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## XLIII

# *The Battle of Badr*

THE Prophet now drew up his army, and he passed in front of each man to give them good heart and to straighten the ranks, bearing an arrow in his hand. "Stand in line, O Sawād," he said to one of the Helpers who was too far forward, and he gave him a slight prick in the belly with his arrow. "O Messenger of God, thou hast hurt me," said Sawād, "and God hath sent thee with truth and justice, so give me my requital." "Take it," said the Prophet, laying bare his own belly and handing him the arrow whereupon Sawād stooped and imprinted a kiss where it was his due to place the point of the shaft. "What made thee do this?" said the Prophet. And he answered: "O Messenger of God, we are now faced with what thou seest; and I desired that at my last moment with thee – if so it be – my skin should touch thy skin;" and the Prophet prayed for him and blessed him.

Quraysh had now begun to advance. Seen across the undulating dunes, the Meccan army appeared to be much smaller than it was. But the Prophet was fully aware of their true numbers and of the great disparity between the two hosts, and he now returned to the shelter with Abū Bakr and prayed for the help which God had promised him.

A light slumber came upon him, and when he woke he said: "Be of good cheer, Abū Bakr; the help of God hath come to thee. Here is Gabriel and in his hand is the rein of a horse which he is leading, and he is armed for war."<sup>1</sup>

In the history of the Arabs many a battle had been averted at the last minute, even when two forces were drawn up face to face. But the Prophet was now certain that the battle would take place, and that this formidable array was the *one of the two parties* that he had been promised. The vultures also knew that carnage was now imminent and they were already in wait to feed on the carcasses of the slain, some wheeling overhead and others perched on the rocky slopes in the rear of either army. It was, moreover, clear from the movements of Quraysh that they were preparing to attack. They were already near and had now halted within easy reach of the cistern which the Muslims had made. It seemed likely that their first move would be to take possession of it.

Aswad of Makhzūm strode ahead of the others, clearly intending to drink. Ḥamzah went out to meet him and struck him a blow which severed one of his legs below the knee, and a second blow which killed him. Then

<sup>1</sup> B. LXIV, 10; I.I. 444.

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'Utbah, still smarting from the taunts of Abū Jahl, stepped from the ranks and gave the challenge for single combat; and for the further honour of the family his brother Shaybah and his son Walīd stepped forward on either side of him. The challenge was immediately accepted by 'Awf of the Najjār clan of Khazraj, who had been one of the first six of the Helpers to pledge themselves to the Prophet; and with 'Awf stepped forward his brother Mu'awwidh. It was their quarter in Medina that Qaswā' had chosen as the ultimate halt of the Hijrah. The third to accept the challenge was 'Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥah, who had defied his leader Ibn Ubayy in speaking words of welcome and comfort to the Prophet.

"Who are ye?" said the challengers. When the men answered, 'Utbah said: "Ye are noble and our peers, yet have we naught to do with you. Our challenge is against none but men of our own tribe." Then the herald of Quraysh shouted: "O Muḥammad, send forth against us our peers from our own tribe." The Prophet had not intended anything else, but the eagerness of the Helpers had forestalled him. Now he turned to his own family, since it was above all for them to initiate the battle. The challengers were two men of mature age and one youth. "Arise, O 'Ubaydah," he said. "Arise, O Ḥamzah. Arise, O 'Alī." 'Ubaydah was the oldest and most experienced man in the army, a grandson of Muṭṭalib, and he faced 'Utbah while Ḥamzah faced Shaybah and 'Alī faced Walīd. The combats were not long: Shaybah and Walīd were soon lying dead on the ground, while Ḥamzah and 'Alī were unhurt: but at the moment when 'Ubaydah struck 'Utbah to the ground he received from him a sweep of the sword that severed one of his legs. It was a triple contest, three against three, so Ḥamzah and 'Alī turned their swords on 'Utbah, and Ḥamzah gave him the death blow. Then they carried their wounded cousin back to their camp. He had lost a mortal quantity of blood, and the marrow was oozing from the stump of his leg. He had only one thought. "Am I not a martyr, O Messenger of God?" he said as the Prophet approached him. "Indeed thou art," he answered.

The tense stillness between the two hosts was now broken by the sound of an arrow from Quraysh, and a freedman of 'Umar fell to the ground, fatally wounded. A second arrow pierced the throat of Hārithah, a youth of Khazraj, as he was drinking at the cistern. The Prophet now exhorted his men saying: "By Him in whose hand is the soul of Muḥammad, no man will be slain this day, fighting against them in steadfast hope of his reward, advancing not retreating, but God shall straightway enter him into Paradise."<sup>1</sup> His words were passed on by those who heard them to those who were out of earshot. 'Umayr of the Salimah clan of Khazraj had a handful of dates which he was eating. "Wonder of wonders!" he exclaimed. "Is there naught between me and my entering Paradise, but that these men should slay me?", and he flung away the dates and put his hand to his sword, in eager readiness for the word of command.

'Awf was standing near to the Prophet, disappointed at having lost the honour of the challenge he had been the first to accept, and he now turned to him and said: "O Messenger of God, what is it that maketh the Lord

<sup>1</sup> I.I. 445.

laugh with joy at His slave?" At once came the answer: "When he plungeth without mail into the midst of the foe"; and 'Awf began to strip off the coat of mail he was wearing, while the Prophet took up a handful of pebbles and shouting at Quraysh "Defaced be those faces!", he hurled the pebbles at them, conscious that he was hurling disaster. Then he gave the order to charge. The battle cry he had devised for them, *Yā mansūr amit*,<sup>1</sup> resounded from every throat as the men surged forward. 'Awf without his mail and 'Umayr were among the first to meet the enemy and both fought until they were slain. Their deaths and those of 'Ubaydah and the two killed by arrows brought the number of martyrs up to five. Only nine more of the faithful were to die that day, amongst them that other 'Umayr, Sa'd's younger brother, whom the Prophet had wanted to send home.

*Thou threwest not when thou threwest, but it was God that threw.*<sup>2</sup> These words were part of the Revelation which came immediately after the battle. Nor were the pebbles the only manifestation of Divine strength which flowed from the hand of the Prophet on that day. At one point where the resistance of Quraysh was at its strongest a sword broke in the hands of a believer, whose first thought was to go and ask the Prophet for another weapon. It was 'Ukkāshah, a kinsman of the family of Jahsh. The Prophet gave him a wooden club saying: "Fight with this, 'Ukkāshah." He took it and brandished it and it became in his hand a long, strong, gleaming sword. He fought with it for the rest of Badr and in all the Prophet's other battles, and it was named *al-'Awn* which means the Divine Help.

When the believers were ordered to charge, they did not charge alone, as well the Prophet knew, for he had been promised: *I will help you with a thousand of the angels, troop on troop.*<sup>3</sup> And the Angels also had received a Divine message: *When thy Lord revealed unto the angels: Lo, I am with you, so make firm the believers. I shall cast terror into the hearts of the disbelievers. It is for you to strike off their heads, and to smite their every finger.*<sup>4</sup>

The presence of the Angels was felt by all, as a strength by the faithful and as a terror by the infidels, but that presence was only visible or audible to a few, and in varying degrees. Two men of a neighbouring Arab tribe had gone to the top of a hill to see the issue and to take part — so they hoped — in the looting after the battle. A cloud swept by them, a cloud filled with the neighing of stallions, and one of the men dropped instantly dead. "His heart burst with fright," said the one who lived to tell of it, judging from what his own heart had felt.

One of the believers was pursuing a man of the enemy, and the man's head flew from his body before he could reach him, struck off by an unseen hand. Others had brief glimpses of the Angels riding on horses whose hooves never touched the ground, led by Gabriel wearing a yellow turban, whereas the turbans of the other Angels were white, with one end left streaming behind them. Quraysh were soon utterly routed and put to flight, except in small groups where the Angels had not passed. In one of these Abū Jahl fought on with unabated ferocity until Mu'ādh, the brother of 'Awf, smote him to the ground. 'Ikrimah, the son of Abū Jahl, then

<sup>1</sup> Concise in Arabic but not in English: "O thou whom God hath made victorious, slay!"

<sup>2</sup> VIII, 17. <sup>3</sup> VIII, 9. <sup>4</sup> VIII, 12.

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struck Mu'ādh and all but severed his arm at the shoulder. Mu'ādh went on fighting with his good arm, while the other hung limply by its skin at his side; but when it became too painful he stooped, and putting his foot on his dead hand jerked himself up, tore off the encumbrant limb, and continued in pursuit of the enemy. Abū Jahl was still full of life, but Mu'awwidh, 'Awf's second brother, recognised him as he lay there and struck him a blow which left him dying. Then Mu'awwidh passed on and like 'Awf he fought until he was slain.

Most of Quraysh escaped, but some fifty were mortally wounded or killed outright in the battle or overtaken and cut down as they fled. About the same number were taken captive. The Prophet had said to his Companions: "I know that men of the sons of Hāshim and others have been brought out despite themselves, without any will to fight us." And he mentioned by name some of those whose lives should be spared if they were caught. But most of his army were in any case bent on holding their captives to ransom rather than putting them to the sword.

Since Quraysh so greatly outnumbered the believers, the possibility of their rallying and returning to the fight had still to be considered, and the Prophet was persuaded to withdraw to his shelter with Abū Bakr while some of the Helpers kept watch. Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh was standing on guard at the entrance with drawn sword, and when his fellow warriors started to bring their captives into the camp the Prophet was struck by the expression of strong disapproval on his face. "O Sa'd," he said, "it would seem that what they are doing is hateful in thine eyes." Sa'd vigorously assented; then he added: "This is the first defeat God hath inflicted on the idolaters; and I had rather see their men slaughtered than left alive." 'Umar was of the same opinion, but Abū Bakr was in favour of letting the captives live, in the hope that sooner or later they might become believers, and the Prophet inclined to his view. But later in the day, when 'Umar returned to the shelter, he found the Prophet and Abū Bakr in tears on account of a Revelation which had come: *It is not for a prophet to hold captives until he hath made great slaughter in the land.<sup>1</sup> Ye would have for yourselves the gains of this world and God would have for you the Hereafter, and God is Mighty, Wise.* But the Revelation then made it clear that the decision to spare the captives had been accepted by God and should not now be revoked; and the Prophet was given a message for the captives themselves: *O Prophet, say unto those captives who are in your hands: If God knoweth any good in your hearts, He will give you better than that which hath been taken from you, and He will forgive you. Verily God is Forgiving, Merciful.<sup>2</sup>*

There was, however, one man, Abū Jahl, who clearly could not be allowed to live. The general opinion was that he had been killed and the Prophet gave orders that his body should be searched for. 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd went out again to the battlefield and searched until he found the man who had done more than any other to stir up hatred of Islam amongst the people of Mecca. Abū Jahl still had enough life in him to recognise the enemy who now stood over him. 'Abd Allāh had been the first man to

<sup>1</sup> It was for wrongfully sparing a captive that Saul was deprived of his kingship (1 Samuel 15). <sup>2</sup> VIII, 70.

recite the Koran aloud in front of the Ka'bah, and Abū Jahl had struck him a severe blow and wounded him in the face, for he was merely a confederate of Zuhrah and a poor one at that, his mother having been a slave. 'Abd Allāh now placed his foot on the neck of Abū Jahl, who said: "Thou hast climbed high indeed, little shepherd." Then he asked him which way the fortunes of war had swung that day, his implication being that next time they would swing in the opposite direction. "God and His messenger have won," he answered. Then he cut off his head and took it to the Prophet.

Abū Jahl was not the only chief of Quraysh to be killed after the fighting had finished. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf was carrying coats of mail which he had taken as booty, and he passed by the corpulent Umayyah, who had lost his mount and was unable to escape. With him was his son 'Alī, whose hand he was holding. Umayyah called out to his one-time friend: "Take me prisoner, for I am worth more than coats of mail." 'Abd ar-Raḥmān agreed, and throwing down the mail he took him and his son each by a hand. But as he was leading them towards the camp Bilāl saw them and recognised his former master and torturer. "Umayyah," he exclaimed, "the head of disbelief! May I not live if he survive!" 'Abd ar-Raḥmān indignantly protested that they were his prisoners, but Bilāl repeated his cry: "May I not live if he survive!" "Wilt thou not hear me, thou son of a black mother?" said the outraged captor, whereupon Bilāl shouted with all the power of the voice that had won him the function of muezzin: "O Helpers of God, the head of disbelief, Umayyah! May I not live if he survive!" Men came running from all sides and narrowly encircled 'Abd ar-Raḥmān and his two captives. Then a sword was drawn and 'Alī was struck to the ground but not killed. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān let go the father's hand. "Make thine own escape," he said, "yet no escape there is, for by God I can avail thee nothing!" Pushing him aside the men closed in upon the prisoners with their swords and quickly made an end of them both. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān used to say in after years: "God have mercy on Bilāl! My coats of mail were lost to me, and he robbed me of my two prisoners."<sup>1</sup>

The Prophet gave orders that the bodies of all the infidels slain in the battle should be thrown into a pit; and when the body of 'Utbah was being dragged towards it the face of his son Abū Hudhayfah turned pale, and was filled with sorrow. The Prophet felt for him, and gave him a look of compassion, whereupon Abū Hudhayfah said: "O Messenger of God, it is not that I question thy command as to my father and the place where they have thrown him. But I used to know him as a man of wise counsel, forbearance and virtue, and I had hoped that these qualities would lead him unto Islam; and when I saw what had befallen him, and when I remembered what state of disbelief he died in after my hopes for him, it saddened me." Then the Prophet blessed Abū Hudhayfah and spoke to him words of kindness.

The peace and quiet of the camp was soon broken by voices raised in anger, for those who had stayed behind to guard the Prophet demanded a share of the booty, and those who had pursued the enemy and captured

<sup>1</sup> I.I. 448-9.

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men and armour and weapons were unwilling to give up what their own hands had taken. But before the Prophet had time to restore harmony by ordering an equitable distribution of all that had been captured, the desired effect was achieved more simply and more immediately by a Revelation: *They will question thee concerning the spoils of war. Say: The spoils of war are for God and the messenger.*<sup>1</sup> So the Prophet ordered that everything that had been taken, including the captives, should be brought together and no longer be considered as the private property of any individual. The order was at once obeyed without question.

The most eminent of the captives was the chief of 'Āmir, Suhayl, cousin of Sawdah and brother of her first husband. Others more closely connected with the Prophet were his uncle 'Abbās, his son-in-law, Zaynab's husband Abū l-'Āṣ, and his cousins 'Aqīl and Nawfal. He gave a general order that all the captives should be well treated, though clearly they had to be bound. But the thoughts of his uncle suffering such duress prevented the Prophet from sleeping that night, and he gave orders that his bonds should be loosed. Other captives received less indulgent treatment from their nearest of kin. Muṣ'ab passed by his brother Abū 'Azīz as he was being bound by the Helper who had captured him, and he said: "Bind him fast for his mother is rich, and it may be that she will ransom him from thee." "Brother," said Abū 'Azīz, "is this how thou dost commend me to others?" "He is now my brother in thy stead," said Muṣ'ab. None the less, Abū 'Azīz used to tell in after years of the good treatment he received from the Helpers, who took him to Medina whence his mother ransomed him for 4,000 dirhems.

As soon as it became clear that the eight hundred or more Meccan troops still at large had been routed beyond possibility of rallying, the Prophet sent 'Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥah to take the good tidings of victory to the people of Upper Medina, that is, the more southerly part of the city, and he sent Zayd to the people of Lower Medina. He himself remained with the army at Badr; and that night he went and stood by the pit into which the bodies of the enemies of Islam had been thrown. "O men of the pit," he said, "kinsmen of your Prophet, ill was the kinship ye showed him. Liar ye called me, when others took me in; against me ye fought, when others helped me to victory. Have ye found it to be true, what your Lord promised you? I have found it to be true, what my Lord promised me." Some of his Companions overheard him and wondered at his speaking to dead bodies. "Your hearing of what I say is not better than theirs," he said, "but they cannot answer me."<sup>2</sup>

Early next morning he set off for Medina with his army and the spoils. Two of the most valuable captives, that is those whose families could be relied upon to pay the full ransom of 4,000 dirhems, were Naḍr of 'Abd ad-Dār and 'Uqbah<sup>3</sup> of 'Abdu Shams. But these were two of the worst enemies of Islam, and if they were allowed to return they would immediately resume their evil activities, unless the Muslims' victory at Badr against such odds had made them reflect. The Prophet's eye was now constantly upon them; but there was no sign of any change of heart in

<sup>1</sup> VIII, 1.    <sup>2</sup> I.I. 454.    <sup>3</sup> See p. 98.

either man, and during the march it became clear to him that it was not in accordance with the Will of God that they should be left alive. At one of the first halts he gave orders that Naḍr should be put to death, and it was 'Alī who beheaded him. At a subsequent halt 'Uqbah suffered the same fate at the hands of a man of Aws. The Prophet divided the remainder of the captives and the rest of the spoils at a halt within three days' march of Medina, giving insofar as was possible an equal share to every man who had taken part in the expedition.

By that time Zayd and 'Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥah had reached Medina, and there was great rejoicing amongst all except the Jews and the hypocrites. But Zayd was given sad news in exchange for his good news: Ruqayyah was dead; 'Uthmān and Usāmah had just returned from burying her. The lamentations in that part of the city were still further increased when Zayd told 'Afrā' of the death of her two sons 'Awf and Mu'awwidh. Sawdah went between her own house and theirs to join the mourning in both. For 'Afrā' there was joy mingled with sorrow on account of the glorious manner of her sons' deaths. But Zayd had also to tell Rubayyi' of the death of her youthful son Ḥārithah ibn Surāqah, whose neck had been pierced by an arrow as he was drinking at the cistern; and as soon as the Prophet himself returned a few days later she came to him and asked him about her son; for she was troubled by the thought that the youth had been slain before the battle had started and before he had had time to strike a blow for Islam. "O Messenger of God," she said, "wilt thou not tell me of Ḥārithah, so that if he be in Paradise I may bear my loss with patience, and if not I may do penance for him with weeping." The Prophet had already answered such questions in general, for he had promised that a believer is rewarded for what he purposes, even if he should not achieve it: "Deeds are counted according to the intention."<sup>1</sup> But he now answered her in particular, saying: "Mother of Ḥārithah, in Paradise are many Gardens, and verily thy son hath attained unto the all-highest, Firdaws."<sup>2</sup>

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صلى الله عليه وسلم

# MUHAMMAD

his life based on the earliest sources

by

**Martin Lings**



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