

**THE PROPHET**  
**OF**  
**ISLAM**

*by*

**MAULANA MUHAMMAD ALI**

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# A Brief Sketch of the Prophet's Life

It was in the year 571 of the Christian Era that the Prophet Muḥammad was born, on the 12th of the lunar month Rabī'ī. He came of the noblest family of Arabia, the Quraish, who were held in the highest esteem, being guardians of the Sacred House at Mecca, the Ka'ba, the spiritual centre of the whole of Arabia. At the time of his birth Arabia was steeped deep in the worst form of idolatry that has ever prevailed in any country. The Ka'ba itself was full of idols, and every household had, in addition, its own idols. Unhewn stones, trees and heaps of sand were also worshipped. In spite of this vast and deep-rooted idolatry, the Arabs were, as Bosworth Smith remarks, materialistic. "Eat and drink is," as he says, "the epicurean tone of the majority of the poems that have come down to us." There was practically no faith in the life after death, no feeling of responsibility for one's actions. The Arabs, however, believed in demons, and diseases were attributed to the influence of evil spirits. Ignorance prevailed among the high as well as the low, so much so that the noblest of men could boast of his ignorance. There was no moral code, and vice was rampant. The sexual relations were loose. Obscene poems and songs were recited in public assemblies. There was no punishment for adultery, nor any moral sanction against it. Prostitution had nothing dishonourable about it, so that leading men could keep brothels. Women were "in the most degraded position, worse even than that in which they were under the laws of Manu in Hindustan."<sup>1</sup> Woman was looked on as a mere chattel. Instead of having any right to inheritance of property, her own person formed

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1. Bosworth Smith

part of the inheritance, and the heir could dispose of her as he liked, even if he did not care to take her as a wife. There was no settled government, no law in the land, and might was practically right. The Arabs belonged to one race and spoke one language, yet they were the most disunited people. Tribe made war on tribe, and family on family, on the most trivial excuse. The strong among them trampled upon the rights of the weak, and the weak could not get their wrongs redressed. The widow and the orphan were quite helpless and slaves were treated most cruelly.

Amongst this people was born Muḥammad, an orphan from his birth, who lost even his mother when six years old. He came of the noblest family of the Quraish, yet, like the rest of his countrymen, he was not taught reading and writing. He tended sheep for some time, and the noblest of the Arabs had no contempt for that occupation, but in his youth he was chiefly occupied in trade. It was, however, his high morals that distinguished him from the first from all his compatriots. The Holy Quran, which contains the most trustworthy account of the Prophet's life, says that he was the "possessor of sublime morals."<sup>2</sup> Leading generally a reserved life, he had for friends only those men whose moral greatness was admitted by all. His truthfulness is testified in the clearest words.<sup>3</sup> His bitterest opponents were challenged to point out a single black spot on his character during the forty years that he had passed among them before he received the Divine call.<sup>4</sup> It was in his youth that, on account of his pure and unsoiled character and his love for truth and honesty, he won from his compatriots the title of *al-Amīn*, or the Faithful. Living in a country in which idol-worship was the basis of the everyday life of the community, Muḥammad hated idolatry from his childhood, and the Holy Quran is again our authority for the statement that he never bent his forehead before an idol.<sup>5</sup> Even Sir William Muir bears testimony to the purity of his character in his youth: "Our authorities all agree in ascribing to the youth of Muḥammad a modesty of deportment and purity of manners rare among the Meccans." And again: "Endowed with a refined mind and

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2. 68:4

3. 6:33

4. 10:16

5. 109:4

delicate taste, reserved and meditative, he lived much within himself, and the pondering of his heart no doubt supplied occupation for leisure hours spent by others of a low stamp in rude sports and profligacy. The fair character and honourable bearings of the unobtrusive youth won the approbation of his fellow-citizens: and by common consent he received the title of *al-Amīn* the Faithful."

Though he lived in a city in which drinking orgies were only too common, never did a drop of wine touch his lips. Even Abū Bakr, the most intimate friend of Muḥammad's youth, never tasted wine. The society at Mecca found pleasure in gambling, yet never did Muḥammad take part in any such pastime. He lived among a people who were addicted to war as they were addicted to wine, yet he had no liking for either.

To quote Muir again, "though now nearly twenty years of age he had not acquired the love of arms." Perforce, he had to take part on one occasion in the famous sacrilegious war that continued for four years between the Quraish and the Hawāzin, yet he did no more than gather up arrows that came from the enemy and hand them over to his uncles. He did not even take to trading for love of wealth but simply out of regard for his uncle Abū Ṭālib, whom he loved to help. Thus says Muir: "Muḥammad was never covetous of wealth, or at any period of his career energetic in the pursuit of riches for their own sake. If left to himself, he would probably have preferred the quiet and repose of his present life to the bustle and cares of a mercantile journey. He would not spontaneously have contemplated such an expedition. But when the proposal was made, his generous soul at once felt the necessity of doing all that was possible to relieve his uncle and he cheerfully responded to the call."

Above all, his earlier life was marked by that rare characteristic, rarest of all in Arabia at the time, love of the poor, the orphan, the widow, the weak, the helpless and the slave. Before he had affluence of means, he was one of the members who took an oath to stand by the oppressed and formed themselves into a league as champions of the injured. When at twenty-five he married a wealthy widow, Khadija, he spent freely for the help of the poor. No slave came into the household but was set free by him. He had acquired such a fame

for helping the poor that when, after the Call, the Quraish demanded him of Abū Ṭālib to put him to death, the old chief refused and praised him in a poem as the “Protector of the orphans and the widows.” Earlier than this when Muḥammad received the Call, and was diffident whether he would be able to achieve the grand object of reforming his countrymen, his wife, Khadija, comforted him, saying that “God would not disgrace him because he bore the burden of those who were weary and helped the poor and gave relief to those who were in distress and honoured the guest and loved his kinsmen.”<sup>6</sup>

To these great qualities was added his anxiety for a fallen humanity. The Quran refers to it repeatedly.<sup>7</sup> As years went on, the gross idolatry of the Arabs and their evil ways pressed the more heavily on his heart, and he spent hours in solitude in the neighbouring mountains. Still later, he repaired for days to a cave at the foot of Mount Ḥirā, and it was here that the Divine light shone on him in its full resplendence. At first, he was in doubt whether he would be able to perform the great task, but his anxiety soon gave place to absolute faith that truth would ultimately triumph, and he set to work with a strength of will and an inflexibility of purpose which could not be shaken by the severest opposition of the whole of Arabia. From the very first his message was for all, for the Arab as well as the non-Arab, for the idolaters as well as the Jews, the Christians and the Magi. Nor was it limited to the town of Mecca, for Mecca was the centre to which men and women flocked in thousands every year from all parts of Arabia, and through this assemblage the Prophet’s message reached the most distant corners of Arabia. His wife, Khadija, was the first to believe in him, and she was followed by others who were either his most intimate friends or closely related to him. As Muir remarks: “It is strongly corroborative of Muḥammad’s sincerity that the earliest converts to Islām were not only of upright character, but his own bosom friends and people of his household, who, intimately acquainted with his private life, could not fail otherwise to have detected those discrepancies which ever

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6. Bukhārī, I:1 7. 9:128; 18:6; 26:3; 35:8

more or less exist between the professions of the hypocritical deceiver abroad and his actions at home."

His first revelations laid stress on the great power and majesty of the Divine Being and on the inevitability of the judgment. The Quraish mocked at first, treated him contemptuously and called him a madman. In spite of this he went on gaining adherents by twos and threes, until within four years the number reached forty and persecution grew bitter. At first the slaves were tortured, Bilāl, a Negro by birth, when made to lie on the burning sands under the Arabian midday sun continued to cry, "One, One," to the bewilderment of his persecutors. But the fire of persecution once kindled could not be confined. Converts of high birth were made to suffer along with the poorer followers. The Prophet himself did not escape the cruelties of the persecutors. The Muslims could not gather together or say their prayers in a public place. Still Muḥammad went on gaining new adherents, and his opponents became severer in their persecution, so much so that some of the humbler converts were put to death in a most brutal manner. The Prophet's tender heart melted at the sight of this brutal treatment of innocent men and women, and in spite of the fact that he would be left alone amongst exasperated opponents, he advised the small band of his followers to betake themselves to a place of safety. Eleven men and women left Mecca in the fifth year of the Hijra, and migrated to Abyssinia. Thither they were followed by a deputation of their opponents that petitioned the ruler of Abyssinia for their extradition. The Muslim case was put by their leader before the king as follows:

O King! We were an ignorant people, given to idolatry. We used to eat corpses even of animals that died a natural death, and to do all sorts of disgraceful things. We did not make good our obligations to our relations, and we ill-treated our neighbours. The strong among us would thrive at the expense of the weak, till at last Allāh raised a Prophet for our reformation. His descent, his righteousness, his integrity and his virtue are well known to us. He called us to the worship of Allāh, and bade us give up idolatry and stone-worship. He enjoined on us to tell the truth, to make good

our trust, to have regard for our kith and kin, and to do good to our neighbours. He taught us to shun everything foul and to avoid bloodshed. He forbade all sorts of indecent things, telling lies and misappropriating orphans' belongings. So we believed in him, followed him and acted up to his teachings. Thereupon our people began to do us wrong, to subject us to tortures, thinking that we might abjure our faith and revert to idolatry. When, however, their cruelties exceeded all bounds, we came to seek an asylum in your country.

The Negus was deeply touched by this statement and by a recitation from the Holy Quran, and refused to deliver the Muslims to their enemies. More Muslims went to Abyssinia next year, until the total reached 101, excluding children. The Quraish tried their utmost to check this tide of emigration, but in vain. Soon they became exasperated beyond all measure at the Prophet and the little band of Muslims that remained with him at Mecca. Not being able to prevail upon Abū Ṭālib, the head of the Hashimites (the Prophet's family), to hand the Prophet over to them to end his life, and failing to tempt the Prophet by offering him kingship, wealth and beauty, they at last entered into a league and shut up the Hashimites and the Muslims in a small quarter, where they suffered the utmost privations for three long years, being allowed liberty of action only during the time of pilgrimage. These three years were the years of the hardest suffering for the Muslims, and Islām itself made little progress during this time.

Released at last from this imprisonment, the Prophet, though facing disappointment on all sides, had still as much faith in the triumph of the truth as ever. If Mecca was now quite deaf to his preaching, he would turn elsewhere. He went to Ṭā'if, another great city of Arabia. Here, however, he found the ground even harder than at Mecca. He was not allowed to stay in Ṭā'if after ten days, and as he walked back he was pelted with stones. Dripping with blood and not even allowed by his persecutors to take rest he at last returned to Mecca, a sadder man than when he had left it. But if men did not listen to him, yet would he open his heart to God who was always

ready to listen, and he prayed to Him thus when coming back from Tā'if:

O my God! To Thee I complain of the feebleness of my strength and of my lack of resourcefulness and of my insignificance in the eyes of people. Thou art the most Merciful of the merciful, Thou art the Lord of the weak. To whom wilt Thou entrust me, to an unsympathetic foe who would sullenly frown at me, or to a close friend to whom Thou has given control over my affair? Not in the least do I care for anything except that I may have Thy protection. In the light of Thy face do I seek shelter, in the light which illumines the heaven and dispels all sorts of darkness, and which controls all affairs in this world as well as in the Hereafter. May it never be that I should incur Thy wrath or that Thou shouldst be displeased with me. There is no strength, nor power, but in Thee.

He feels that no man lends his ear to his message, yet his faith in the goodness of God and in the ultimate triumph of his cause is as unshaken as ever. To him God is all in all and the opposition of the whole world is as nothing. With marvellous calmness he undergoes the severest hardships which he has to suffer for working for the good of the very people who take pleasure in inflicting on him the cruellest tortures. All these, he says, are insignificant so long as he enjoys the pleasure of God. What a firm faith in God, what a cheerful resignation to His supreme will, what an unalloyed spiritual happiness!

Three years more passed away at Mecca amidst the most trying circumstances. In the meanwhile Islām took root in Medina and spread fast. As the thirteenth year of the Call drew to a close, seventy-five Muslims (including two women) from Medina came to perform a pilgrimage and swore allegiance to the Prophet, affirming that if he chose to go to Medina, they would defend him against his enemies just as they defended their own children and wives. Then it was that the Muslim exodus to Medina commenced. The Prophet chose to remain alone amidst an enemy that was growing more and more exasperated, and to see his followers safe at the new centre.



This shows the depth of his love and concern for his followers. He was anxious more for their safety than for his own. Within two months, about 150 Muslims left Mecca and there remained only the Prophet with two of his closest friends. The psychological moment had now arrived for his enemies to deal the final blow. Individual efforts had hitherto been made to do away with the Prophet, but they had failed. If the final blow was not struck immediately, the Prophet might escape to Medina and get beyond their reach. A big conference of all the tribes was held and a final decision taken. A youth from each clan was to be selected, and all these were to fall upon the Prophet at one and the same time, so that no particular clan should be held accountable for the murder. The Prophet's house was besieged by these bloodthirsty youths as soon as it was dark, but, undaunted and having his faith in Divine protection, the Prophet passed through them unnoticed. In the dark of the night, with only one companion, he made his way through the streets of Mecca to the bare and rugged hills outside, and a hiding-place was ultimately found in a cave known as Thaur. When morning appeared, the enemy saw the failure of their plan and the whole countryside was scoured. One party reached the very mouth of the cave. Through a crevice, Abū Bakr saw the enemy at the mouth and grieved. "Do not grieve, for Allāh is with us," said the Prophet. The more helpless he became, the stronger grew his faith in God. And surely some invisible power saved him throughout his life every time that the enemy's hand was on him. After three days the Prophet and his companion started for Medina.

It was not the Prophet alone who bore all the hard trials so willingly at Mecca for thirteen years; those who accepted him bore persecutions with the same willing heart. The new life to which the Prophet had awakened them has drawn words of praise from Sir William Muir:

The believers bore persecutions with a patient and tolerant spirit. ... One hundred men and women, rather than abjure their precious faith, had abandoned home and sought refuge, till the storm should be overpast, in Abyssinian exile. And now again a still larger number, with the Prophet himself,

were emigrating from their fondly loved city with its Sacred Temple, to them the holiest spot on earth, and fleeing to Medina. There, the same marvellous charm had within two or three years been preparing for them a brotherhood ready to defend the Prophet and his followers with their blood. Jewish truth had long sounded in the ears of the men of Medina; but it was not until they heard the spirit-stirring strains of the Arabian Prophet that they too awoke from their slumber and sprang suddenly into a new and earnest life.

The Prophet reached Medina on the 12th of Rabī' I, corresponding to June 28, 622 of the Christian Era. The first thing that he did on reaching Medina was to construct a mosque, now famous as the Prophet's Mosque. Here prayers to God were offered five times daily in a free atmosphere for the first time in the history of Islām. He next turned to establishing a brotherhood of the Muslims. Those who had fled from Mecca, called Muhājirs (Refugees), had left all their property behind. So, to provide shelter for them, every refugee was bound in a bond of brotherhood with one of the residents of Medina, called Anṣār (Helpers).

The third important matter to which the Prophet turned his attention was to establish friendly relations between the various tribes living in Medina. Among these were three Jewish clans, and a pact was concluded with them as well. The main terms of this pact were as follows: 1. The Muslims and the Jews shall live as one people. 2. Each one of the parties shall keep to its own faith. 3. In the event of a war with a third party, each shall be bound to come to the assistance of the other, provided the party at war were not the aggressors. 4. In the event of an attack on Medina, both shall join hands to defend it. 5. Peace shall be made after consultation with each other. 6. Medina shall be regarded as sacred by both, all bloodshed being forbidden therein. 7. The Prophet shall be the final court of appeal in cases of dispute. This agreement with the Jews shows that the Prophet had an apprehension that the exasperated Quraish who were foiled in their attempt to put an end to his life at Mecca would now attack Medina.

We have seen that when the Muslims fled to Abyssinia, the Quraish tried all the means in their power to have them expelled from there. How could they see Islām prosper so near home at Medina, an important city only 270 miles distant and on the trade route to Syria. Muḥammad had already received an intimation from on High that he would have to carry on a war to save Islām from utter annihilation. The sword, he was told, would be taken up against him and he would have to fight to save the small community of Islām from destruction at the hands of a powerful enemy who was determined to uproot Islām from the soil of Arabia. Temperamentally Muḥammad was not inclined to war; he had not once handled the sword in actual fighting up to the fifty-fifth year of his age, and this in a country where, owing to constant internecine warfare, fighting had become a vocation of the people. The religion which he preached, Islām, (lit. peace or submission), was a religion of peace, laying stress on prayer to God and the service of humanity, and he was required to preach this religion; to deliver the message, not to enforce it on others:

The truth is from your Lord, so, whoever will, let him believe, and whoever will, let him disbelieve.<sup>8</sup>

We have shown man the way, he may be thankful or he may be unthankful.<sup>9</sup>

And in still plainer words, it was laid down:

There is no compulsion in religion.<sup>10</sup>

But war was being forced on him and it was his duty, he was told, to defend his oppressed community who had twice fled their homes from the persecutions of a cruel enemy to a distant place:

Permission to fight is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressed, and Allāh is well able to help them.<sup>11</sup>

Why were they expelled from their homes? Why was war made on them? What was their offence?

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8. 18:29

9. 76:3

10. 2:256

11. 22:39

Those who have been expelled from their homes without a just cause, except that they say, Our Lord is Allāh.<sup>12</sup>

To worship Allāh, to say that Allāh is our Lord, to bow before Him, was an offence in this land, the punishment for which was that the men who worshipped God, and the places where He was worshipped, should be destroyed. So the Muslims were required to defend all houses of worship, whether they belonged to the Jews or the Christians or their own community:

And had there not been Allāh's repelling some people by means of others, cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allāh's name is remembered most, would certainly have been pulled down.<sup>13</sup>

These three statements follow one another in the Divine revelation to the Prophet. In a later revelation he was further told that he should by no means resort to an aggressive war. It was in defence only that he was allowed to take up the sword:

And fight in the way of Allāh with those who fight with you, and do not exceed this limit, for Allāh does not love those who exceed the limits.<sup>14</sup>

There was no question of converting anyone to Islām by force; it was the enemy that wanted to turn back the Muslims by force from Islām:

And they will not cease fighting with you until they turn you back from your religion if they can.<sup>15</sup>

Religion was a matter between God and His servants and no one had a right to compel anyone to adopt a particular religion, and the Prophet had thus to fight for the noble cause of the liberty of man:

And fight with them until there is no persecution and religion is held for Allāh. But if they give up persecution, then there should be no hostility except against the oppressors.<sup>16</sup>

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12. 22:40  
16. 2:193

13. 22:40

14. 2:190

15. 2:217

If the Prophet was required to cease fighting when the enemy ceased to persecute on account of religion, he was also required to cease fighting if the enemy offered peace, even though he might be gaining time only to renew his attack:

And if they incline to peace, do thou also incline to it and trust in Allāh; He is the Hearing, the Knowing. And if they intend to deceive thee, then surely Allāh is sufficient for thee.<sup>17</sup>

It was in these circumstances and on these conditions that the Prophet was allowed to fight. He had not up to this time trained a single man for fighting; he had no army at all. He had a small community of followers trained only in praying to God, and even they could not be forced to fight. To carry on the war, even though single-handed, was his duty:

Fight then in Allāh's way; this is not imposed on thee except in relation to thyself, and rouse the believers to ardour; maybe Allāh will restrain the fighting of those who disbelieve, and Allāh is strongest in prowess and strongest to punish (offenders).<sup>18</sup>

Small detachments of the Quraish used to go out on marauding expeditions and scour the country right up to the outskirts of Medina. The situation called for vigilance on the part of the Prophet. Reconnaissance parties were sent out by him to keep an eye on enemy movements and to approach certain tribes to secure their alliance or neutrality. One such party sent out with express orders to gather information about the Quraish movements accidentally killed a member of the Quraish, Ibn Hadzramī by name. The usual practice in Arabia in such cases was to demand blood-money. But the Quraish wanted a pretext to rouse the populace against the Muslims, and Ibn Hadzramī's murder furnished it. Another pretext was furnished by a Quraish caravan coming from Syria just at this time. Knowing that the Muslims were still very weak, the Quraish thought that 1000 men would be sufficient to annihilate them, and with this

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17. 8:61, 62

18. 4:84

army they marched on Medina in the month of Ramadzān, the Muslim month of fasting, in the second year of the Prophet's Flight. When news of this reached Medina, the Prophet made hurried preparations to meet them, but could gather only a force of 313 Muslims. The two forces met at Badr, a distance of three days' journey from Medina and ten days' from Mecca; on the one side being 1000 veteran warriors with whom fighting had been a life-long profession, armed with every weapon of warfare of the time, and on the other only 313 ill-equipped men, including raw youths and men advanced in age. The Prophet saw this and in deep anxiety passed the night praying to God in a small hut: "O Allāh! Shouldst Thou suffer this small band of believers to perish this day, no one will be left on earth to worship Thee and carry Thy message to the world. O Living One! O Subsisting One by whom all subsist! I cry to Thee for Thy mercy."

The unexpected happened. Almost all the Quraish chiefs, the ringleaders of the campaign against Islām, were slain in action. Seeing their chiefs fall, the rank and file were seized with confusion and took to flight. Seventy fell and an equal number were taken prisoners. There were fourteen casualties on the Muslim side.

The Quraish defeat at Badr was an ignominy which they could not leave unavenged. An army of 3000 strong, with warriors like Khālid among them, marched on Medina next year, Shawwāl A.H. The Muslims could muster no more than 700 men, and marched out of Medina to meet the enemy at the foot of Uḥud, only three miles from the city. The Muslims fought desperately and seven of the enemy's flagbearers fell one after another. Utter confusion seized the Quraish. They took to flight and the Muslims pursued them, but just at this time Khālid saw that the Muslim archers had left their rear undefended by vacating a certain position to join in the pursuit, and wheeling round at the head of his 200 cavalry attacked the Muslims from behind. Seeing this, the fleeing Quraish army also turned back, and the handful of Muslims, in disorder on account of the pursuit, were thus pressed on both sides. The position was so precarious that the whole Muslim army was now in danger of being annihilated. The Prophet, braving the danger of himself becoming the target of the

enemy's attack, called out aloud to his men to rally round him: "To me, O servants of Allāh! I am the Messenger of Allāh." This was a signal to the enemy to direct their attack to this particular point. The Muslims saw this and, cutting their way through the enemy ranks, mustered strongly round the Prophet. But in this attempt they sustained serious losses, and Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umair, who resembled the Prophet, being killed, the news spread like wildfire that the Prophet had been killed. Still the Muslims did not lose heart. "Let us fight on for the cause for which the Prophet fought," said one of them. By this time, the Prophet had sustained serious wounds and had fallen down, but the position had become secure both for the army and for the Prophet himself who was surrounded on all sides by devoted friends." Here closing their ranks on elevated ground with the mountain protecting their rear, they again made the enemy feel their strength. The Quraish retired from the field and took their way back to Mecca. When some one entreated the Prophet to pray for the destruction of his enemies he raised his hands, saying: "O Allāh! Forgive my people for they do not know."

Though they had this time inflicted severe losses on the Muslims, the Quraish knew that even this attack on Medina had proved abortive. Therefore, after returning from Uḥud, they tried to raise the Jews and the Bedouin tribes against the Muslims, and in this they were successful. The Jews, the Bedouins and the Quraish all combined to deal a crushing blow to Islām, A large army of 10,000 was gathered together in the fifth year of the Flight. The Muslims, unable to meet these hosts in the open field, fortified themselves in Medina by digging a ditch on the side which was unprotected. The Prophet himself participated in digging the ditch like an ordinary labourer. Covered with dust and with the fear of annihilation lurking in their minds, they yet sang in happy chorus:

O Allāh! Had it not been for Thy mercy, we would not have  
been guided aright,

Nor would we have given alms, nor would we have prayed  
to Thee.

Send down tranquillity upon us and establish our steps in  
battle,

For they are risen against us and they wish to pervert us by force — But we refuse, but we refuse.

The huge force at last reached Medina. It was an hour of consternation for the Muslims. The Holy Quran thus depicts the anguish and perplexity of the moment:

When they came upon you from above you and from below you, and when the eyes turned dull and the hearts rose up to the throats, and some of you began to entertain diverse thoughts about Allāh. There the believers were sorely tried and shaken with a severe shaking.<sup>19</sup>

Amid this seeming scene of dread and terror, the hearts of the Muslims were full of faith:

And when the believers saw the Allies, they said: This is what Allāh and His Messenger promised us, and Allāh and His Messenger spoke the truth: and it only increased them in faith and submission.<sup>20</sup>

During a full month of siege the Muslims stood firm. Arrows and stones came in terrible showers but they could not break through the defence. Attacks were made and repulsed in quick succession. The siege became wearisome to the besieging army, which also began to run short of provisions. The elements of nature ultimately came to the help of the brave Muslim defence. A storm raged one night which blew down the tents of the besiegers. There was confusion among the Allies and they took to flight during the night, to the great joy and thanksgiving of the Muslims.

The Quraish now lost all hope of being able to crush the Muslims. About a year after this, the Prophet with about 1400 companions (Islām was gaining ground in spite of the wars) undertook a journey to Mecca to perform the lesser pilgrimage, but finding that the Quraish were prepared to offer armed resistance to his entry into Mecca, even though it was simply with the object of performing a religious obligation, he had to stop at about nine miles

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19. 33:10, 11      20. 33:22



from the sacred city, at a place called Hudaibiya. Emissaries were sent to find a peaceful solution, but they were maltreated, and at last a man of the high position of 'Uthman, deputed to negotiate, was arrested by the Quraish. The situation was critical; the Muslim envoy had been taken into custody and there was a rumour that he had been murdered. The Muslims were unarmed except for sheathed swords, which they carried as a necessity when journeying in a country like Arabia, but they were determined not to turn their backs. The Prophet took a pledge from them, and they pledged afresh one and all, that they would fight to the last man in defence of the Prophet, whom the enemy wanted to put to death. This pledge is known as *Bai'ak al-Ridzwan* (Pledge of Divine Pleasure) in the history of Islām.

This resolve on the part of the Muslims brought the Quraish to their senses and a truce was at last drawn up to last for a period of ten years, with the following conditions among others:

1. The Muslims shall return without performing a pilgrimage, for which they may come back the following year.
2. Should any of the Meccans go over to Medina, the Muslims shall hand him over to the Meccans, but if any of the Muslims go over to Mecca, the Quraish are under no obligation to return him to the Muslims.
3. The Arab tribes are at liberty to enter into alliance with whichever party they choose.

It can easily be seen what a heavy price the Prophet was willing to pay for the sake of peace; he had agreed not to give shelter to those who were persecuted for accepting Islām, while his own men were free to join the unbelievers and find shelter in Mecca. The moral force drawing the people to Islām was so great that while not a single Muslim went back to Mecca where he could find a sure shelter, scores of Meccans embraced Islām, and finding the doors of Medina closed to them, settled themselves at 'Īṣ, a place subject neither to the authority of the Prophet, nor to that of the Quraish. Islām was spreading in spite of the sword.

After returning from Ḥudaibiya, the Prophet made arrangements to send the message of Islām to all people, Christians as well as Magians, living on the borders of Arabia. He wrote letters to the sovereigns of the neighbouring kingdoms, the Emperor of Rome, Chosreos II of Persia, the king of Egypt, the Negus of Abyssinia, and certain Arab chiefs, inviting them to Islām. The letter to the Roman Emperor was worded as follows:

In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful. From Muḥammad, the servant of Allāh and His Messenger, to Heraclius, the chief of the Romans. Peace be with him who follows the guidance. After this, I invite thee with invitation to Islām. Become a Muslim and thou wilt be in peace - Allāh will give thee a double reward; but if thou turnest away, on thee will be the sin of thy subjects. And, O followers of the Book! Come to an equitable proposition between us and you that we shall not serve any but Allāh, and that we shall not associate aught with Him and that some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allāh; but if they turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims.<sup>21</sup>

Of the rulers addressed the Negus accepted Islām; the king of Egypt sent some presents in reply; the Roman Emperor was impressed but his generals were averse; while Chosroes tore up the letter and sent orders to the governor of Yemen to arrest the Prophet. When the governor's soldiers reached Medina for the execution of the orders, the Prophet told them that Chosroes was himself dead and no more the king of Persia. They went back with this report to the governor of Yemen and it was found that Chosroes II had actually been murdered by his own son on the very night indicated by the Prophet. This event led to the governor's conversion to Islām, and ultimately to Yemen's throwing off the yoke of Persia.

The truce of Ḥudaibiya had hardly been in force for two years when the Banū Bakr, an ally of the Quraiṣh, attacked the Khuzā'a an ally of the Muslims, with the help of the Quraiṣh. The Prophet

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21. Bukhārī, I:1

thereupon sent word to the Quraish that they should either pay blood-money for those slain from among the Khuzā'a or dissociate themselves from the Banū Bakr, or, in the last resort, declare the truce of Ḥudaibiya to be null and void. The Quraish did not agree to either of the first two proposals, and the result was the annulment of the truce. The Prophet thereupon ordered an attack on Mecca in the closing months of the eighth year of the Flight. The two years during which the truce remained in force had brought such large numbers over to Islām that the Prophet now marched on Mecca with 10,000 men under his flag. The Meccans were unable to make any preparations to meet the attack. At Marr al-Zahrān, a day's journey from Mecca, the Quraish leader, Abū Sufyān, sued for pardon, and though he was the arch-offender who had left no stone unturned to annihilate Islām, free pardon was granted to him by the Prophet.

The conquest of Mecca was practically bloodless. The Quraish were unable to meet this force and the Prophet declared a general amnesty, guaranteeing safety to all those who entered Abū Sufyān's house, or closed the doors of their own houses or entered the sacred precincts of the Ka'ba. Conversion to Islām formed no part of the conditions which guaranteed security of life and property. There were strict orders to the advancing army that there should be no bloodshed. There were only about a score of casualties due to 'Ikrima, son of Abū Jahl, attacking a part of the Muslim forces under Khālid, who was now a Muslim.

Mecca having thus been entered, the first thing that the Prophet did was to clear the Ka'ba of the idols. He then addressed the assembled Quraish who had been guilty of the most heinous offences against the Muslims. They were standing before him now as culprits who had persecuted Muslims, inflicted on them the severest tortures, put many of them to death and ultimately expelled them from Mecca. They had not even allowed the Muslims to live a peaceful life at their new home in Medina, but had attacked that city thrice with large forces which they knew the Muslims had no means to meet. It was these men who were now at the Prophet's mercy, and addressing them, he put to them the question: "What treatment do you expect from me?"

They knew *al-Amīn* of old; they knew Muḥammad had a generous heart within his breast. "Thou art a noble brother, the son of a noble brother," was their unhesitating reply. But the treatment Muḥammad accorded them exceeded even their own expectations. "This day," he said in the words of Joseph to his brothers, "there is no reproof against you."<sup>22</sup> They were yet unbelievers, but mark the magnanimity of that great soul who would not even reproach them for their evil deeds, who let them go even without taking a pledge from them for the future. Here was a practical proof of that laudable precept, *Love thine enemy*. Not only was Mecca conquered, but with it were conquered also the hearts of the bitterest foes of Islām. They now saw with their own eyes how the combined forces of opposition offered by the whole country had proved an utter failure against the mighty truth which came from the lips of a man who had stood alone in the midst of all opposition. The righteousness of the cause was now only too clear to them and men and women came forward spontaneously to embrace the faith. There was not a single instance of conversion by force.

Those that still adhered to the old religion were treated in the same spirit of friendliness as the members of the brotherhood. Even a hostile critic has to admit:

Although the city had cheerfully accepted his authority, all its inhabitants had not yet embraced the new religion nor formally acknowledged his prophetic claim. Perhaps he intended to follow the course he had pursued at Medina and leave the conversion of the people to be gradually accomplished without compulsion.<sup>23</sup>

The fall of Mecca was a signal to the whole of Arabia. In fact, the Quraish were generally at the bottom of all organized opposition. With the sole exception of the battle of Hunain, which had to be undertaken against the Hawāzin immediately after the conquest of Mecca, regular warfare between the Muslims and the non-Muslims,

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22. 12:92

23. Sir William Muir

in the whole of Arabia now came to an end, and even at Ḥunain, the unbelieving Meccans fought on the side of the Muslims.

Islām was now free from trouble within, but the Christian power on the north viewed its strength with a jealous eye, and persistent news as to preparations of the Roman Empire to attack Arabia could not be ignored. Accordingly, an expedition of 30,000 men was led by the Prophet personally to the northern frontier in the ninth year of the flight. When he reached Tabūk, however, he found that his march had a restraining effect on the enemy, and there being no hostile force in the field, the Prophet returned without either attacking the Romans or declaring war against them. In fact, the Prophet always observed the Quranic injunction to fight only with those who took up the sword first to fight against the Muslims.

After the return from Tabūk, peace was apparently established in the peninsula, but the Islāmic territory was infested with hordes of marauders belonging to the tribes that had entered into agreement with the Muslim state, but had little respect for their treaties: "Those with whom thou makest an agreement, then they break their agreement every time and they have no regard for their obligations."<sup>24</sup> These people had become a menace to the security of life and property, and accordingly, towards the end of the ninth year of the Hijra, the Prophet sent 'Ali to make an important declaration of immunity regarding such agreements at the annual pilgrimage at Mecca. This declaration is contained in the opening verses of the chapter entitled *The Immunity*: "This is a declaration of immunity by Allāh and His Messenger towards those of the idolaters with whom you made an agreement"<sup>25</sup>

By idolaters were meant the idolaters spoken of in the previous chapter, already referred to, "those with whom Thou makest an agreement then they break their agreement every time." This is made clear in the next few verses by making an exception in favour of those who had not violated their treaties:

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24. 8:56

25. 9:1

Except those of the idolaters with whom you made an agreement then they have not failed you in anything and have not aided any one against you so fulfil their agreement to the end of their term, for Allāh loves those who have regard for their obligations.<sup>26</sup>

And again:

How can there be an agreement for the idolaters with Allāh and His Messenger, except those with whom you made an agreement at the Sacred Mosque; so as long as they are true to you be true to them, for Allāh loves those who have regard for their obligations. How can it be! For if they prevail against you, they will not pay regard in your case to ties of relationship, nor those of their covenant; they please you with their mouths while their hearts do not consent and most of them are transgressors ... They do not pay regard to ties of relationship nor those of covenant in the case of a believer, and these are they who exceed the limits.<sup>27</sup>

The idolaters concerned met 'Ali with the retort: "O 'Ali! Deliver this message to thy cousin (i.e. the Prophet) that we have thrown the agreements behind our backs and there is no agreement between him and us except smiting with spears and striking with swords." The result of the Prophet's firm attitude was that such tribes surrendered, and a settled condition of peace prevailed throughout the peninsula.

This declaration of immunity towards the violaters is sometimes misunderstood as meaning an abrogation of the conditions of war laid down at the beginning: "Fight with those who fight with you and do not exceed this limit." As a matter of fact, the condition laid down remained effective to the end. The Prophet's return from Tabūk without attacking either the Roman territory or the territory of any other tribe is a clear evidence of this. And even after the declaration of immunity, the Muslims were required to fight with those who attacked them first:

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26. 9:4

27. 9:7-10

What! Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and aimed at the expulsion of the Messenger and attacked you first?<sup>28</sup>

Deputations which had already started coming to the Prophet in the ninth year of the Flight to learn the truth about Islām now became more abundant. People came from different corners from all over Arabia and embraced Islām of their own free will. As soon as peace was established, Islām spread by leaps and bounds, and the tenth year of the Flight witnessed the conversion of the whole of Arabia to Islām, including some Christian tribes. It was not only a conversion in the sense that idolatry was given up for the purest monotheism from one end of the vast peninsula to the other; it was a reformation in all spheres of life. The whole course of life of an entire nation was changed - ignorance, superstition and barbarism giving place to the spread of knowledge and to a rational outlook in all aspects of life.

At the end of the tenth year of the Hijra, the Prophet set out to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. As the whole of Arabia was now Muslim, there was not a single idolater in the huge concourse of 124,000 pilgrims assembled at Mecca from all corners of the country. The very spot where the Prophet was only twenty years ago a rejected person, to whose word no one was willing to lend his ear, was now the scene of marvellous devotion to him. To whichever side he turned his eye, he saw hosts of devoted friends who recognized him both as their temporal as well as their spiritual head. An inspiring manifestation of Divine power to him as well as to those who had assembled there.

It was here on the ninth day of Dhul Hijja, the day of the assembling of the pilgrims at Mount 'Arafat, that he received a revelation from on High which sent a thrill of joy through the vast gathering:

This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour to you and chosen for you al-Islām as a religion.<sup>29</sup>

Obviously the Prophet perceived that the message of the perfection of religion meant his approaching end. Here he delivered the following sermon - Islām's sermon on the Mount - to the whole of Arabia through representatives of tribes coming from every quarter:

O people! Lend an attentive ear to my words, for I know not whether I shall ever hereafter have the opportunity to meet you here. ... I apprise you that your lives, your properties and your honour must be as sacred to one another as this sacred day in this sacred month in this sacred town. Let those present take this message to those absent. You are about to meet your Lord Who will call you to account for your deeds ...

O people! This day Satan has despaired of re-establishing his power in this land of yours. But should you obey him even in what may seem to you a trifling matter, it will be a source of pleasure for him. So you must beware of him in the matter of your faith.

O my people! You have certain rights over your wives and so have your wives over you ... They are the trust of Allāh in your hands. So you must treat them with all kindness ... And as regards your slaves, see that you give them to eat of what you yourselves eat and clothe them with what you clothe yourselves.

O people! Listen to what I say and take it to heart. You must know that every Muslim is the brother of another Muslim. You are all equal, and members of one brotherhood. It is forbidden to any of you to take from his brother save what he should willingly give. Do not do injustice to your people.



Then the Prophet cried at the top of his voice:

O Allāh! I have delivered Thy message,  
and the valley resounded with the words:

Aye! That thou hast.

This is known as the Prophet's Farewell pilgrimage. A little while after his return to Medina, he fell ill. At first he went to the mosque to lead the prayers even during his illness, but later on he became too weak and appointed Abū Bakr to lead the prayers. After about twelve days' illness, on the 12th of Rabī'ī on a Monday in the 11th year of the Flight, at the age of sixty-three, he commended his soul to his Maker, His last words being:

Blessed companionship on High.

The most outstanding characteristic of the life of the Prophet is the amazing success which he achieved. The transformation wrought within the short space of less than a quarter of a century is in fact unparalleled in the history of the world. There is not a single reformer who brought about such an entire change in the lives of a whole nation inhabiting such a vast country. None, in fact, found his people at such a depth of degradation as the Prophet found the Arabs, and no one raised them materially, morally and spiritually to the height to which he raised them. So deep-rooted was their idolatry, so powerful the bonds of their superstitions and their usages that the propagandic efforts of the Jews and the Christians, carried on for hundreds of years one after the other, with the material power of the kingdoms at their back, could not bring about the least change in their condition. The indigenous Arab movement of the Ḥanīfs proved an even greater failure. All these attempts at reform left the Arabs as a nation as ignorant of the principles of religion and morality as they ever were. Twenty-three years' work of the Prophet, however, quite metamorphosed them. Worship of idols and of all objects other than God, whether in heaven or on earth, was now considered to be a disgrace to humanity. No trace of an idol was left throughout the whole of Arabia. The whole nation awakened to a sense of the true dignity of manhood and realized the folly of falling prostrate before things which man was made to rule and before powers which he was

required to conquer. Superstition gave place to a rational religion. The Arab was not only cleansed of deep-rooted vice and bare-faced immorality; he was further inspired with a burning desire for the best and noblest deeds in the service of, no country and nation, but, what is far higher than that, humanity. Old customs which involved injustice to the weak and the oppressed were all swept away, as if by a magician's wand, and just and reasonable laws took their place. Drunkenness, to which Arabia was addicted from time immemorial, disappeared so entirely that the very goblets and vessels which were used for drinking and keeping wine could no more be found. Gambling was quite unknown, and the loose relations of the sexes gave place to the highest regard for chastity. The Arab who prided himself on ignorance became the lover of knowledge, drinking deep at every fountain of learning to which he could get access. And greatest of all, from an Arabia, the various elements of which were so constantly at war with each other that the whole country was about to perish, was indeed on the "brink of a pit of fire,"<sup>30</sup> as the Holy Quran so tersely puts it - from these jarring and warring elements, the Prophet welded together a nation, a united nation full of life and vigour, before whose onward march the greatest kingdoms of the world crumbled as if they were but toys before the reality of the new faith. No man ever breathed such a new life on such a wide scale - a life affecting all branches of human activity; a transformation of the individual, of the family, of the society, of the nation, of the country; an awakening, material as well as moral, intellectual as well as spiritual. Here are a few testimonies from non-Muslim writers:

The prospects of Arabia before Muḥammad were as unfavourable to religious reform as they were to political union or national regeneration. The foundation of Arab faith was a deep-rooted idolatry which for centuries, had stood proof, with no palpable symptom of decay, against every attempt at evangelization from Egypt and Syria.<sup>31</sup>

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30. 3:103

31. Sir William Muir

During the youth of Muḥammad, the aspect of the Peninsula was strongly conservative; perhaps never at any previous time was reform more hopeless.<sup>32</sup>

Causes are sometime conjured up to account for results produced by an agent apparently inadequate to effect them. Muḥammad arose, and forthwith the Arabs were aroused to a new and spiritual faith; hence the conclusion that Arabia was fermenting for the change, and prepared to adopt it. To us calmly reviewing the past, pre-Islāmite history belies the assumption.<sup>33</sup>

From time beyond memory Mecca and the whole Peninsula had been steeped in spiritual torpor. The slight and transient influences of Judaism, Christianity, or philosophical enquiry upon the Arab mind had been but as the ruffling here and there of the surface of a quiet lake; all remained still and motionless below. The people were sunk in superstition, cruelty and vice ... Their religion was a gross idolatry; and their faith, the dark superstitious dread of unseen things ... Thirteen years before the Hijra, Mecca lay lifeless in this debased state. What a change had these thirteen years now produced ... Jewish truth had long sounded in the ears of the men of Medina; but it was not until they heard the spirit-stirring strains of the Arabian Prophet that they too awoke from their slumber, and sprang suddenly into a new and earnest life.<sup>34</sup>

And yet we may truly say that no history can boast events that strike the imagination in a more lively manner or can be more surprising in themselves, than those we meet with in the life of the first Mussalmans; whether we consider the Great Chief, or his ministers, the most illustrious of men; or whether we take an account of the manners of the several countries he conquered; or observe the courage, virtue and

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32. Sir William Muir

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

sentiments that equally prevailed among his generals and soldiers.<sup>35</sup>

A more disunited people it would be hard to find, till, suddenly, the miracle took place. A man arose who, by his personality and by his claim to direct Divine guidance, actually brought about the impossible, namely, the union of all these warring factions.<sup>36</sup>

Never has a people been led more rapidly to civilization, such as it was, than were the Arabs through Islām.<sup>37</sup>

Such then, very briefly, was the condition of the Arabs, social and religious, when, to use an expression of Voltaire, ... 'the turn of Arabia came'; when the hour had already struck for the most complete, the most sudden and the most extraordinary revolution that had ever come over any nation upon earth.<sup>38</sup>

Of all the religious personalities of the world, Muḥammad was the most successful.<sup>39</sup>

The man who brought about the most thorough transformation of a nation within twenty years; who, alone and unaided, swept away vice and immorality from a whole country where the most strenuous efforts of a powerful missionary nation had hopelessly failed; who by his personal example purified the lives of vast numbers of humanity; could such a man himself be in the grip of sin? An impure man could not consistently preach virtue; how could he take others by the hand, and free them from the bondage of sin, and inspire his very soldiers and generals with sentiments of virtue? Could a man who himself groped in the dark lead others to light? Yet the Prophet - this great deliverer of humanity from the bondage of sin - is called

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35. *Life of Muhammad*, by Count of Boulainvilliers

36. *Ins and Outs of Mesopot.*

37. *New Researches*, by Hirschfeld

38. Bosworth Smith

39. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, Art. "Koran."

sinful because at a certain stage in his life he had more wives than one.

Whatever may be the views on polygamy of the modern world, there is not the least doubt that plurality of wives is met with in the lives of the great religious personages who by a consensus of opinion led lives of transcendent purity. Abraham, who is held in reverence by more than half the world up to this day, had more wives than one. Similar was the cases with Jacob, Moses and David among the Israelites, and with some of the famous revered Hindus. Yet it is true that these great sages were not led to a polygamous life by sensual desires. Purity in all respects is the outstanding characteristic of their lives, and this fact alone is sufficient to condemn the attempt to defame them on the basis of their resorting to polygamy. What was their object in doing so, it is difficult to say at the present day, as their histories are generally enveloped in darkness, but as the life of the Prophet can be read in the full light of history, we will take his case in detail.

The life of the Prophet may be divided into four periods so far as his domestic life is concerned. Up to twenty-five he led a celibate life; from twenty-five to fifty-four he lived in a married state with one wife; from fifty-four to sixty he contracted several marriages; and lastly, from sixty till his death he did not contract any new marriage. The most important period to determine whether the Prophet was a slave to his passions is the period of celibacy. If he had not been a complete master of his passions, he could not have led an exceptionally chaste and pure life, which won him the title of *al-Amīn*, to the age of twenty-five in a hot country like Arabia where development must necessarily take place early and passions are generally stronger. His worst enemies could not point to a single blot on his character when challenged later. According to Muir, all authorities agree "in ascribing to the youth of Muḥammad a modesty of deportment and purity of manners rare among the people of Mecca." Now, youth is the time when passions run riot, and the man who is able to control his passions in youth, and that in celibacy, cannot, possibly, be conceived as falling a prey to lust in his old age. Thus the first period of his life, his celibacy up to twenty-five years

of age, is conclusive proof that he could never fall a prey to his passions. It should be noted in this connection that in Arab society at the time there was no moral sanction against an immoral life, so that it cannot be said that he was kept back from an evil course by the moral force of society. Profligacy, on the other hand, was the order of the day; and it was among people who prided themselves on loose sexual relations that the Prophet led a life of transcendent purity, and therefore all the more credit is due to his purity of character.

Take now the next period, the period of a monogamous married life. When twenty-five years of age, Muḥammad married a widow, Khadija, fifteen years his senior, and led a life of the utmost devotion with her till she died, when he was fifty years of age. Polygamy was the rule in Arabia at the time; and the wife had no cause of complaint, nor did she ever grumble, if the husband brought in a second or third wife. The Prophet belonged to the noblest family of the Quraish and his marriage with Khadija had enriched him; and if he had chosen to marry another wife, it would have been quite easy for him. But he led a monogamous life of the utmost devotion to his wife during all that time. When Khadija died, he married a very elderly lady, Sauda, whose only recommendation for the honour was that she was the widow of a faithful companion of his who had to flee to Abyssinia from the persecution of the Quraish. The main part of his life, from twenty-five to fifty-four, was thus an example for his followers that monogamy was the rule in married life.

Now comes the third period. Of all his wives 'Ā'isha was the only one whom he married as a virgin. Her father, Abū Bakr, the closest friend of the Prophet, had offered her to him when he suffered the great bereavement of losing both his wife and his uncle Abū Ṭālib. The girl was one possessing exceptional qualities, and both Abū Bakr and the Prophet saw in her the great woman of the future who was best suited to perform the duties of the wife of a teacher who was to be a perfect exemplar for mankind. So the Prophet accepted her; but apparently she had not yet reached the age of

puberty,<sup>40</sup> and her marriage was consummated towards the close of the second year of the Flight.

In the second year of the Flight began the series of battles with the Quraish and the other Arab tribes, which appreciably reduced the number of males, the bread-winners of the family. These battles continued up to the eighth year of the Flight, and it was during this time that the Prophet contracted all the marriages which appear objectionable to the modern mind, but which neither friend nor foe looked upon with disapprobation at the time. A Christian writer says:

It would be remembered, however, that most of Muḥammad's marriages may be explained at least as much by his pity for the forlorn condition of the persons concerned, as by other motives. They were almost all of them widows who were not remarkable either for their beauty or their wealth, but quite the reverse.<sup>41</sup>

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40. A great misconception prevails as to the age at which 'Ā'isha was taken in marriage by the Prophet. Ibn Sa'd has stated in the *Ṭabaqāt* that when Abū Bakr was approached on behalf of the Holy Prophet, he replied that the girl had already been betrothed to Jubair, and that he would have to settle the matter first with him. This shows that 'Ā'isha must have been approaching majority at the time. Again, the *Iṣāba*, speaking on the Prophet's daughter Fatima, says that she was born five years before the Call and was about five years older than 'Ā'isha. This shows that 'Ā'isha must have been about ten years at the time of her betrothal to the Prophet, and not six years as she is generally supposed to be. This is further borne out by the fact that 'Ā'isha herself is reported to have stated that when the chapter entitled "The Moon" (fifty-fourth chapter) was revealed, she was a girl playing about and remembered certain verses then revealed. Now the fifty-fourth chapter was undoubtedly revealed before the sixth year of the Call. All these considerations point to but one conclusion, viz., that 'Ā'isha could not have been less than ten years of age at the time of her *nikāh*, which was virtually only a betrothal. And there is one report in the *Ṭabaqāt* that 'Ā'isha was nine years of age at the time of *nikāh*. Again it is a fact admitted on all hands that the *nikāh* of 'Ā'isha took place in the tenth year of the Call in the month of Shawwāl, while there is also preponderance of evidence as to the consummation of her marriage taking place in the second year of Hijra in the same month, which shows that full five years had elapsed between the *nikāh* and the consummation. Hence there is not the least doubt that 'Ā'isha was at least nine or ten years of age at the time of betrothal, and fourteen or fifteen years at the time of marriage.

41. Bosworth Smith

Let us look the facts straight in the face. The Prophet had now in his house a young and beautiful wife in 'Ā'isha. None of the other wives whom he married later compared with her either in youth or beauty. Surely then it was not attraction for beauty that led to these marriages. We have already seen that from his youth till his old age the Prophet remained a complete master of his passions. The man who could live in celibacy up to twenty-five and still have the reputation of a spotless character, who up to fifty-four lived with a single wife and this notwithstanding the fact that polygamy was more the rule than the exception at the time and that a polygamous connection was not in the least objectionable — such a man could not be said to have changed all of a sudden after fifty-five when old age generally soothes the passions even of those who cannot control their passions in youth. No other motive than compassion for the ladies who were given this honour can be attached to these marriages. If there had been any less honourable motive, his choice would have fallen on others than widows, and under the Arab custom a man in his position could have plenty of youthful virgins.

I have said that a change for the worse could not come over a man who had led an undoubtedly spotless life until he reached fifty-five. If the beauty of women could not excite his passions in youth and lead him away from the path of rectitude, how could it lead him away in old age? And what were the circumstances in which he lived at Medina during these years? It was not a life of ease and luxury that he was leading at the time; it was a life of hardness, because it was at this very time that he had to carry on a life-and-death struggle with the enemies of Islām. Huge armies came to crush him and the small band of Muslims at Medina. The whole of Arabia was aflame against him. He was not secure for a minute. Battles had to be fought in quick succession. Expeditions had to be arranged and sent. "Prophet of God! We are tired of being in arms day and night," his companions would say to him; and he had to console them by telling them that the time would come when a traveller would be able to go from one end of the country to the other without having any arms. The Jews and the Christians were his enemies along with the idolaters. His best friends were falling sometimes in battle and



sometimes by treachery. Is it possible for a man to lead a life of ease and luxury under such circumstances? Even if a man had the mind to lead a life of self-indulgence, which the Prophet according to all available evidence had not, this was not the opportune time for it. In such circumstances of warfare, with enemies within Medina and enemies all around it, with the number of Muslims being insignificantly small in comparison with the enemy, with news of assaults by overwhelming numbers on all sides, even a profligate's life would be changed, to say nothing of a man of avowed purity of character, which no temptation could shake, turning into a profligate.

If the Prophet's days during this period were passed so strenuously, how did he pass the nights? He had a number of lawful wives, but he did not spend his nights in enjoyment with them. There is the clearest evidence on record in the Holy Quran as well as the Ḥadīth that he passed half, and sometimes even two-thirds, of the night in prayers and in reciting the Holy Quran while standing in prayer. He would stand so long that his feet would get swollen. Could such a man be said to be taking wives for self-indulgence when the minutest details of his life as available to us show conclusively that it was a strenuous life furthest away from indulgence of any kind?

Let us now consider another point. Was any change really witnessed in the latter part of his life when he became the ruler of a state? "In the shepherd of the desert, in the Syrian trader, in the solitary of Mount Hira, in the reformer in the minority of one, in the exile of Medina, in the acknowledged conqueror, in the equal of the Persian Chosroes and the Greek Heraclius, we can still trace a substantial unity. I doubt whether any other man, whose external conditions changed so much, ever himself changed less to meet them: the accidents are changed, the essence seems to me to be the same in all."<sup>42</sup>

From the cradle to the grave the Prophet passed through a diversity of circumstances — diversity which can hardly be met with

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42. Bosworth Smith

in the life of a single man. Orphanhood is the extreme of helplessness, while kingship is the height of power. From being an orphan he climbed to the summit of royal glory, but that did not bring about the slightest change in his way of living. He lived on exactly the same kind of humble food, wore the same simple dress, and in all particulars led the same simple life as he led in the state of orphanhood. It is hard to give up the kingly throne and lead the life of a hermit, but it is harder still that one should wield the royal sceptre yet at the same time lead a hermit's life, that one should possess power and wealth yet spend it solely to promote the welfare of others, that one should ever have the most alluring attractions before one's eyes yet should never for one moment be captivated by them. When the Prophet actually became the ruler of a state, the furniture of his house was composed of a coarse matting of palm leaves for his bed and an earthen jug for water. Some nights he would go without food. For days no fire would be lighted in his house to prepare food, the whole family living on mere dates. There was no lack of means to live a life of ease and comfort. The public treasury was at his disposal. The well-to-do among his followers, who did not shrink from sacrificing their lives for his sake, would have been only too glad to provide him with every comfort of life, should he choose to avail himself of it. But worldly things carried little weight in his estimation. No mundane craving could ever prevail over him, neither in times of indigence nor of plenty. Just as he spurned wealth, power and beauty which the Quraish offered him when he was yet in a state of utmost helplessness, so did he remain indifferent to them when God granted him all these things out of His grace.

Not only did he himself live the simple life of a labourer, but he did not even allow wealth to have any attraction for his wives. Shortly after their immigration into Medina, the condition of the Muslims had changed, and they carried on a prosperous trade. Their conquests, later on, went further to add to the comforts of life which the Muslims enjoyed. A quite human desire crept into the hearts of the Prophet's wives that, like other Muslim families, they too should avail themselves of their share of comforts. Accordingly, they

approached the Prophet in a body to prevail upon him to allow them their legitimate share of worldly comforts. Thereupon came the Divine injunction:

O Prophet! Say to thy wives, If you desire this world's life and its adornment, come, I will give you a provision and allow you to depart a goodly departing. And if you desire Allāh and His Messenger and the latter abode, then surely Allāh has prepared for the doers of good among you a mighty reward.<sup>43</sup>

Thus they were offered two alternatives. They might either have worldly finery, or remain in the Prophet's household. Should they decide to have the former, they would have plenty of what they wanted, but would forthwith forfeit the honour of being the Prophet's wives. Is this the reply of a sensual man? Such a man would have done everything to satisfy the whims of the objects of his affection. Nay, he would himself have desired that his wives should wear the most beautiful dress and live in comfort. No doubt the Prophet cherished great love for his wives. He had immense regard for the rights of women and was the champion of their cause. But when his wives came to him with what was apparently a quite legitimate demand to have more finery and ornaments, they were coldly told that if they would have these things they were not fit to live in the Prophet's house. This shows beyond a shadow of doubt how free the Prophet's mind was of all base and sensual thoughts. He was prepared to divorce all his wives rather than yield to what he regarded as unworthy of his wives - an inclination towards worldly things. It shows conclusively that the object of his marriages was anything but self-indulgence.

Let us consider once more the historical facts which led the Prophet to take a number of wives within the short space of five years from the third year of Hijra to the seventh, while before that he passed nearly thirty years of his life in a monogamous state. This period coincides exactly with the period during which incessant war

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43. 33:28, 29

was carried on between the Muslims and the non-Muslims. The circle of Muslim brotherhood was at the time very narrow. The perpetual state of war created disparity between the male and the female elements of society. Husbands having fallen on the field of battle, their widows had to be provided for. But bread and butter was not the only provision needed in such cases. Sex-inclination is implanted in human nature, and the statesman who neglects the sex requirements leads society to moral corruption, ending ultimately in the ruin of the whole nation. A reformer with whom morals were all in all could not content himself with making provision merely for the maintenance of the widows. The Prophet was anxious for their chastity to a far greater extent than their physical needs. It became therefore necessary to allow polygamy. This is the reason that he himself took so many women for his wives during the period when war was raging. Nearly all his wives were widows. If self-indulgence were the motive, the choice would not have fallen on widows. It would have been an enviable privilege for any Muslim to be the father-in-law of the Prophet. But the object was a noble one - the protection of the widows of his friends. In polygamy alone lay the safety of the Muslim society.

We now come to the fourth period. With the conquest of Mecca in 8 A.H., internal warfare came practically to an end. Disturbances there were, but, on the whole, peace had been established in the country and normal conditions were restored. From the eighth year of the Flight to the end of his life we again find that the Prophet did not contract any new marriage. What is the evidence of the facts then? The Prophet added to the number of his wives only during the time that he had to live in a state of warfare, when the number of males was reduced and many women would have been left without protection and without a home if the difficulty had not been solved by permitting a limited polygamy. Before the Prophet had to enter on a defensive war, he lived in the company of a single wife, and when war ended, he contracted no new marriage. This sets all doubts at rest as to the motive of the Prophet. In all the marriages which he contracted during the war, there was some ulterior moral end in view. There arose situations in his life under which he could not

consistently, with the moral and religious mission of his life, help taking more wives than one. In that, he only showed compassion to the weaker sex.

Living in a country in which polygamy was the rule, the Prophet had no liking for polygamy. He passed the prime of his life, up to fifty-four years of age, as the husband of a single wife, thus showing that the union of one man and one woman was the rule under normal conditions. But when abnormal conditions arose, he did not, like a sentimentalist, shirk his duty. He saw that the chastity of woman was at stake if polygamy was not allowed, and for the sake of a higher interest he permitted polygamy as an exception to meet exceptional circumstances. Exactly thus he had to resort to war, though by disposition he was averse to it. Full forty years before the Call, he had been living in a land where the sword was wielded as freely as a stick elsewhere, where fighting and feuds were the order of the day, where men would fly at each other's throats like wild animals, where there was no chance of survival for one who could not use the sword, yet not once during these forty years did he deal a blow at an enemy. The same was the case with him for fourteen years after the Call.

That he was peace-loving by nature is shown by the clear injunctions relating to peace in the Holy Quran: "And if they incline to peace, do thou also incline to it and trust in Allāh ... And if they intend to deceive thee, than surely Allāh is sufficient for thee."<sup>44</sup>

The Prophet's acceptance of the truce of Ḥudaibiya, though its conditions were humiliating for the Muslims, who were ready to lay down their lives one and all rather than accept those terms, is also a clear proof of his peace-loving nature. But when duty called him to take the field to save his community, he did not hesitate to take up the sword against an overwhelming majority. He acted as a sagacious general in all fields of battle and behaved like a brave soldier when opportunity demanded. He knew how to disperse an enemy in time before it had gained sufficient strength to deal a severe blow at the Muslims. And once, in the battle of Ḥunain, when his army was in

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44. 8:61, 62

flight owing to the severe onslaught of the enemy's archers, he was all alone advancing towards the enemy forces, till his soldiers rallied round him. By disposition he had no inclination for war, yet circumstances arose which dragged him into the field of battle, and he then displayed the wisdom of a general and the bravery of a soldier. So by disposition he was not inclined to polygamy, living a celibate life of unexampled purity up to twenty-five years of age and a married life of a monogamous husband up to fifty-four, but when duty called him to take more women under his shelter, he answered the call of duty.

Brief as this treatment of the Prophet's life is, it would be incomplete without a few words as to his manners and morals. When his wife, 'Ā'isha, the most privy to his secrets, was questioned about his morals, her reply was, "His morals are the Quran." In other words, the highest morals that were depicted in the Holy Quran were possessed by him.

Simplicity and sincerity are the keynotes of the Prophet's character. He would do all sorts of things with his own hands. He would milk his own goats, patch his own clothes and mend his own shoes. In person would he dust the house, and he would tie his camel and look after it personally. No work was too low for him. He worked like a labourer in the construction of the mosque, and again in digging a ditch round Medina. In person would he do shopping, not only for his own household, but also for his neighbours or for helpless women. He never despised any work, however humble, notwithstanding the dignity of his position as Prophet and King. He thus demonstrated through personal example that man's calling does not really determine his nobleness or his meanness.

His actions and movements were characterized by homely simplicity. He did not like his companions to stand up on his arrival. Once he forbade them, saying, "Do not stand up for me as do the non-Arabs;" and added that he was a humble creature of God, eating as others eat and sitting as others sit. When a certain man wanted to kiss his hand, he withdrew it remarking that that was the behaviour of the non-Arabs towards their kings. Even if a slave sent him an invitation he accepted it. He would take his meals in the company of

all classes of people, even of slaves. When seated among people, there was nothing about him to make him conspicuous.

The Prophet had a deep love for his friends. While shaking hands with them, he would never be the first to withdraw his hand. He met everybody with a smiling face. A report from Jarīr ibn ‘Abdullāh says that he never saw the Prophet but with a smile on his face. He would talk freely, never putting on artificial reserve to give himself an air of superiority. He would take up children in arms and nurse them. He disliked backbiting and forbade his visitors to talk ill of any of his friends. He would ever take the lead in greeting his friends and shaking hands with them.

The Prophet’s generosity even towards his enemies stands unique in the annals of the world. ‘Abdullāh ibn Ubayy, the head of the hypocrites, was a sworn enemy of Islām, and his days and nights were spent in plotting mischief against the Muslims. Yet at his death, the Prophet prayed to the Lord to forgive him and even granted his own shirt to enshroud his body. The Meccans, who had all along subjected him and his friends to the most barbarous tortures, were not only awarded a general amnesty but were let off even without a reproof. Twenty long years of persecutions and warfare were absolutely forgiven and forgotten. “The magnanimity with which Muḥammad treated a people who had so long hated and rejected him is worthy of all admiration,” says Muir. The fact is that no other example is met with in history of such magnanimous forgiveness of inveterate enemies, who had shed innocent blood, who had shown no pity for helpless men, women and children, who had exerted themselves to their utmost to kill the Prophet and to annihilate the Muslims. The prisoners of war were almost always set free even without demanding a ransom. It was only in the case of the prisoners of Badr that ransom was demanded; after that, hundreds of prisoners and in one case, in the battle with Hawāzin, as many as six thousand, were released without taking a single piece of ransom. At the battle of Uḥud, when he was wounded and fell down, a comrade asked him to curse his persecutors. His reply was: “I have not been sent to curse but as an inviter to good and mercy. O Lord! guide my people, for they know not.” Once a Bedouin pulled him and threw his wrap

round his neck. When asked why he should not be repaid in the same coin, he pleaded that he (the Prophet) never returned evil for evil.

In the administration of justice, the Prophet was scrupulously even-handed. Muslims and non-Muslims, friend and foe, were all alike in his eyes. Even before the Call, his impartiality, his honesty and integrity were of household fame, and people would bring their disputes to him to settle. At Medina, the Jews and idolaters both accepted him as the arbitrator in all their disputes. Notwithstanding the deep-rooted malice of the Jews against Islām, when a case between a Jew and a Muslim once came up before him, he decreed in favour of the Jew, regardless of the fact that the Muslim, nay, even perhaps the whole of his tribe, might thereby be alienated. In his dealings with his worst enemies he was always true to the Quranic injunction which says: "Let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety."<sup>45</sup> On his death-bed, immediately before he breathed his last, he had it publicly announced: "If I owe anything to anybody, it may be claimed; if I have offended anybody, he may have his revenge."

In his dealings with others he never placed himself on a higher pedestal. Once while he held the position of a king at Medina, a Jew whom he owed some money came up to him and began to abuse him. 'Umar was enraged, but the Prophet rebuked him, saying: "It would have been meet for thee to have advised both of us - me, the debtor to repay the debt with gratitude, and him, the creditor, to demand it in a more becoming manner." And he paid the Jew more than his due. On another occasion when he was out in the wood with his friends, the time for preparation of food came. Everybody was allotted a piece of work, he himself going out to pick up fuel. Spiritual and temporal overlord though he was, he would yet do his share of work like an ordinary man. In his treatment of his servants, he observed the same principle of equality. A report from Anas says that during the ten years that he was in the Prophet's service at Medina, where he ultimately became the master of the whole of



Arabia, he was not once scolded by him. He never kept anybody in slavery. As soon as he got a slave, he set him free.

In charity the Prophet was simply unapproached. He never gave a flat refusal to a beggar. He would feed the hungry, himself going without food. He never kept any money in his possession. While on his death-bed, he sent for whatever there was in his house and distributed it among the poor. Even for the dumb creatures of God his heart overflowed with mercy. He spoke of one who drew water from a well to quench the thirst of a dog as having earned paradise with this act of kindness. He spoke of a deceased woman that she was undergoing punishment because she would tie up her cat and keep it hungry. From his earliest days he had a deep sympathy for widows and orphans, the poor and the helpless. He would ever stand by the oppressed. He vindicated the rights of women over men, of slaves over their masters, of the ruled over the rulers, and of the subjects over the king. Negro slaves were accorded the same position of honour as the Quraish leaders. He was the champion of the oppressed and the ill-treated ones. He was very fond of children, and while walking along he would pat and stroke those whom he met on the way. Without fail would he visit the sick to enquire after their health and console them. He would also accompany a funeral.

Humble and meek in the highest degree, he had yet the courage of the bravest of men. Never for a moment did he harbour fear of his enemies. Even when plots to take his life were being hatched in Mecca, he moved about fearlessly day and night. He told all his companions to emigrate from Mecca, himself remaining almost alone among infuriated enemies. With his pursuers at the mouth of the cave in which he had hidden himself, he could yet console his companion, saying, "Allāh is with us." On the field of Uḥud when the whole of his army fell into a trap, he shouted aloud, regardless of all danger to his own person, to rally the confused soldiers. In the battle of Ḥunain when the Muslim rank and file took to flight, he advanced alone towards the enemy, calling aloud, "I am the Prophet." When one night a raid was suspected, he was the first to reconnoitre the outskirts of Medina, riding his horse without saddling it. On a certain journey, while resting under a tree all alone, an enemy came upon

him, and unsheathing his sword shouted out: "Who can save thee now from my hands?" Calmly the Prophet replied, "Allāh." And the next moment the same sword was in the Prophet's hand who put to his enemy the same question, on which he assumed a tone of abject humility, and the Prophet let him go.

The Prophet's integrity and sincerity were of universal fame throughout Arabia. His worst enemies had often to confess that he had never told a lie. When he once pledged his word, he kept it under the most trying conditions and even at a heavy cost. He faithfully observed the truce made at Ḥudaibiya, though he had to refuse shelter to Muslims escaping from the persecutions of the Meccans. His biographers are all at one in their admiration of his unflinching fortitude and unswerving steadfastness. Despair and despondency were unknown to him. Hemmed in as he was on all sides by a gloomy prospect and severe opposition, his faith in the ultimate triumph of the truth was never for one moment shaken.