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Personality in the Words of Dignitaries

The Greatness of Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Personality in the Words of Dignitaries

Although the status of Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Imamate suffices to become aware of his sublime position, stating part of the words related in this respect would make a great impression on the public minds.

Despite his enmity with Imam al-Ridha (a.s.), the Abbasid Ma'mun, who enjoyed a high status in knowledge and scholarship, has said about Imam al-Ridha (a.s.): "I do not know anyone superior to this man – meaning Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) – on the face of the earth."¹

Jamal al-Din Ahmad b. Nassaba, also known as Ibn 'Inaba, said, "Imam al-Ridha (a.s.), whose nickname is Aba al-Hasan, was matchless in his own time among the sons of Abu Talib."² And Dhahabi, who is famous for his deviation from Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), said about Imam al-Ridha (a.s.): "He was chief of Bani Hashim in his own time and the most forbearing and the wisest of them all..."³

As one of the notables of his time, Aba Salt Hirawi said, "I have not seen anyone more knowledgeable than 'Ali b. Musa al-Ridha (a.s.); no scholar saw his holiness unless he would confirm this same witness of mine..."⁴

Abu Nawas was one of the celebrated poets in Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) era. One day one of his friends protested to him why he had not written anything about such a personality as Imam 'Ali b. Musa al-Ridha (a.s.), despite knowing him. Abu Nawas replied: "I swear by God that his greatness prevented me from this; someone like me is not able to eulogize the like of him."

Then he wrote a poem, the brief rendering of which is as follows:

"They tell me: How come you, who are a matchless orator, fail to eulogize Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) despite his sublime character? I said, "I cannot eulogize the Imam to whose father Gabriel was a servant."⁵

One day Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) came out while riding a nimble mule. Abu Nawas approached him, greeted, and said, "O son of the Prophet! I have composed some poetry; I would like you to hear it." The

Imam said, “Recite it!” Abu Nawas recited three lines of his poetry, including this one:

“Whoever is not ‘Alawi in his lineage,

Does not have any honor from his past.”

The Imam (a.s.) said to his retainer: “How much is remained of our expenditure?” He replied: “Three hundred *dinars* (every *dinar* costing a *mithqal* – equivalent to 5 grams).” His holiness told him to give it to Abu Nawas. When the Imam returned home, he said to his retainer: “Maybe he would regard that amount as little, take this mule to him, as well.”^{[6](#)}

^{1.} Al-Irshad, 2/261.

^{2.} ‘Umdat al-Matalib, 198. See: A’lam al-Hidaya, p. 21.

^{3.} A’lam al-Hidaya, p. 21.

^{4.} I’lam al-Wara, 2/64. See: A’lam al-Hidaya, p. 20.

^{5.} Kashf al-Ghumma, 3/158.

^{6.} A’lam al-Hidaya, p. 22.

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