

Two impostors

The organized conspiracy which was afoot against the Commander of the Faithful did not come to end even after the defeat of his opponents in the Battle of the Camel, because the aspirations of his opponents and the causes of their enmity against him were still there. If one group of those who conspired against him was in Hijaz the other was in Syria and both of these groups had many supporters of Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr. The ring-leaders of these people were the governors and other officers who had accumulated large wealth illegally during the period of Uthman and did not expect any such indulgence from Ali.

The supporters of Ali in Hijaz were all indigent believers or the pious companions of the Prophet. His position in Hijaz was similar to that of his cousin, the Prophet and if there was any difference it was only due to the time and circumstances. The similarity is proved by the fact that his enemies were mostly the Quraysh, who had been the enemies of the Prophet earlier. Ali says: "Let the Quraysh involve themselves in deviation and do not bother about the dissensions which they create or the egotism which they display. They have united to fight against me just as they had united to fight against the Prophet of God".

In Syria Mu`awiya was busy in his nefarious activities against Ali – the lawful caliph. He was spending enormous sums of money and making very attractive promises to win the support of the people. He had also a large army of which he was the despotic head. This army may briefly be described thus: "They were foolish mercenaries. They were paid by Mu`awiya who took care that as far as possible they should remain devoid of intellect".

We mention below an incident which explains the nature of the soldiery of Mu`awiya and also shows that he was convinced that his rival Ali was on the right, and it was not difficult for him to achieve success against him because he was to face Ali having with him (Mu`awiya) the soldiers, who did not possess the capability of differentiating between injustice and justice or in other words between Mu`awiya and Ali.

After the army of Ali returned from Siffin, a Kufan came to Damascus mounted on his camel. One of the Syrians claimed that the she-camel belonged to him and had been snatched away from him by the Kufan during the Battle of Siffin. The matter came up before Mu`awiya and the Syrian produced fifty

witnesses to prove that the she-camel was his. Mu`awiya, therefore, decided the case in his favour. The Kufan said to Mu`awiya: "May God forgive you! It is a he-camel and not a she-camel. Mu`awiya said that as the decision had been taken it was not possible to reverse it. When the court was dispersed and there was no one there, he called the Kufan secretly and enquired from him about the value of his camel. When he mentioned its cost Mu`awiya gave him double the amount and something more and said: "When you reach Kufa tell Ali that I will bring to fight against him one hundred thousand such persons who don't differentiate between a he-camel and a she-camel".

Jahiz has also confirmed these remarks of Mu`awiya and has explained as to why the Syrians were so obedient to him. He says: "The reason for the Syrians being so submissive was that they were very stupid and foolish. It was in their nature to follow others blindly and to stick to the views once formed by them. If someone was slandered before them in his absence, they never cared to verify if it was true or false".

As mentioned above the conspiracies of the enemies of Ali were not limited to the Battle of the Camel but it was only a link of the chain of even greater conspiracies against him. After defeating the army of Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr, he started making preparations to bring Mu`awiya to his knees. His sole object was to guide the people towards high morals and good deeds, to prevent them from committing oppression and to establish a government which should consider the protection of their rights to be its foremost duty.

Ali's method was quite different from those who flatter the powerful, forgive the rebels to seek their assistance, and approach the influential persons to help them in establishing their rule.

We have already mentioned before that Ali did not seek any recompense from the people for the services rendered by him to them except that they should obey him. He often uttered this sentence: "If knowledge, wisdom and justice could be measured I would have measured them for you gratis. However, what is necessary for it is that I should get competent persons and intelligent brains".

Mu`awiya was not a receptacle in which knowledge, wisdom and justice could be contained. Justice and public rights were not safe in his hands and if they were left with him there was no surety that he would pass them on to the people. That was why Ali did not allow him to continue as the Governor of Syria. If Ali had been lax in administering justice it was possible that he might have practised simulation with Mu`awiya.

Mu`awiya did not take oath of allegiance to Ali and did not obey his orders. This shows that he was planning to establish a kingdom of his own. Opposition to Ali by Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr and the consequent Battle of the Camel provided him an opportunity to strengthen himself.

After the Battle of the Camel was over Ali wrote letters to Mu`awiya impressing upon him to refrain from antagonism and asking him to take oath of allegiance to him as had been done by others. Mu`awiya replied to him as follows: "I swear by my own life that I do not mind whosoever may have sworn

allegiance to you. You would have been like Abu Bakr and Umar if you had been innocent of the murder of Uthman. However, you instigated the Muhajirs to revolt against him and restrained the Ansar from helping him. The ignorant people obeyed you and the weak became powerful because of you.

The Syrians will not refrain from fighting against you unless you hand over to them those persons who murdered Uthman. Thereafter the question of the caliphate will be decided through a consultative council. The people of Hijaz were the rulers of the people so long as they supported truth. They have now forsaken truth and consequently the Syrians now deserve to rule. The argument advanced by you against Talha and Zubayr does not hold good in the case of the Syrians. They took the oath of allegiance to you but we have not done so.

As regards your excellence and greatness in Islam and your kinship with the Prophet it is something which I cannot deny. And peace (be upon you)”.

The letter reproduced above makes the intention of Mu`awiya quite clear. He wanted to avoid taking oath of allegiance to Ali on one pretext or another. He knew that he could not deceive Ali with his words. He was also aware that Ali had nothing to do with the murder of Uthman. He, therefore, said that even if those persons who had taken oath of allegiance to Umar and Abu Bakr had also taken such oath to him and he deserved to become the caliph it was incumbent upon him to hand over to the Syrians the murderers of Uthman who had been given asylum by him.

However, even Ali's innocence in regard to Uthman's murder was proved Mu`awiya was not prepared to acknowledge him as the lawful caliph but wanted the matter to be referred to the consultative council. Furthermore, he was not prepared to allow the people of Hijaz and Iraq to select the caliph, because, according to him this right had been transferred to the Syrians because they were the rightful rulers.

It is evident that if all these conditions were fulfilled none other than Mu`awiya could become the caliph.

Ali showed unusual patience. However, this patience was not due to any lack of resolution or laxity on his part. The position was that at that time the Arabs were divided into two groups and one of them was bound to be defeated in spite of the differences between them. On the one side were the weak and helpless persons who wanted a life of peace and security for themselves as well as for their brethren. There were also the pious companions of the Prophet who longed for a country where justice should prevail. And on the other side were those who wanted to exploit the helpless people and to accumulate wealth by all possible means.

The first group was headed by Ali ibn Abi Talib. All those who desired justice were his supporters and well wishers. The chief of the second group was Mu`awiya bin Abi Sufyan, and all those who were accustomed to oppress others were his followers. The recompense for the first group was their clear conscience and the gift for the second group was Mu`awiya's treasure. There were numerous truth-loving persons who left Mu`awiya and joined Ali and similarly there were many worldly-minded persons who left Ali and went over to Mu`awiya. We mention here some cases in which some persons left Ali and

joined Mu`awiya. It will become clear what sort of people they were and why they sided with Mu`awiya.

A man named Yazid bin Hujyah Tamimi was appointed by Ali as Governor of Ray and the adjoining areas. He accumulated a large amount of wealth and misappropriated it. When Ali came to know about it he called him back and imprisoned him. He appointed a man named Sa`d as a sentry. When Sa`d went to sleep Yazid slipped away from the prison. He mounted his animal of riding and reached Damascus where he joined Mu`awiya.

He composed the following verses with regard to his escape: "I mounted my animal of riding deceiving Sa`d and came over to Damascus. I chose a superior person".

"When Sa`d went to sleep I escaped. Sa`d is nothing more than a misguided and perplexed slave".

This Yazid satirized Ali in his verses which he sent to Iraq and made it known to Ali that he (Yazid) was his enemy. Mu`awiya gave him a large sum of money whereupon he praised him and the people of Syria, and said that Syria was a sacred land and the Syrians were true believers.

He said: "I loved the Syrians in preference to others and wept bitterly for Uthman".

"Syria is sacred land and its inhabitants are the true believers and the followers of the Qur'an".

Another man named Za`qa` bin Sa`d was appointed by the Commander of the Faithful as the ruler of Kaskar. He accumulated a large quantity of wealth by all possible means and spent it lavishly. So much so that he married a woman and gave her one hundred thousand dirhams as dowry. When he came to know that Ali had become aware of his malpractices he left for Syria taking away as much money as he possibly could.

Ali punished a man named Najashi for drinking wine. He was one of the supporters of Ali and, therefore, thought that he deserved indulgence as compared with others. He did not like that Ali the Commander of the Faithful should punish him as he had punished others. When Mu`awiya promised him asylum he, therefore, ran away to Syria. On arriving there he composed this verse satirizing Ali.

"Who will convey this message of mine to Ali that I am safe now and do not feel any danger".

When Najashi was punished many Yemenites were annoyed, as he, too, was one of them. They, therefore, deserted Ali and joined Mu`awiya.

Just as the worldly-minded people are numerically larger than others the number of those who deserted Ali and joined Mu`awiya was also large.

Every person is not capable of tolerating the truth or of saying or doing the right thing. Therefore every person could not love Ali who was very strict in the matter of truth and justice and could not deviate from truth and righteousness even for his very near relatives. In the circumstances why should that governor have not left him and joined Mu`awiya whom Imam Ali wrote as under: "I swear by God that if I come to know that you have misappropriated the property of the Muslims even to a very small extent I shall

award you a punishment which will make you indigent, heavy-laden and disgraced”.

Similarly why should that governor not have deserted him when he addressed in these words: “I know that you have made the Public Treasury empty and have grabbed whatever you could lay your hands on. You have misappropriated whatever came into your hands. Will you please send me the account that you have maintained?”

How could mean persons attain to the heights of piety and the truthfulness and how could such a ruler like the following message of the Commander of the Faithful?

“If the information which I have received about you is correct, your camel and the lace of your shoe are better than you”.

How could the powerful capitalists and their unjust associates tolerate that Ali should be the caliph – the same Ali who wanted to spend the wealth for the welfare of the common man and was always at war with the oppressors and their associates? How could they like a caliph who said: “I swear by God that it is preferable for me to lie on thorns and be chained rather than that I should oppress anyone or usurp even the most ordinary thing”.

Why should these people not have rebelled against him who openly said: “It is my duty to wage a war against oppression and the oppressors, and against those who unlawfully grab the wealth of others, and I shall have to account for it on the Day of Judgement”. Had Ali not considered this responsibility essential, he would have left matters as they were. He would have left the people to their own fate. Some would have been the oppressors and some the oppressed.

He says: “If the Almighty God had not taken a promise from the rulers that they will not sit quiet in the event of the oppressor becoming oversatiated with food and the oppressed one remaining hungry, I would have thrown the reins of the caliphate on his shoulders (i.e. would have allowed the affairs to continue to take the turn they had already taken) and would have satisfied its last one like the first one. You would then have found your world to be more worthless in my eyes than the sneezing of a goat”.

How could the treacherous persons let such a person assume the administration of their affairs when Ali held the following view about them and his contemporaries: “A person who knows how he will have to render his account cannot be treacherous. We are living during a time in which the people commit treachery and deceit considering it to be prudence, and the ignorant persons treat it to be a good policy”.

That is why a large number of powerful persons who opposed Ali were those who had amassed large quantities of wealth by unlawful means and wished Mu`awiya to make them richer at the cost of the common man and through the Public Treasury. As regards persons other than these capitalists who were against Ali they were those foolish persons who did not know what was good and what was harmful for them.

As we have mentioned above the Arabs of that time were divided into many groups. Every group was

obedient to a chief. They obeyed their chiefs blindly and did not ask them as to why they were pleased or displeased with someone. Ali has referred to his contemporaries of this kind, time and again. In his remarks about them there is grief as well as annoyance of a kind father with regard to the children who disobey him and provide intentionally or unintentionally, the means of their own ruin. He says about them: "I complain to God against those people who are spending their lives in ignorance".

Addressing those people he says: "Your enemies are not unmindful of you whereas you have forgotten everything on account of your heedlessness".

Explaining how such people feel when they are called upon to fight against the rebels he says: "Some of them come unwillingly, others make false excuses and still others withhold assistance intentionally".

He adds: "The questioner from amongst them tries to confuse and one who gives a reply gives it without reflecting on it. Usually the sentiments of pleasure and displeasure make a man holding correct views deviate from the right path. As regards that person from amongst them whose intellect is mature it is possible that one look may impress him and one word may bring about a revolution in his mind".

In his last sentence the Commander of the Faithful has described the mental condition of the distinguished personalities of his time in a very lucid manner. He says: "During this time if there are some sensible persons their sensibility is subservient to their greed and avarice and their views depend on their pleasure and displeasure. If they are pleased with somebody they take decisions in his favour without any justification; if they are displeased with someone they give wrong decisions in his case simply on account of their displeasure.

As regards those with mature intellect one look at the things which they like is sufficient to make them deviate from the path already being followed by them, and one word of an influential and powerful person or a briber is sufficient to make them support injustice and assist the oppressor".

* * * * *

When, after the defeat of the people of the camel, the centre of conspiracies against Ali shifted to Damascus, Mu`awiya bin Abi Sufyan the leader of Bani Umayyah intensified his preparations to fight against Ali and topple down his government. On the receipt of the first letter of Ali wherein he had asked him to take the oath of allegiance to him like others, he summoned to Damascus for consultation all those persons, from whom he could expect assistance. The most prominent among them was Amr ibn al-Aas. On receipt of Ali's letter Mu`awiya wrote immediately to Amr:

"You must have come to know the fate which Talha, Zubayr and Ayesha have met. Marwan, after having left Basra, has since joined me. Now Jarir bin Abdullah has brought to me a letter from Ali. I do not wish to send him a reply without consulting you. You should, therefore, come as early as possible".

On receiving Mu`awiya's letter Amr called his sons Abdullah and Muhammad to consult them about the

reply which might be sent by him. Abdullah said: "I think that when the Prophet breathed his last he was pleased with you, and Abu Bakr and Umar were also pleased with you when they died. In case you corrupt your faith now by siding with Mu`awiya, you and he both will go to Hell on the Day of Judgment".

Then Amr asked his second son Muhammad to express his views in the matter. He replied: "You should go expeditiously and join Mu`awiya. It is better to reach early and become a chief rather than go later and become a camp-follower".

In the morning Amr ibn al-Aas called his slave named Durdan and asked him to saddle his animal of riding. Then he asked him to unsaddle it. He got it saddled and unsaddled thrice. Durdan asked him: "Sir! What is the matter? I hope you won't mind if I tell you what is in your heart". Amr said: "Speak out what you have to say". Thereupon Durdan said: "At present this world and the hereafter have created a storm in your mind. You reflect that the hereafter is with Ali but not this world and this world is with Mu`awiya but not the hereafter. You are wavering between these two. My suggestion is that you should stay at home. If the believers succeed, you may pass your day amidst them and if the worldly-minded are victorious, they will certainly need your assistance".

However, the promises made by Mu`awiya to Amr ibn al-Aas were not so insignificant that he might have ignored them and might have stayed at home acting on the advice of his son Abdullah or his slave Durdan. He decided to oppose Ali and joined Bani Umayyah and Mu`awiya.

As Amr ibn al-Aas was active in plotting against Ali in no lesser a degree than Mu`awiya it is necessary to give briefly his life sketch so that we may know the reason why he left Ali and joined Mu`awiya's company and what the value he had for his company.

Before he adopted Islam Amr ibn al-Aas was well known for his bargaining and profiteering. This is a fact which cannot be denied. He has himself explained clearly this trait of his in these words: "On return from the Battle of the Ditch I gathered together some men from amongst the Quraysh who usually accepted my views and heard me attentively. I said to them: "I swear by God that I can foresee that Muhammad is going to succeed.

In the circumstances it will be better for us to migrate to Ethiopia permanently and settle there. It is better to live under the Negus than to submit to Muhammad. If Muhammad overcomes our people we shall remain beyond his reach and if our people overpower him we shall stand to gain much. They agreed with me and said: "Whatever you have said is absolutely correct. Then I asked them to procure some presents for the Negus.....".

Dr. Hasan Ibrahim Hasan of Egypt who is a great admirer of Amr and has obtained a doctorate from the London University on the basis of his thesis entitled "Amr son of Aas" writes thus while commenting on the nature of his Islam:

"When we look into the affairs of Quraysh that in the beginning every one of them was bent upon

destroying Islam. Every victory of the Prophet and every defeat of the Quraysh instead of dismaying them, made them more furious. However, after they had suffered successive defeats and all their chiefs and distinguished men were killed the young men felt very uneasy and began thinking about their future line of action. They could see darkness on one side and a ray of hope on the other.

They knew that even if they sided with the ever-increasing strength of Islam at that stage they would stand to gain. However, they also feared that by doing so they would lose the honour and dignity which they enjoyed among their people and they would also lose their former freedom. Some of them ignored all these misgivings and reaching Madina took the oath of allegiance to the Prophet. Others who could not take any decision desisted from opposing Islam and when it became perfectly clear to them that in any case Muhammad was going to gain victory over Quraysh they also decided to avail of the opportunity before it was too late and adopted Islam. This happened before the conquest of Mecca.

The foremost persons among the two respective groups were Khalid bin Walid and Amr ibn al-Aas. Amr had gone away from Arabia to Ethiopia to study the conditions there. However, when he realized that very good relations existed between the Prophet and the Negus, and in Arabia Islam was going to reach the height of success and the fall of Mecca was a matter of days only, he decided to join those who had already embraced Islam and to do voluntarily what he would have to do willy-nilly later". (***Amr ibn al-Aas*** by Dr. Hasan Ibrahim Hasan Egyptian also Urdu translation published by Idara Maktaba Jadid, Lahore. p.43-44).

Opportunism remained alive in the heart of Amr ibn al-Aas throughout his life. In this respect he was just like the chiefs of the tribes and other distinguished persons against whom Abu Bakr, Umar and Ali had to wage war. We have explained in the foregoing pages that when, Amr ibn al-Aas was the Governor of Egypt, he accumulated a large amount of wealth. Umar ordered him to surrender half of it to the Public Treasury. He tried to evade payment on different pretexts but Umar was not satisfied. He wrote to Amr ibn al-Aas saying: "I swear by God that I am not going to be deceived by your fraudulent words. You people have amassed wealth and are not afraid of anything.....Look here! You collect disgrace and leave fire behind you as inheritance. I am sending Muhammad son of Muslima to you. You should hand over half of your wealth to him".

When Muhammad son of Muslima met Amr with the letter in question he got very sumptuous dishes prepared for him, but Muhammad declined to eat them. Amr asked him: "Do you consider it unlawful to take meal in my house?" Muhammad replied: "If you had placed before me the food which is ordinarily offered to the guests I would not have refused to eat it. However, the food which you have arranged for me is a prelude to corruption (i.e. it is nothing short of bribe). You should, therefore, remove this food from here and surrender to me half of your property.

Amr, therefore, handed over to him one half of everything belonging to him. A pair of shoes was left with him out of which Muhammad took one shoe also, and let the other shoe remain with him. Amr ibn al-Aas could not tolerate this. He, therefore, said to Muslima: "Woe be to the time when I was appointed as

governor by Umar. By God I am aware of the condition of Umar's father Khattab when he used to carry a bundle of firewood on his head and Umar too carried another bundle. Both of them did not have enough clothes to hide their bodies. Each of them wore a loin-cloth which did not reach even upto their knees. And I swear by God that my father Aas lived such a luxurious life that he was not satisfied even with a silken coat with gold buttons on it”.

This incident shows how keen Amr ibn al-Aas was to avail of every opportunity to acquire wealth. It also shows the complex mentality of the distinguished persons. Amr could not find any fault with Umar and his father except that they were poor and did not have enough clothes to wear and worked with their hand and carried bundles of firewood on their heads and he could not mention any quality of his own father except that he used to wear silken clothes.

It would be wrong to imagine that what Amr ibn al-Aas said about Umar was occasioned by sudden agitation and anger. No. That was not so. The fact is that he had always been thinking that as Umar and his father were poor and his own father Aas was a rich man his father was better than Khattab and he himself was better than Umar. Amr's point of view was that all human beings were not equal.

According to him some persons were mean and others were noble and the criterion of nobleness was one's descent and nothing else. Whoever belonged to a noble and rich family was noble and one was low-born was despicable. The noble persons possessed rights which were not admissible to others and it was the duty of the people to obey them. All historians agree that as regards the administration and government of Egypt Amr's view was that it was necessary for one who wanted improvement and development not to lend ears to the complaints made against the nobility by the persons belonging to the lower classes”. (Al-Islam wa al-Hazarat al-Arabiyyah).

In this way Amr ibn al-Aas was completely occupied with greed for indulgence and luxury. He believed that exploitation of the lower classes was the birth-right of those who belonged to the noble families. At times his mind wavered as to whether he should keep his conscience alive or to kill it for worldly gains, but he soon decided in favour of luxury and wealth. As mentioned above the same thing happened when Mu`awiya called him. He reflected for some time as to whether he should side with Ali or with Mu`awiya, but eventually he decided to proceed to Syria.

The historians and narrators attribute some verses to Amr ibn al-Aas. He composed them while he was going to Mu`awiya. In these verses he has clearly expressed his views about Ali and Mu`awiya. In his eyes Ali was a very great man and Mu`awiya stood no comparison with him. It might he said that he had two hearts in his bosom. One of them stopped him from going to Mu`awiya whereas the other ordered him to go and see Mu`awiya. He concludes his poem with the following verses:

“I adopted the world intentionally on account of avarice, although there was no sound reason for adopting the world”.

“I know very well the losses involved in adopting the world, but it is also a fact that I possess various

worldly desires”.

“The real thing is that my mind desires to lead a life of honour and dignity. Who can agree to lead a life of humiliation”.

According to Amr ibn al-Aas life of honour and dignity was confined to immediate worldly gains and Umayyad promises. Just as in the days of Umar the criterion of dignity in his eyes was such that his own father used to wear silken clothes, the standard of humiliation, according to him, during the time of Ali was assisting who neither did any bargaining himself nor allowed others to do it. This standard of humiliation was like that of the poor clothing of Umar and his father.

When Amr ibn al-Aas reached Mu`awiya's court the latter said to him: “O Abu Abdillah! I invite you to perform jihad against that man (i.e. Ali ibn Abi Talib) who has disobeyed God created dissension among the Muslims and dispersed the nation”. Amr ibn al-Aas said: “What will you give me if I join you to fight against Ali knowing as you do that the matter is so dangerous”.

Mu`awiya said: “I shall give you whatever you ask for”. Amr ibn al-Aas said: “I want the Governorship of Egypt”.

Thereafter a long deceptive conversation took place between them. Each of them tried to dupe the other. Each of them had his personal gain in view.

Their deceptive conversation, however, ended with bargaining with each other. Amr ibn al-Aas acknowledged Mu`awiya as the caliph and took oath of allegiance to him and in return Mu`awiya gave him absolute authority over Egypt and its inhabitants and promised non-interference from his side. Ali has drawn a picture of this bargaining in the following words:

“He did not swear allegiance to Mu`awiya until he agreed to pay the price of his allegiance. May the hands of one who swore this allegiance be not victorious and successful! And may the purchaser of this allegiance be disgraced and humiliated! (The time has now come that) you should get ready for war and procure the necessary equipment”.

Ali further says about this bargaining: “I have been given to understand that Amr ibn al-Aas has not taken oath of allegiance to Mu`awiya for nothing. He made him agree beforehand that he would have to pay its price – that he would have to give a present for forsaking the faith”.

Amr ibn al-Aas did not content himself with the aforesaid bargain. His motive was something else. He advised Mu`awiya to organize a propaganda movement against Ali so that it might be useful in connection with a war which might be fought later. He said to him inter alia: “Send reliable persons to different cities to propagate that it is Ali who has killed Uthman”.

Amr ibn al-Aas did all this in spite of the fact that he knew very well that Ali was not at all involved in the murder of Uthman and in fact the party to which he himself belonged had a great hand in the matter, as

we have explained in an earlier chapter.

When at the time of the Battle of Siffin Mu`awiya asked Amr ibn al-Aas to array the forces he did not comply with his wish until he had obtained a promise from him once again that when Ali was killed and his (Mu`awiya's) govern- ment was established he would give him the Governorship of Egypt.

Another proof of the fact that Amr ibn al-Aas was very skilled in bargaining and safeguarding his own interests is that when he and Abu Musa Ash`ari sat together in connection with the well-known event of Arbitration and those who were representing the two parties suggested the names of different persons for the caliphate, Abu Musa put forth the name of Abdullah bin Umar al-Khattab. Others also supported him saying that Abdullah was the most deserving person for the caliphate. Abu Musa said time and again: "I would like to revive the name of Umar al-Khattab) if I could. Thereupon Amr ibn al-Aas said to Abu Musa: "If you want to make Abdullah bin Umar the caliph for his religiousness why don't you select my son Abdullah for that office? You are well aware of his merits and competence".

This was how Amr ibn al-Aas used to bargain. He had come as an arbitrator nominated by Mu`awiya but as soon as he felt that there was a possibility of his son becoming the caliph he tried to avail of the opportunity and put forward his name for that office. At that time he also forgot that in the Battle of Siffin he was the Commander-in-Chief of Mu`awiya's forces and in the event of success he had promised him the Governorship of Egypt, and ignored the fact that he was the arbitrator from Mu`awiya's side and the arbitration was also taking place on account of his machinations and deceit.

The fact is that both Mu`awiya and Amr ibn al-Aas knew that they were doing injustice to Ali. In the heart of their hearts they were aware that Ali was better than them. Both of them were endeavouring to achieve their own purpose. Apparently they were friends and well-wishers of each other but in reality they were very much inimical and their enmity became manifest from the colour of their faces and from the sentences they uttered. After the Battle of Siffin was over Mu`awiya asked his courtiers one day: "What is the most surprising thing?" Every one of them expressed his views on the subject. When the turn of Amr ibn al-Aas came he said: The most strange thing is, that falsehood should gain victory over truth". By saying this he alluded to Mu`awiya and Ali.

Mu`awiya said in reply at once: "No. The most strange thing is that a man may, without fearing another man and knowing that he can do him no harm, give him something which he does not deserve". He meant that he had given the Governorship of Egypt to Amr ibn al-Aas although Amr could do him no harm and did not also deserve to be the governor.

The views held by Amr ibn al-Aas about Ali and Mu`awiya become manifest from the acknowledgement made by him in these words: "I have been deceived. It was a great mistake to leave Ali and to support Mu`awiya". This admission and acknowledgement by Amr shows the extreme moral degradation of Mu`awiya's associates and supporters. They were deceiving themselves intentionally.

When Ali was martyred and soon afterwards Mu`awiya became the sole ruler of the Islamic territories he

began to adopt dilly-dallying tactics in appointing Amr ibn al-Aas as the Governor of Egypt. Amr demanded that Mu`awiya should fulfil his promise. However, when Mu`awiya did not comply with his request he wrote a long poem and sent it to him. Some of its verses are as under:

“O Mu`awiya! Do not forget the prize which you promised me. Do not deviate from the right path”.

“O son of Hind! I assisted you against the greatest and the most distinguished chief (i.e. Ali ibn Abi Talib) on account of my ignorance”.

“What comparison do you bear with Ali? How can a sword be compared with an axe, the Milky Way with the last layer of the earth, or Ali with Mu`awiya”.

On receiving this poem Mu`awiya immediately appointed Amr ibn al-Aas as Governor of Egypt.

How much Mu`awiya and Amr ibn al-Aas, whom their personal interests, and give and take matters had brought together, hated each other is also proved by the following incident:

When Mu`awiya deputed Amr ibn al-Aas to strengthen the plot of Arbitration and to take advantage of the foolishness of Abu Musa Ash`ari, he (Mu`awiya) said something which displeased Amr. He, therefore, recited a satirical verse about Mu`awiya which is well-known. Thereupon Mu`awiya asked one of his courtiers named Abdur Rahman bin Umm Hakam to reply to that verse and write a satire on him. Abdur Rahman satirized Amr in a number of verses wherein he threatened and cursed him and also censured him for having run away from the battlefield of Siffin while he was facing Ali. Abdur Rahman said: “You should give up rebellion and stubbornness because a rebel is an accursed person. Did you not run away on the day of Siffin while facing Ali? You were very keen to save your life and feared you might have to face death, although every person has to die one day”.

Evidently both of these persons possessed a strange mentality. On the one hand they had joined hands to claim revenge for the murder of Uthman and to declare Ali to be an oppressor and take revenge on him, and on the other hand they threatened, abused and censured each other.

There was a sect among the Muslims who decided most of the matters according to the dictates of reason and good conscience. They have treated both Mu`awiya and Amr ibn al-Aas to be treacherous, because they fought against Ali who was the lawful caliph. The Mu`tazilah held this view. The Mu`tazilah were more bold as compared with other Muslim sects in the matter of analysis and criticism of the actions of the people. As explained by the author of *al-Munyah wal-Amal*, most of the Mu`atazilites have dissociated themselves from Mu`awiya and Amr ibn al-Aas and declared them to be thieves and robbers, who looted public property. (See *Fajr al-Islam* p.240).

Mu`awiya was exactly as depicted by Ali. He says: “He is a man with a big mouth and a swollen belly. He ate what he could find and was on the look-out what he could not get”.

As regards Amr ibn al-Aas he says: “He told lies and broke promises. If he wanted to borrow something from another person he pestered him for it, and if someone else asked him for something he showed

stinginess. And if he made any pact or promise he violated it”.

All these qualities were common in Mu`awiya and Amr ibn al-Aas and that is why they joined hands with each other. When a man with a big mouth also possesses a big belly he naturally eats what he finds, and remains on the look-out for more. He does not care whether the thing being utilized by him is lawful or unlawful nor is he acquainted with the sense of equity and justice, cruelty and oppression, good and bad, and virtue and meanness. And when a person is a liar he breaks the promises made by him. When he wants to borrow something from another he presses him hard but shows stinginess when he himself is asked for something. He violates the pacts and promises made by him. He does all these things for his personal gain.

What Ali has said about both of them means that their actions were based on their selfish motives. In the circumstances nothing could prevent them from collaborating with each other on treachery and rebellion especially when both of them stood to gain by it, although in the heart of their hearts they hated each other. Ali refers to this fact when he says:

“I have read the letter of these two evil-doers (Mu`awiya and Amr ibn al-Aas) who have joined hands to disobey the orders of God”.

* * * * *

The enemies of Ali plotted against him with great dexterity. The conspirators were many and their aims and objects were also different from one another. They were, however, united on one point and it was that Ali should not be their ruler. Mu`awiya had a great hand in organizing and strengthening the conspiracy. He was the ring-leader and all others were his supporters and followers. In fact it was he who caused the Battle of the Camel also. If he had not provided equipment to the insurgents, without himself coming into the forefront, this battle would not have taken place. This claim is also proved by the fact that immediately on receiving information about Ali's having assumed the caliphate he sent a letter to Zubayr through a man belonging to the tribe of `Amis. The letter read as follows:

“From Mu`awiya bin Abu Sufyan to the Commander of the Faithful Abdullah al-Zubayr. After salam (greetings) I have to inform you that I have obtained the oath of allegiance to you from the people of Syria and they have promptly acknowledged you as their caliph. Now it is necessary for you to endeavour that the people of Basra and Kufa should also join you, because if the citizens of these two cities submit to you, the matters will become very easy for you. After you I have obtained the oath for Talha bin Ubaydullah. Now you claim the revenge of the murder of Uthman on Ali and should invite the people to yourselves. Both of you should make utmost efforts in this matter and quickly too. May God grant you success and destroy your enemies”.

When Zubayr received the said letter he was very happy and showed it to Talha also. Both of them were deceived by Mu`awiya's show of sincerity. They immediately broke their allegiance to Ali, acting on the advice of Mu`awiya, and decided to fight against him. Consequently the Battle of the Camel took place.

Mu`awiya's desire was fulfilled as he wanted that the caliph of the time Ali and the aspirants of caliphate Talha and Zubayr should fight together so that their strength might be weakened.

When the Battle of the Camel was over Mu`awiya spent enormous sums of money to bribe those about whom he felt that they would assist him or would not at least support Ali. And if he knew that someone would neither help him nor would remain a silent spectator when he (Mu`awiya) revolted, he adopted novel methods to deceive and misguide them. Amr ibn al-Aas was Mu`awiya's chief adviser and helper in all these conspiracies. Ali did not try to coax or flatter Amr ibn al-Aas and to win him over even when he came to know that he was collaborating with Mu`awiya. He remained as upright and truthful as ever and even the alliance of Amr ibn al-Aas and Mu`awiya did not affect his steadfastness. He, therefore, wrote a letter to Amr ibn al-Aas as follows:

“You have made your faith pursue the world of a man, whose deviation is not something hidden, it is known to all. He is one who brands even a noble-minded who sits with him, and befools one who is judicious and forbearing. You have followed him and crave for his crumbs just as a dog followed a lion looking at its claws greedily and expecting to get the remains of its prey. By doing so you have ruined your present world as well as the hereafter, although you would have gained your object even if you had stuck to truth. Now if God grants me victory over you and the son of Abu Sufyan I shall punish both of you properly for your misdeeds and even if I cannot gain control over you and you continue to live after me your fate will be extremely bad”.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/voice-human-justice-sautul-adalatil-insaniyah-george-jordac/two-impostors#comment-0>