victory. When the beating of drums stopped, they raised the usual cry challenging the young defenders of Husain to come out into the field to face death. Now Qasim came over to Husain, who was standing near Zainab's prostrate form with his head bent. Qasim could not muster sufficient strength to say what he had come to convey to the Imam. He quietly handed over the letter of his father for Husain which he had found in the envelope given to him by his mother. Husain glanced at the hand-writing on the letter and at once recognized it as his late lamented brother's. With surprise he opened the letter and as he eagerly read it, he could not control himself and burst into a cry of grief. In the letter it was written: "My beloved Husain, when this letter will be read

by you, you will be surrounded by sorrows on all sides, with dead bodies of your near and dear ones strewn round you. I will not be there to lay down my life for you, Husain, but I am leaving behind my Qasim to be my deputy on this day. Husain, I beseech you not to reject my offering. In the name of love that you bear for me, I implore you to let Qasim go forth and die in your defense. Dearest brother, in spirit I am with you, watching your heroic sacrifices and sharing your woes and affliction."

Hasan's letter brought back to Husain the memories of his dear brother to whom he was devoted and he wept copiously recollecting his love and affection. What unique love Hasan had for him that, though dead, he had left his deputy in Qasim for this day!

With effort Husain controlled himself turned to Qasim saying: "Dear child, your father's wishes, which I regard as commands for me, leave me no other alternative. March on, Qasim, as your father wished you to do. If it is so ordained that I may bear the wound of your martyrdom, I shall bow to the Will of God."

Qasim bowed reverentially and hurried to his mother Umme Farwa who was sitting dazed with grief on receiving the sad news of Aun's and Muhammad's martyrdom. As Qasim entered her tent, she raised her head and looked at him expectantly. She could see from the look of satisfaction he had on his face that he had received Husain's permission for which he had been begging so long. An exchange of looks between the mother and son confirmed to Umme Farwa that she was right. Slowly she rose and said to Qasim: "My beloved son, all these years I have been waiting for the day when you would become a bridegroom, and dressed as a groom, come to receive my blessings.

It seems that fate has decreed otherwise. Qasim, I have preserved the dress your father wore on the day of his marriage with me. I had hoped that, on your wedding day, I would ask you to wear it. Now that you are going to the land of no return, my wish is that you put on that dress so that my desire to see you dressed as a groom may be fulfilled." After a pause she continued in a reflective tone: "It is the custom for grooms to apply henna on their hands— Though I have none with me, I know that you will not need it. Your hands will be dyed with your own blood." With these words she kissed her son's cheeks and embraced him. It was a long embrace, the embrace of a mother who knew that she was seeing her young darling for the last time in this world. Holding him tightly in her arms she was looking longingly at his face, as if she wanted to let his image sink into her mind's eye for ever. All partings are sad but where the parting is for ever, and in such circumstances, what words can describe it?

The mother and son tore themselves from each other lest their surging love and attachment might make their parting impossible. Umme Farwa brought out the wedding garments of Hasan for Qasim to wear. Dressed in these clothes Qasim was looking the very image of Hasan. The son, followed by the mother, went over to Zainab's tent to bid her good-bye. Zainab had not completely recovered from her swoon: In her dazed mind she thought for a moment that Hasan had descended from heaven to defend his brother. It was just a flitting thought which passed away like lightning. She realized that it was Qasim who had come to pay his last respects. She looked at him and then at this mother who was following him. She understood with what efforts Umme Farwa was controlling her feelings. Much as her own heart was bursting with grief at this parting with her beloved brother's son, she knew that it was essential for her to control herself for the sake of Umme

Farwa. With one hand on her head and the other on her heart, she came forward to bid adieu to Qasim. With hot tears rolling down her cheeks she kissed Qasim on his forehead saying: "Qasim, my dear child, your aged aunt had hoped that you, my dear ones, would carry my funeral bier. But it is written in Zainab's fate that she should see the young lives of her dearest ones extinguished before her. It has fallen to my lot to see you all dead before me and to carry your memories for the rest of my dreary, unending days. March on my child with the name of God . "

Qasim came to Husain and reverentially kissed his hands. Seeing Qasim so vividly resembling Hasan, his dear, departed brother, Husain wept bitterly. He kissed Qasim on his cheeks and held the horse for him to mount. Abbas came forward to do this service but Husain would not let him do so. "This is the last occasion for me to give a send-off to my Qasim and let me do this for him." He turned to Qasim and said: "Qasim, I shall not be long in joining you."

Reaching the battle arena, Qasim addressed the enemy with an eloquence which reminded many of the sermons of his grandfather Ali. With gaping mouths they were transfixed to the ground at his words of admonition on the betrayal of the Imam. Amr Ibne Saad ordered his men to challenge him to single combat, fearing that this youth's eloquence might rouse the vestiges of goodness in some of his men. Qasim fought battles with several of them and threw them from their horses as if he were a seasoned warrior and not a youth of 14, with three day's thirst and hunger. Such was his skill with the sword and horsemanship that Husain, who was watching his nephew's fight from a hillock near his camp, burst into spontaneous acclamation. Now no warrior from the enemy ranks was coming forward to meet the challenge of

this brave son of Hasan. He was now repeatedly challenging the soldiers of Amr Saad to come forward and match their skill and swordsmanship against him in single combat. Amr Saad, seeing that none of his warriors was prepared for this, ordered his soldiers to attack Qasim together. It was now a fight between one and thousands, if such a thing can at all be called a fight. How long could Qasim ward off the attacks of swords, spears, daggers and arrows coming at him from all directions? He was wounded from head to foot. When he saw that he could no longer remain in the saddle, he gave a cry offering his last salutation to his uncle Husain.

Husain, who was watching from a distance the dastardly attack of the multitude of soldiers on his helpless Qasim, heard this cry full of agony and pain. He felt as if he had himself received all the wounds inflicted on Qasim. He unsheathed his sword and, like an enraged lion, he rushed towards the battle-field. With sword in one hand he galloped his horse cutting through the enemy hordes. Such was the fury of his charge that the enemy were reminded of the charges of Ali, his father, in the battle of Siffin, when the dexterous Lion of God had singly scattered the enemy, running through them like a knife through butter, and killing hundreds with his powerful sweeps of his sword, while the remainder of the arrant cowards ran helter-skelter to save their contemptible lives. The stampede of Yazid's soldiers was such that the body of Qasim was trampled under the feet of hundreds of minions who were a disgrace to their calling. When the battlefield was cleared of the cowards and Husain reached the body of Qasim, he found that it was torn to pieces. What feelings this gruesome sight evoked in Husain's heart can better be imagined than described. Husain stumbled down from his horse and fell to the ground exclaiming: "My God, what have these cowards done to my Qasim?" For some time he wept with such agony that

his body convulsed. After a while he took off his robe and started picking up pieces of Qasim's body. One by one he put them all in his robe and, lifting the bundle, put it on his aged shoulders and mounted the horse. As he did so, he muttered: "My Qasim, your mother had sent you out dressed as a groom. Now you are returning to your mother with your body cut to pieces." As he was riding back towards his camp, Husain was disconsolately exclaiming: "My God, has there been an instance where an uncle had to carry his own nephew's body in such a state?"

On reaching the camp Husain put down the body on the ground. He called Abbas and asked him to bring Umme Farwa and his sisters Zainab and Kulsum to the morgue. He besought Fizza, his mother's devoted maid, to console Umme Farwa and Zainab, for he knew that the condition of Qasim's body might give them such a shock as would kill them.

Qasim's mother came with Zainab on one side and Umme Kulsum on the other. Fizza went over to the ladies and said: "I beseech you, in the name of my lady Fatima, to muster all the strength and courage you can to see Qasim's mortal remains. They may be torn and cut to pieces but remember his soul is now with my lady and Hasan, who must have welcomed him with open arms." Saying this, she opened the robe and unfolded the body. Zainab held her aching heart, Kulsum held her reeling head and Umme Farwa fell with a shriek and fainted.

What pen can narrate the grief of a mother who has lost her only son? What words can describe the agony of a mother's loving heart on seeing her son in such a state? The land of Karbala was echoing the cries of the ladies and the wail of the children on Qasim's death. Can any one attempt to depict

Husain's plight- at that time? Resting his head on Abbas's shoulders, Husain was saying: "My God, my God, if my enemies wanted to kill me, they could do so; but what have my dear ones done that they slay them so mercilessly?"

Husain stood there for some time as if in a trance. He was brought back to the reality of the situation by Abbas who softly said to him "My master, now let me go, as others have done. I am now the commander of soldiers who are no more." Husain for a moment did not reply. Then he equally softly said: "Verily we come from God and unto Him we shall return."

Abbas -- the Standard Bearer of Husain (A.S.)

The shifting sand dunes of Karbala were smeared with blood. Near one of wash dunes, on the bank of Alkoma, lay the prostrate figure of a youth with blood gushing out from innumerable wounds. The crimson life-tide was ebbing fast. Even so, it seemed as if he was anxiously expecting somebody to come to him, to be near him before he breathed his last. Through his starched throat he was feebly calling somebody. Yes, Abbas was anxiously expecting his master to come to him before he parted with his life, as he had come to the side of all his devoted friends who had laid down their dear lives for him and in espousing his cause.

It is said that before a man's death all the past events of his life pass before his mind's eye in a flash-back. In his last moments Abbas was experiencing this. He was seeing himself as a child in Medina following Husain with a devotion which was considered unique even for a brother. He was seeing the events of that hot and sultry day in Kufa when his illustrious father Ali was addressing a congregation in the mosque and he, as a child, with his characteristic devotion, was looking at the face of his beloved brother watching him intently so that he could attend to his wishes on an instant command. Seeing from the parched lips of Husain that he was feeling extremely thirsty, how he had darted out from the mosque and returned with a tumbler full of cool, refreshing water and in the hurry to carry the water as quickly as possible to quench the consuming thirst of his dearest brother, how he had spilled water on his own clothes. He was recalling how this incident had made his illustrious father stop in the midst of his speech, with tears rolling down his cheeks at the sight of his young son all wet with water. He was remembering his father's reply to the queries from his faithful

followers as to what had brought tears in his eyes, that Abbas who had wetted his body with water in the process of quenching Husain's thirst would in the not too distant future wet his body with his own blood in attempting to quench the thirst of his young children. He was vividly seeing the scene on the 21st Ramazan, way back in 40 Hijra, when his father mortally wounded, was lying on his death-bed and entrusting his children and dependents to the care of the his eldest brother, Hasan - all except him. Seeing that his father had commended all but him to the care of Hasan - how he, a child of 12, had burst out into uncontrollable tears. His father, on hearing him sobbing, had called him to his side and given his hand in Husain's hand with the words:

Husain, this child I am entrusting to you. He will represent me on the day of your supreme sacrifice and lay down his life in defending you and your dear ones, much as I would have done if alive on that day.

How his father had turned to him and affectionately told him:

Abbas, my child, I know your unbounded love for Husain. Though you are too young to be told about it, when that day dawns, consider no sacrifice too great for Husain and his children.

He saw before his mind's eye that parting with his aged mother Fatima in Medina. How she had affectionately embraced him and reminded him of the dying desire of his father to lay down his life in the defense of Husain and his dear ones.

A faint smile of satisfaction flickered for a brief moment on his parched lips a smile of satisfaction that he had fulfilled his father's wish; that he had performed his duty for which he was brought up. It just flitted for a moment and vanished as other scenes came before his mind's eye. He was re- living

the events of the night before. He was seeing Shimr stealthily coming to him; and talking to him about his ties of relationship; about the protection he had been promised for Abbas by the Commander of Yazid's forces, only if he would leave Husain and go over to Yazid's camp; about the promises of riches and rewards that he would get; how he had spurned the suggestion of Shimr with the utmost disdain to the chagrin of that servile minion who had sold his soul for a mess of pottage. How he had scared away that coward by his scathing rage saying:

You worshipper of Mammon, do not think that Abbas will be lured by your tempting offer of power and pelf. If I die in fending my master, Husain, I shall consider myself the luckiest person. O coward, remember that valiants die but once. Nobody is born to live eternally. By betraying my master, you have betrayed the Prophet, whose religion you profess to follow. On the Day of Judgement you will be doomed to eternal perdition. I am ashamed to own any relationship with you. Had it not been for the fact that you have come here unarmed, I would have given you the chastisement you deserve for your impudence in asking me to become a turncoat.

How that wretch had scampered from there seeing him roaring like an enraged lion. The thought of that unpleasant interlude contracted his brows. Or was it the excruciating pain he was suffering on account of the deep gashes he had all over his body?

Yet another scene passed before Abbas's eyes - Sakina leading 42 children, each with a dry water-bag. The children were shouting as if in chorus

Thirst, consuming thirst, is killing us.

Sakina coming to him and putting her dry water-bag at his feet and saying to him:

O uncle, I know you will do something to get water for us. Even if you can bring one bag full of water, we can wet our parched throats.

He could see that thirst, aggravated by the scorching heat of the desert, was squeezing their young lives out of them. The sight of these youngsters had moved him more than any other soul-stirring events of that faithful day.

How he had picked up the water-bag with assurance to Sakina that he would go and bring water - God Willing.

How he had taken Husain's permission and marched out of the camp with a sword in one hand, the flag in the other, and the bag on his shoulder, with the children following him in a group up to the outer perimeter of the camp. How Husain had repeatedly requested him to avoid fighting as much as possible and confine himself to the task of bringing water!

His thoughts switched over to the events that had preceded his fall from the horse. With the object of procuring water for his dear little Sakina, he had charged on the enemy who held the river banks. He had run through the enemy ranks like a knife through butter. Again this surging onslaught the cowards could not stand and had run helter-skelter shouting for protection. For a moment it seemed as if Ali, the Lion of God, had descended from heaven. In no time Abbas was near the rivulet. He had jumped down from the horse and bent to fill the water-bag. When it was filled to the brim, he had taken some water in his cupped hand to drink and satisfy his killing thirst. But, on second thoughts, he had thrown the water away. How could he drink water when Sakina and the children were still withering without it? How could he be so callous as to forget that his master Husain had not had a

drop of water since the last three days. He had turned to his horse which had been let loose so that it could satisfy its thirst. The animal had been intently looking at its master as if to say:

I too am aware that, so long as our master and his children remain without water, our thirst cannot be quenched.

With the water-bag filled he had jumped into the saddle with one thought uppermost in his mind, to get the water to the anxiously waiting children as quickly as possible. Seeing him galloping towards the camp of Husain, the enemy had turned. Somebody had shouted from the enemy ranks that if Husain and his people got water, it would be difficult to fight them on the battlefield. Though it was an uneven fight, he fought them with valour which was so characteristic of his fathers. Though he was thirsty and hungry, he charged on them and scattered them. The mercenaries of Yazid were running like lambs in a fold when charged by a lion. Seeing that a frontal assault on a man so brave was not possible, they had resorted to a barrage of arrows. When arrows were coming from all sides, Abbas had only one thought in his mind, how to protect the water-bag than his life. Seeing that Abbas was preoccupied with this thought, one treacherous foe, hiding behind a sand-dune, had rushed out and dealt a blow on his right hand and cut it off. In a flash Abbas had transferred his sword to his left hand and the standard he was bearing he had hugged to his chest. Now that the Lion of Ali was crippled, the foes had found courage to surround him. A blow from an enemy's sword severed his left arm. The odds were now mounting against him. He held the bag with his teeth and protected the flag with his chest pressed on the horse's back. Now the paramount thought in his mind was to reach the camp somehow or the other. A silent prayer had escaped his lips: Merciful Allah, spare me long enough to fulfill my mission.

But that was not to be. An arrow had pierced the water-bag and water had started gushing out of it. Was it water that was flowing out of that bag or the hopes of Abbas? All his efforts had been in vain. After all Sakina's thirst would remain unsatisfied and all her hopes would be frustrated. The enemies who had made bold to surround him, now seeing his helpless condition, were now gathering thick round him. One of them came near him and struck mortal blow with an iron mace. He reeled over and fell from the horse.

He tossed on the burning sand with excruciating pain. He felt that life was fast ebbing out but his wish to see his master had remained unfulfilled. With one last effort, with all the strength that was left in him, he shouted:

O my master, do come to me before I die.

As it in answer to his prayers he felt some footsteps near him, Yes, his instinct told him that it was his lord. His one eye had been blinded by an arrow and the other filled with blood and so he could not see. But he felt his master kneeling down beside him, lifting his head and taking it into his lap. Not a word was said for a few seconds because both were choked with emotion. At last he heard Husain's voice, a half-sob, half-muffled cry: Abbas, my brother, what have they done to you?

If Abbas could see, would he have recognized his master? With back bent and beard turned white and hoary, on hearing the parting cry of his beloved brother, Husain's plight was such that nobody could have recognized him - such was his transformation. Abbas was now feeling the loving touch of his master's hand. With effort he muttered:

You have come at last, my Master. I thought I was not destined to have a last farewell with you but, thank God, you are here.

With these words he put his head on the sand. Tenderly Husain lifted his head and again put it on his lap, inquiring why he had removed it from there.

My Master, replied Abbas, the thought that when you will be breathing your last, nobody will be there to put your head in a lap and to comfort you, makes me feel that it would be better if my head lies on the sand when I die, just as yours would be. Besides, I am your slave and you are my master. It is too much for me to put my head on your lap.

Husain burst into uncontrollable tears. The sight of his brother, whose name was to become a byword for devotion and unflinching faithfulness, laying down his dear life in his arms, was heart-rending.

Abbas was heard to whisper softly:

My master, I have some last wishes to express. When I was born, I had my first look at your face and it is my last desire that when I die, my gaze may be on it, too. My one eye is pierced by an arrow and the other is filled with blood. If you will clear the blood from my one eye, I'll be able to see you and fulfill my last dying desire. My second wish is that when I die you may not carry my body to the camp. I had promised to bring water to Sakina and, since I have failed in my attempt to bring her water, I cannot face her even in death. Besides, I know that the blows that you have received since morning have all but crushed you and carrying my body to the camp will be heart breaking work for you. And my third wish is that Sakina may not be brought here to see my plight. I know with what love and affection she was devoted to me. The sight of my dead body lying here will kill her.

Husain sobbingly promised him that he would carry out his last wishes added:

Abbas, I too have a wish to be fulfilled. Since childhood you have always called me master. For once at least call me brother with your dying breath. The blood was cleared from the eye, one brother looked at the other with a longing lingering look. Abbas was heard to whisper:

My brother, my brother

and with these words he surrendered his soul to his Maker: Husain fell unconscious on the dead body of Abbas with a cry:

O Abbas, who is left to protect me and Sakina after you?

The flow of Furat became dark as winter and a murmur arose from the flowing water as if to protest against the killing of a thirsty water-bearer on its banks.

Ali Akbar, the Hashmite Prince

The whole town of Medina was humming with activity. People from all parts of the town were looking into the street of the Hashimites where a caravan was getting ready for a journey. The elders of the town were talking to each other in hushed tones, recalling the words of the Prophet, that a day will dawn when his beloved grandson Husain (as) would leave Medina with his sons, brothers, nephews and kinsmen never to return. There was sadness on the faces of all, young and old. The elderly people were aghast at the thought of Husain going away for ever. They were accustomed to turning to him in all their needs. The youths of Medina were saddened by the thought of Abbas and Ali Akbar and Qasim going away for good. Their anxious inquiries could only elicit this much information, that Husain with his kinsmen and children, was going for Hajj and from there to an unknown destination.

Thoughts of parting were tormenting not only the male population of Medina but also the womenfolk of the town. They too were accustomed to the munificence of the ladies of the Prophet's house. Who was there amongst them who had not received help and counsel from the daughters of Fatima? Who would be left now to whom they could turn in their hour of need, when Zainab and Kulsum, Umme Rubab and Umme Laila had left Medina? Had not times out of number their children received gifts and favours from Sakina and Rokayya?

As was their want, the people of Medina, men and women, young and old, had gone to the tomb of the Prophet to pray and seek solace to pray to God with the invocations of His Prophet that they might be spared the ordeal of

separation from Husain and his family. There at the tomb of the Prophet they witnessed a heart-rending scene. They saw Husain and Zain prostrate with grief and sorrow, bidding farewell to the Prophet. They saw both of them visiting the grave of Fatima and lamenting over the separation, as if they were parting for ever.

It was rumoured that Husain was leaving Medina to arrange the marriage of his son Ali Akbar with some Princess, some lady of a noble stocks in some distant land. Could this rumour be correct? They all knew that there was not a young lad of marriageable age in Arabia who could be said to be fit to hold a candle before him. His handsome looks were matched by his handsome deeds. His nobility of character, his sense of duty, his generosity, his chivalry, his geniality, his love of justice and fairplay had endeared him to every soul. It was a well-known fact amongst the Arabs throughout Hejaz that Ali Akbar was bearing a remarkable resemblance to the Holy Prophet. In looks, in voice, in mannerism, in gait and in every way, he resembled the Prophet. The resemblance was so marked that people from far and wide were coming to see him, to be reminded of the Prophet whom they were missing so much. Those who had not had the good fortune to see the Prophet were told by their elders that Ali Akbar was the very image of Muhammad, may Peace of Allah be on Him. There could, therefore, be no room for doubt that the noblest families of Arabia would consider it a signal honour if this scion of the Prophet's family were to ask for their daughter in marriage. But then, if Husain and his family were leaving Medina for Ali Akbar's marriage, they would not be secretive about it. The Prophet's grandson would in that case have given out the good tidings to the public. There was not a living being in that town whose heart would not have been filled with joy to hear about the betrothal of Ali Akbar. And if marriage of

Ali Akbar was the purpose, surely Husain would not choose this season when outside the oasis of Medina, the scorching heat of summer was baking the desert sands!

After long discussions, by a consensus of opinion, it was decided to approach Husain in a delegation and to dissuade him from undertaking the journey. Some of the venerable companions of the Prophet undertook to apprise Husain of their forebodings and their recollection of his grandfather's prophecy that, if Husain migrated from Medina with his family, he would not return.

The caravan was almost ready to depart. The horses were neighing with impatience and champing their bits in the oppressive heat of the day. Husain was standing near his horse intently watching the arrangements being made by Abbas and Ali Akbar. He was reflectively following their movements as they were helping each lady and each child to mount the camels, as they were lending a helping hand to the ladies with tender care and affection; as the ladies were graciously and profusely thanking them for the excellent arrangements they had made for their comfort and for protecting them from the unbearable heat by holding their own gowns over their heads as a canopy. This sight had some inexplicable effect on Husain, for his eyes were glittering with tears. The solicitude displayed by his brother and son for the ladies and children should have filled him with happiness; but instead, the effect on him was just the opposite. Was he beholding the shadows of some coming events?

At this moment came the representatives of the people of Medina. With one voice they entreated Husain to abandon the idea of undertaking this journey.

Their leader, with supplication in his faltering voice, besought Husain to tell them why he had decided to leave them and the Prophet's tomb for which he had so much attachment.

O Son of the Prophet, if we have displeased you in any way, please forgive us.

At this display of love and affection Husain was moved to tears. Suppressing his grief he replied:

My dear brethren, believe me that my heart is bleeding at this parting, parting from you and from the graves of my beloved grandfather, my dearest mother and my brother, whom I held dearer than my life. Had it not been for the call of duty, I assure you I would have abandoned the idea of leaving Medina. It grieves me most that I cannot for once grant you your wishes when you all love me so dearly. But Almighty Allah has so willed it and in His divine dispensation ordained that I should undertake this journey. I know what hardships await me; but the Prophet has groomed me from my childhood to face them.

Seeing that the hand of destiny was snatching away Husain from them, they conferred amongst themselves and suggested that, if his decision to go from Medina was final, he should take with him all the able-bodied persons of the town so that they could protect him and his people. They reminded him of the treachery that was pervading the atmosphere in the adjoining regions. Husain, obviously moved by their sincere consideration for his safety, thanked them profusely. But he told them that, in accordance with the wishes of the Prophet, he had to fulfill the mission of his life only with those who were destined to be associated with him in the task confronting him.

When they received this reply to their entreaties, from Husain, the representative of the Medinites requested Husain to grant them one wish to leave Ali Akbar behind him in Medina.

O Husain," they said, "we cannot bear the thought of parting with your son Ali Akbar, He is the very image of the Prophet. Whenever we feel overcome by the remembrance of Muhammad, we go to Ali Akbar to have a look at him and take comfort. We shall look after him better than we look after our own sons. We promise that we shall treat his every wish as a command. In fair weather and foul we shall stand by him. Even if we die, we shall command our children as our dying wish to attend to all his comforts and needs. His exemplary life has been an object lesson for our sons who are devoted to him as if he were their brother.

These pleading, which had a ring of sincerity and earnestness, rendered Husain quite speechless for a time. How could he tell them what was in store for Ali Akbar who they loved and adored so much? When his sad reflections had subsided, he replied to them in a tone tinged with pathos, Alas, I only wish I could entrust my Ali Akbar to your care! In my mission he has to play a role, the importance of which time alone will tell. I cannot accede to your request for reasons which I cannot reveal to you; but rest assured that I shall always remember your kindness to me. I shall carry with me vivid memories of this parting and remember you in my prayers.

When the heavens were glowing with the last rays of day, the caravan left on its long-drawn journey to the unknown destination. Soon darkness descended upon Medina as if symbolic of the darkness and gloom which the departure of Husain had cast on the town, associated with a myriad memories of his childhood.

Meandering through the desert, the caravan had reached its destination, a destination which Allah had willed for it. The march of Husain and his kinsmen in this world had ended; but it was just the beginning of their march toward their real goal. With the dawn of the 10th day of the month of Muharram the events, for which the Prophet and Ali and Fatima had prepared Husain, started unfolding themselves. What a day it was and what fateful events it encompassed!

One by one the faithful followers went out to fight for the cause of Islam which forces of evil were attempting to stifle, and in the process faced death. In their glorious deaths they demonstrated what steadfastness and unflinching faith, what courage of conviction can achieve and attain against all odds. With his devoted supporters now sleeping the sweet slumber of death from which nothing could awaken them, the turn of Husain's sons and brothers and nephews came. In spite of Husain's best efforts to send his son Ali Akbar to the battlefield before all his devoted friends and faithful followers, they would not even let him mention it. The thought of Ali Akbar, Husain's beloved son, laying down his life in battle, when they were still alive, was too much for them. It would be blasphemous for them even to entertain such an idea!

Ali Akbar went over to his father to ask his permission to go out into that gory arena from which no person from his camp had returned. Husain looked at his face; it would be more correct to say that for a couple of minutes his stare was fixed on that face which he loved so much; which reminded him every time of his grandfather whom he resembled every inch.

He tried to say something but his voice failed him. With considerable effort he whispered with downcast eyes:

Akbar, I wish you had become a father; then you would have known what I am experiencing at this moment. My son, how can a father ask his son to go, when he knows that the parting would be for ever! But Akbar, the call of duty makes me helpless in this matter. Go to your mother, and to your aunt Zainab who has brought you up from childhood and loved you and cared for you more than for her own sons, and seek their permission.

Ali Akbar entered the tent of his aunt Zainab. He found her and his mother Umme Laila gazing vacantly towards the battlefield and listening intently to the battle-cries of the enemy hordes. Their instinct made them aware that, now that all the devoted followers of Husain had laid down their dear lives defending him and them, the turn of his sons, and brothers and nephews had come. It was now only a question of time. It was only a question who would go first from amongst them.

The light footsteps of Ali Akbar roused both of them from their reverie. Both of them fixed their gaze on him without uttering a word. Zainab broke the silence with an exclamation:

Oh God, can it be true that Akbar has come to bid me and his mother the last farewell Akbar do not say that you are ready for the last journey. So long as my sons Aun and Muhammad are there, it is impossible for me to let you go.

Akbar knew what love and affection his aunt Zainab had for him. He was conscious of the pangs of sorrow she was experiencing at that moment. Her

affection for him transcended everything except her love for Husain. He looked at her face, and at his mother's who was rendered speechless by her surging feelings of anguish. He knew not how to tell them that he had prepared himself for the journey to Heaven that lay ahead. He summoned to his aid his most coaxing manners that had always made his mother and Zainab accede to his requests and said:

My aunt, for all my father's kinsmen the inevitable hour has come. I implore you, by the love you bear for your brother, to let me go so that it may not be said that he spared me till all his brothers and nephews were killed. Abbas, my uncle, is Commander of our army. The others are all younger than me. When death is a certainty, let me die first so that I can quench my thirst at the heavenly spring of Kausar at the hands of my grandfather.

The earnestness of Akbar's tone convinced Zainab and his mother that he was determined to go. It seemed to be his last wish to lay down his life before all his kinsmen. Since on no other occasion they had denied him his wishes, it seemed so difficult to say no to his last desire. With a gasp Zainab could only say,

Akbar, my child, if the call of death has come to you, go.

His mother could only say:

May God be with you, my son. With you I am losing all I had and cared for in this world. Your father has told me what destiny has in store for me. After you, for me pleasure and pain will have no difference.

With these words she fell unconscious in Ali Akbar's arms.

The battle-cry from the enemy's ranks was becoming louder and louder. Ali Akbar knew that he had to go out quickly lest the enemy, seeing that their challenges for combat were remaining unanswered, got emboldened to make a concerted attack on his father's camp. Even such a thought was unbearable

for him. So long as he was alive, how could he permit the onslaught of Yazid's forces on his camp where helpless women and defenseless children were lying huddled together? He gently put his mother in his aunt Zainab's arms saying:

Zainab, my aunt, I am leaving my mother to your care. I know, from your childhood, your mother Bibi Fatima has prepared you for the soul-stirring events of today and what is to come hereafter. My mother will not be able to bear the blows and calamities that are to befall her, unless you lend her your courage. I implore you by the infinite love you bear for me to show the fortitude that you are capable of, so that your patience may sustain my mother when she sees my dead body brought into the camp's morgue. I entrust her to your care because there will be none to solace her and look after her in the years of dismay and despondency that lie ahead of her.

Ali Akbar embraced his loving aunt Zainab with tender love and affection for the last time. she exclaimed:

Akbar, go. My child, I entrust you to God, To ease your last moments I promise you that, so long as I live, I shall after Umme Laila with the affection of a mother.

With a heavy heart Ali Akbar returned to his father. There was no need for him to say that he had bid farewell to his mother and aunt Zainab, for the sorrow depicted on his face spoke volumes to Husain. Silently he rose and put the Prophet's turban on Akbar's head, tied the scabbard on his waist and imprinted a kiss on his forehead. In a failing, faltering voice he muttered: Go Akbar, God is there to help you.

Treading heavily Akbar came out of the tent with Husain following closely behind him. He was about to mount his horse when he felt somebody tugging at his robe. He could hardly see, because his eyes were almost

blinded with tears. He heard the voice of his young aster Sakina supplicating him not to leave her.

O my brother," she was saying, "do no go to the battleground from which nobody has returned alive since this mornings."

Softly Akbar lifted her, gently and affectionately kissed her on her face and put her down. His grief was too deep for words. Husain understood the depth of Akbar's feelings and picked up Sakina to console her.

The scene of Ali Akbar's march towards the battlefield was such as would defy description. The cries of ladies and children of Husain's camp were rising above the din of battle-cries and beating of enemy drums. It was appearing as if a dead body of an only son, dead in the prime of youth, was being taken out of a house for the last rites.

Ali Akbar was now facing the enemy hordes. He was addressing the forces of Amr Ibne Saad with an eloquence which he had inherited from his Grandfather and the Prophet. He was telling them that Husain, his father, had done them no harm and had devoted his life to the cause of Islam. He was explaining to them that by shedding the blood of Husain and his kinsmen. They would be incurring the wrath of God and displeasure of the Prophet who had loved Husain more than any other person. He was exhorting them not to smear their hands with the blood of a person so holy, so God-fearing and so righteous. His words cast a spell on the army of the opponents. The older ones from amongst them were blinking their eyes in amazement and wondering whether the Prophet had descended from the Heavens to warn them against the shedding of Husain's blood. What a resemblance there was with the Prophet, in face, features and even mannerism! Even the voice was of Muhammad! But on second thoughts,

they realized that this was Ali Akbar, the 18 year old son of Husain, about whose close resemblance with the Prophet people were talking so much.

Seeing the effect which Ali Akbar's address had produced on his soldiers, Amr Saad exhorted them to challenge him to single combat. A few of them, coveting the honour and rewards they would get if they overpowered and killed this brave son of Husain, emaciated by three days of hunger and thirst, came forward to challenge him. One by one he met them in battle, gave them a taste of his skill and prowess in fighting and flung them from their horseback to meet the doom they so much deserved. Now it was his turn to challenge the warriors of Yazid to come forward. Seeing that in spite of his handicaps, he was capable of displaying valour and battle craft for which his grandfather Ali had acquired name and fame and which had struck terror into the hearts of enemies of Islam none dared to come forward.

Ali Akbar had received several gaping wounds in the course of his victorious single combats. He was fast losing blood and the effect of his thirst was getting accentuated with every second that was passing. He realized that the treacherous enemies would attack him en masse. He had left his mother in a dazed condition. An irresistible urge to see his dear ones for the last time seized him and he turned his horse towards his camp.

He found his father standing at the doorstep of the tent and his mother and aunt standing inside the tent. Husain had been watching the battles of this thirsty youth and the two ladies were watching his face: they knew that if any calamity befell Ali Akbar, Husain's expression would indicate it. Whilst watching Husain's face, they were both praying offering silent prayers:

O Allah, Who brought back Ismail to Hajra; O Allah, Who granted the prayers of the mother Musa and restored her son to her; O Allah, Who reunited Yakoob with his son Yusuf in response to the aged father's supplications, grant us our one wish to see Ali Akbar for once.

Was it the effect of these prayers that brought back Ali Akbar to the camp?

Ali Akbar was now facing his aged father and his loving mother and Zainab. With an exclamation of joy and relief they clung to him. Husain lovingly embraced his son saying:

Bravo, my son. The gallantry you now displayed today reminded me of the battles of my revered father, Ali. The only difference was that, during his fights, my father Ali had not to battle against hunger and thirst as you had to.

Ali Akbar with his head bent replied:

Father, thirst is killing me because my wounds have added to its effect. It is usual to ask for rewards from parents for celebrating victories in single combats and I would have asked for a cup of refreshing water from you. But alas! I know that you have not even a drop of water with which you can quench the thirst of the young children. Father, knowing this, I shall not embarrass you by asking for water. I have come only to see you and my dear ones for the last time.

Ali Akbar met each and every one of his family. The second parting was sad as the first one, perhaps sadder. Without being told, every one realised that this was the last time they were beholding Akbar. Fizza, the faithful maid of Fatima and Zainab, was as disconsolate with grief as Zainab and Umme Laila. Husain followed Ali Akbar out of the tent. As he rode away, Husain walked behind him with a brisk pace for some distance, as a man follows his

sacrificial lamb in Mina. When Akbar disappeared from his sight, he turned heavenwards and, with his hands raised, he prayed:

O Allah, Thou art my Witness that on this day I have sent away for sacrifice one whom I loved and cherished most, to defend the cause of righteousness and truth.

He sat on the ground as if trying to listen expectantly to some call from the battlefield.

It was not very long before he received a wailing call, a call from Ali Akbar, a call of anguish and pain:

Father, Akbar has fallen with a mortal wound in his chest. Father, come to me for I have not long to live. If you cannot reach me, I convey my last salutations to you and my dear ones.

Though Husain was anticipating such a call, what a ghastly effect it had on him! He rose from the ground and fell; he rose again and fell again. With one hand on his heart he struggled to his feet. Torrential tears were flooding his eyes. He rushed in the direction from which the cry had come. It seemed as Husain's strength had ebbed away on hearing that fateful cry of his dearest son, for he was falling at every few steps. He was sobbing:

Akbar, give me another shout so that I can follow its direction. Akbar, my sight is gone with the shock I have received and there is nobody to guide me to where you lie.

Abbas came rushing to the aid of his master. Holding his hand he led him on to the place from where Akbar's dying cry had come.

Now Husain was stumbling his way onwards resting his hands on Abbas' shoulders. The distance seemed interminable but at last Husain and Abbas

reached the place where Akbar was lying in a pool of his own blood. Ah, that tragic sight! May no father have occasion to see his young on in such a conditions. With one hand on his chest covering a deep wound from which blood was gushing out, with his face writhing with pain, Akbar was lying on the ground prostrate and unconscious. With the agony he was enduring on account of the wound and the thirst that he was Offering, he was digging his feet into the sand. With a cry of anguish Husain fell on the body of Akbar.

My son, tell me where you are hurt; tell me who has wounded you in the chest. Why don't you say something? My Akbar, I have come in response to your call. Say one word to me, Akbar.

Seeing that Akbar was lying there without any response to his entreaties, Husain turned to Abbas and said:

Abbas, why don't you tell Akbar to say something to me. My dutiful son, who used to get up on seeing me, is lying on the ground pressed by the hand of death.

Husain once again flung himself on the body of Akbar. His breathing was now heavier, a gurgling sound was coming from his throat. It seemed that his young life was engaged in an uneven struggle with death. Husain put his head on Akbar's chest. He lifted it and put his own cheeks against Akbar's and wailed

Akbar, for once open your eyes and smile, as you were always smiling to gladden my heart.

Though Akbar did not open his eyes, a faint smile appeared on his lips as if he had listened to his father's request. With the sweet smile still playing on his lips, he heaved a gasp and with that his soul departed. The cheeks of the father were still touching the cheeks of the son, in death as so many time in life.

On seeing his son, his beloved son, breathe his last in his own hands, Husain's condition became such as no words can describe. For quite some time he remained there weeping as only an aged father who has lost a son, in his prime of youth, in such tragic circumstances, can weep. Abbas sat there by his side shedding tears. What words of consolation could he offer when the tragedy was of such a magnitude? All words of solace and comfort would sound hollow and be in vain when a father, an aged father, gives vent to his pent up emotions. After a time, Abbas reverentially touched Husain on his shoulders and reminded him that, since he had rushed out of the camp, Zainab and the other ladies of his house were waiting for him, tormented by anxiety, demented by the thoughts of the tragedy that had befallen them. Only mention of this was enough for Husain. He knew that, as the head of the family, it was his duty to rally by the side of the grief-stricken mother, his grief-stricken sister Zainab, and the children for whom this bereavement was the greatest calamity.

Husain slowly rose from the ground and tried to pick up the dead body of Akbar but he himself fell on the ground. Abbas, seeing this, bent over him and said:

My master, Abbas is still alive by your side. How can I leave you carry the body of Akbar and remain a silent spectator. Let me carry his body to the camp. "

No Abbas, replied Husain, let me do this as a last token of my love. To hold him by my heart, even in his death, gives me some comfort, the only comfort that is now left to me.

Saying this, he made all the efforts that he was capable of and, assisted by Abbas, he lifted the body of Akbar. Clasping it close to his bosom, he started the long walk to his camp. How he reached is difficult to say. It would not be too much to imagine that his grandfather Muhammad, his father Ali, his brother Hasan and perhaps his mother Fatima had descended from heaven to help him in this task.

Husain reached the camp and laid down Akbar's body on the ground. He called Umme Laila and Zainab and Kulsum, Sakina and Rokayya, Fizza and the other ladies of the house to see the face of Akbar for the last time. The loving mother came, the loving aunts came, the children came, and surrounded the body of Ali Akbar. They looked at Akbar's face and then at Husain's. They knew that their weeping would add to Husain's grief which was already brimful. Ali Akbar's mother went up to her husband, and with stifled sobs and bent head, she said to him:

My master, I am proud of Akbar for dying such a noble death. He has laid down his life in the noblest cause and this thought will sustain me through the rest of my life. I implore you to pray for me, to pray for ail of us, that Almighty Allah may grant us patience and solace.

Saying this she turned to the dead body of her son lying on the ground and put her face on his. Zainab and Kulsum, Sakina and Rokayya had all flung themselves on Akbar's body. The tears that were flowing from their eyes were sufficient to wash away the clotted blood from the wounds of Akbar.

Husain sat for a few minutes near the dead body of his son; the son whom he had lost in such tragic circumstances; the son who had died craving for a drop of water to quench his thirst. He felt dazed with grief. He was

awakened from his stupor by Qasim, the son of his brother, who had come to seek his permission to go to the battlefield. He rose from the ground, wiped the tears from his aged eyes and muttered

Verily from God we come, and unto Him is our return.