

وَمِنْ خُطْبَةٍ لَهُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ

From one of his sermons

فِي تَخْلُوفِ أَهْلِ النَّهْرَوَانَ

Warning the people of Nahrawān [1] of their fate

فَأَنَا نَذِيرٌ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَصِيحُوا صَرَغِي بِأَثْنَاءِ هَذَا النَّهْرِ، وَبِأَهْضَامِ هَذَا الْغَائِطِ، عَلَى غَيْرِ بَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ، وَلَا سُلْطَانَ مَبِينٍ مَعَكُمْ، قَدْ طَوَّحْتُ بِكُمْ الدَّارَ، وَاحْتَبَلْتُكُمْ الْمَقْدَارَ، وَقَدْ كُنْتُ نَهَيْتُكُمْ عَنْ هَذِهِ الْحُكُومَةِ فَأَبَيْتُمْ عَلَيَّ إِبَاءَ الْمُخَالَفِينَ [فِي بَعْضِ النُّسخِ: الْمُنَابِذِينَ]، حَتَّى صَرَفْتُ رَأْيِي إِلَى هَوَاكُمُ، وَأَنْتُمْ مَعَاشِرٌ أَخْفَاءُ الْهَامِ، سَفَهَاءُ الْأَحْلَامِ، وَلَمْ آتِ - لَا أَبَا لَكُمْ - بِجِرَاءٍ، وَلَا أَرَدْتُ لَكُمْ ضَرًا.

I am warning you that you will be killed on the bend of this canal and on the level of this low area, while you will have no clear argument before Allāh or any open authority with you. You have come out of your houses, and then divine decree entangled you. I had advised you against this arbitration, but you rejected my advice like adversaries and opponents, till I turned my ideas in the direction of your wishes. You are a group whose heads are devoid of wit and intelligence. May you have no father! (Allāh's woe be to you!) I have not put you in any calamity, nor wished you harm.

Notes:

[1] The cause of the battle of Nahrawān was that when, after Arbitration, Amīr al-Mu'minīn was returning to Kūfah, the people who were foremost in pleading acceptance of Arbitration began to say that appointment of anyone other than Allāh as arbitrator is heresy, and that, Allāh forbid, by accepting the Arbitration, Amīr al-Mu'minīn turned heretic. Consequently, by distorting the meaning of "There is no authority save with Allāh," they made simple Muslims share their views and, separating from Amīr al-Mu'minīn, encamped at Ḥarūrā' near Kūfah. When Amīr al-Mu'minīn learned of these plottings, he sent Ṣa'ṣa'ah ibn Ṣawḥān and Ziyād ibn al-Naḍr al-Ḥārithī, in the company of Ibn 'Abbās, towards them; and afterwards himself went to the place of their stay and dispersed them after discussion.

When these people reached Kūfah, they began to spread the news that Amīr al-Mu'minīn had broken the agreement of Arbitration and that he is again ready to fight against the Syrians. When Amīr al-Mu'minīn learned this, he refuted it, whereupon these people stood up in rebellion and encamped twelve miles from Baghdad in the low-lying area of the canal called Nahrawān.

On the other side, after hearing the verdict of Arbitration, Amīr al-Mu'minīn rose for fighting the army of Syria and wrote to the Khārijites that the verdict passed by the two arbitrators, in pursuance of their heart's wishes instead of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, was not acceptable to him; that he had therefore decided to fight with them and they should support him for crushing the enemy. But the Khārijites gave him this reply, "When you had agreed to Arbitration, in our view you had turned heretic. Now, if you admit your heresy and offer repentance, we will think over this matter and decide what we should do."

Amīr al-Mu'minīn understood from their reply that their disobedience and misguidance had become very serious. To entertain any kind of hope from them now was futile. Consequently, ignoring them, he encamped in the valley of an-Nukhaylah with a view to marching towards Syria. When the army had been arrayed, he came to know that the men desired to deal with the people of Nahrawān first and to move towards Syria afterwards. Amīr al-Mu'minīn, however, said that they should be left as they were, and that they themselves should first move towards Syria, while the people of Nahrawān could be dealt with afterwards. People said that they were prepared to obey every order of his with all their might whether he moved this way or that way. The army had not moved when news about the rebellion of Khārijites began to reach them, and it was learnt that they had butchered the governor of Nahrawān namely 'Abdullāh ibn Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt, and his slave-maid with the child in her womb, and have killed three women of Banū Ṭayy' and Umm Sinān aṣ-Ṣaydāwīyyah. Amīr al-Mu'minīn sent al-Ḥārith ibn Murrah al-'Abdī for investigation, but he too was killed by them.

When their rebellion reached this stage, it was necessary to deal with them. Consequently, the army turned towards Nahrawān. On reaching there, Amīr al-Mu'minīn sent them word that those who had killed 'Abdullāh ibn Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt and innocent women should be handed over to him for avenging blood. Those people replied that they had killed these persons jointly and that they considered it lawful to shed the blood of all the people on his side. Even at this, Amīr al-Mu'minīn did not take the initiative for the battle, but sent Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī with a message of peace. So he spoke to them aloud, "Whoever comes under this banner, or separates from that party and goes to Kūfah or al-Madā'in, would get amnesty and he would not be questioned." As a result of this, Farwah ibn Nawfal al-Ashja'ī said that he did not know why they were at war with Amīr al-Mu'minīn. Saying this, he separated along with five hundred men. Similarly, group after group began to separate, and some of them joined Amīr al-Mu'minīn. Those who remained

numbered four thousand, and according to aṭ-Ṭabarī's account, they numbered two thousand eight hundred. These people were not in any way prepared to listen to the voice of truth, and were ready to kill or be killed.

Amīr al-Mu'minīn had stopped his men to take the initiative, but the Khārijites put arrows in their bows and broke and threw away the sheaths of their swords. Even at this juncture, Amīr al-Mu'minīn warned them of the dire consequences of war, and this sermon is about that warning and admonition. But they were so brimming with enthusiasm that they leapt on Amīr al-Mu'minīn's force all of a sudden. This onslaught was so severe that the footmen lost ground, but they soon fixed themselves firmly that the attack of arrows and spears could not dislodge them from their position, and they soon so cleared away the Khārijites that, except for nine persons who fled away to save their lives, not a single person was left alive. From Amīr al-Mu'minīn's army only eight persons fell as martyrs. The battle took place on the 9th of Ṣafar, 38 A.H.