

Salah ud-din was, in truth and reality, a standing miracle of the Prophet of Islam and a manifest sign of the truthfulness and authenticity of his message.

Salah ud-din was brought up like other Kurd youths of mode-rate means, studying the conventional sciences and the art of warfare. Nobody could have predicted before Salah ud-din captured Egypt and confronted the Crusaders, that this young man would one day emerge as the conqueror of Jerusalem and a great Defender of the Faith, and that he would achieve such an eminence as to be looked upon by posterity as a brilliant example for his ardent zeal and courage in fighting the infidels, or, for his sterling virtues which could rightly be envied even by the most pious and pure in heart. Describing the youthful days of Salah ud-din, Lane-Poole says :

"As the favoured governors son, he naturally enjoyed a privileged position, but, far from exhibiting any symptoms of future greatness, he was evidently a shining example of that tranquil virtue which shuns 'the last infirmity of the noble minds'."2

God had, however, destined him to become the most renowned leader of his time; and when God wills a thing He provides the means there for. His master Nur-ud-din ordered him to proceed to Egypt. Cadi Baha ud-din ibn Shaddad, a trusted councilor of Salah ud-din, writes that the latter had confessed it to him that he had gone to Egypt dragged against his will, like one driven to his death. It was the fulfilment of what the Qur'an says : But it may happen that ye hate a thing whiih is good for you, and it may happen that ye love a thing which is bad for you?

Transformation of his life:

Salah ud-din was, however, completely a changed man after assuming power in Egypt. Conviction dawned upon him that God had to take some work from him which would be thwarted by the 'pursuits of pleasure.

Ibn Shaddad is on record that "no sooner did he assume the over-lordship of Egypt, the world and its pleasures lost all significance in his eyes. With a heart-felt sense of gratitude for the favour bestowed by God on him he gave up drinking, renounced the temptations of pleasure,

and took to the life of sweat and toil which went on increasing with the passage of time." Lane-Poole too has the same story to tell. He says:

"On his side, Saladin began to order his life more rigorously. Devout as he had always shown himself, he became even more strict and austere. He put aside the thought of pleasure and the love of ease, adopted a Spartan rule, and set it as an example to his troops. He devoted all his energies henceforth to one great object—to found a Moslem empire strong enough to drive the infidels out of the land. 'When God gave me the land of Egypt,' said he, 'I was sure that He meant Palestine for me also.' It may well be that natural selfish ambition quickened his zeal; but the result was the 'same: thenceforward his career was one long championship of Islam. He had vowed himself to the Holy War."

Zeal for Jihad:

The constant aim of his efforts was to fight in the way of God. Describing the zeal of Salah ud-din for Jihad, writes Ibn Shaddad: "Fired with the zeal to wage war against the Crusaders, Jihad was the most favourite topic of his discussion; he was always seen making his dispositions for the strengthening of his forces, seeking out men and materials for the same purpose and paying attention to anyone who spoke about these matters to him. He had gladly abandoned for its sake his hearth and home, family and children, and betaken to the life of the camp where a wind could uproot his tent. Anybody encouraging him in his ambitions could easily win his confidence."

"One could make a solemn affirmation that after he started the war against the Crusaders he never spent a single shell on anything save on the preparation for war and help-ing his men." Ibn Shaddad continues:

"The Sultan appeared to be like a bereaved mother on the battle-field, who had been deprived of her only child by the cruel hands of Death. He could be seen trotting on his horse from one end of the battle-field to another, exhorting the people to fight for the sake of Allah. He would himself go round all the detachments, with tears in his eyes, asking people to come forth for the aid of Islam." The same writer describes how Salah ud-din spent his days during the siege of Acre :

"Excepting a sweet-drink for which his physician insisted, the Sultan did not take anything for the whole day.

"The royal physician told me that the Sultan had taken only a few morsels of food from Friday to Sunday as he was unable to pay attention to anything save the happenings on the battle-field."

Battle of Hittin:

After a series of fights and forays a hotly-contested battle was fought in the neighbourhood of Tiberias beneath the hills of Hittin, on Saturday, the 24th of Rabi ul-Akhir, 583 a.h., which gave a death-blow to the power of the Crusaders. The victory achieved by the Sultan has been described thus by Lane-Poole:

"The flower of chivalry was taken. The king and his brother, Reginald of Chatillon, Joscelin of Courtenay, Humphrey of Toron, the Masters of the Temple and Hospital, and many other nobles were among the prisoners The rest of the chivalry of Palestine was under Moslem warders. Of the rank and file, all who were alive were made prisoners. A single Saracen was seen dragging some thirty Christians he had himself taken, tied together with a tent-rope. The dead lay in heaps, like stones upon stones, among broken crosses, severed hands and feet, whilst mutilated heads strewed the ground like a plentiful crop of melons.

"The field long bore the marks of the bloody fight where '30,000' Christians were said to have fallen. A year afterwards the heaps of bleaching bones could be seen from afar, and the hills and valleys were strewn with the relics of the horrid orgies of wild beasts."

Religious Ardour of the Sultan :

The fateful fight at Hittin came to a close with an incident which is symptomatic of Sultan Salah ud-din's fiery zeal for the religion. This is how Lane-Foole describes it:

"Saladin camped on the field of battle. When, his tent was pitched, he ordered the prisoners to be brought before him. The King of Jerusalem and Reginald of Chatillon he received in his tent; he seated the King near himself, and seeing his thirst, he gave him a cup of water iced in snow. Guy drank and passed the cup to the lord of Karak: but Saladin was visibly annoyed. 'Tell the king,' he said to the interpreter, 'that it was he, not I, that gave that man drink.' The protection of 'bread and salt' was not to baulk his vengeance. Then he rose and confronted Reginald, who was still standing: 'Twice have I sworn to kill him; once when he sought to invade the holy cities, and again when he took the caravan by treachery, Lo ! I will avenge Mohammed upon thee!' And he drew his sword and cut him down with his own hand, as he had sworn. The guard finished it and dragged the body out of the tent; and God sped his soul to Hell.

"The King, trembling at the sight, believed his own turn was now coming, but Saladin reassured him : 'It is not the custom, of kings to slay kings; but that man had transgressed all bounds, so what happened, happened.'"

Ibn Shaddad's version of Reginald of Chatillon's execution adds that Salah ud-din offered him the choice of Islam and on his refusal cut off his head. The Sultan said: "Lo! I avenge Muhammad, (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) upon thee."

Conquest of Jerusalem:

The victory at Hittin was but the prelude to the much coveted conquest of Jerusalem by Salah ud-din. The intense desire of Salah ud-din for regaining the holy city has been starkly depicted by Ibn Shaddad who says that "the Sultan was so keen for Jerusalem that the hills would have shrunk from bearing the burden he carried in his heart."

On Friday, the 27th of Rajab, 583 a. h., the day of the Prophet's Ascension when he had led the congregational prayer of the earlier prophets in Jerusalem, the Sultan entered the city.

Ibn Shaddad has given a graphic account of this memorable day. He writes:

"It was the victory of victories. A large crowd consisting of scholars and the nobles, traders and

the laity had gathered on this joyous occasion. A number of people had come from the coastal lands on getting the news of the Sultan's victory, and so had come nearly all the notable theologians from Egypt and Syria to congratulate him on his victory. Hardly any dignitary or any noteworthy personage of the empire was left behind. The joyful shouts of 'God is Great', and 'There is no god but God' rent the skies. After ninety years Friday prayer was again held in Jerusalem. The Cross that glittered on the Dome of the Rock was pulled down. An indescribable event as it was, the blessings and the succour of God were to be witnessed everywhere on the day." A costly pulpit which had been designed under the orders of Nur ud-din Zangi twenty years ago was brought from Aleppo and erected in the Dome of the Rock.

Benevolence of Salah ud-din :

The forbearance, humanity and magnanimity of Salah ud-din on this occasion was in striking contrast with the brutality of his Christian foes. The Christian biographer of Salah ud-din, Lane Poole, acknowledges that the Sultan's kindness of heart had conquered his desire for revenge. He writes:

"Never did Saladin show himself greater than during this memorable surrender. His guards, commanded by responsible emirs, kept order in every street, and prevented violence and insult, insomuch that no ill-usage of the Christians was ever heard of. Every exit was in his hands, and a trustee Lord was set over David's gate to receive the ransoms as each citizen came forth."

Then, after describing how the people left in the holy city were ransomed and how al-Malik al-Adil, the brother of the Sultan, the Patriarch and Balian of Ibelin, were each allowed to set free a thousand slaves given by Salah ud-din, Lane-Poole writes:

"Then said Saladin to his officers: 'My brother has made his alms, and the Patriarch and Balian have made theirs; now I would fain make mine.' And he ordered his guards to proclaim throughout the streets of Jerusalem that all the old people who could not pay were free to go forth. And they came forth from the postern of St. Lazarus, and their going lasted from the rising of the sun until night fell. Such was the charity which Saladin did, of poor people without number."

"Thus did the Saracens show mercy to the fallen city. One recalls the savage conquest by the

first Crusaders in 1099, when Godfrey and Tancred rode through streets choked with the dead and dying, when defenseless Moslems were tortured, burnt, and shot down in cold blood on the towers and roof of the Temple, when the blood of wanton massacre defiled the honour of Christendom and stained the scene where once the gospel of love and mercy had been preached. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy was a forgotten beatitude when the Christians made shambles of the Holy City. Fortunate were the merciless, for they obtained mercy at the hands of the Moslem Sultan.

"The greatest attribute of Heaven is Mercy;

And it is the crown of justice, and the glory. Where it may kill with right, to save with pity.

"If the taking of Jerusalem were the only fact known about Saladin, it were enough to prove him the most chivalrous and great-hearted conqueror of his own, and perhaps of any, age."

The Third Crusade:

The fall of Jerusalem and the terrible rout of the Crusaders at the battle of Hittin threw the whole of Christendom into a violent commotion. Reinforcements from Europe poured forth into Palestine. Almost all the principal sovereigns and eminent generals of the then Christendom, such as, Frederick Barbarossa, the Emperor of Germany, Richard Lion, King of England, and Philip Augustus, King of France, Leopold of Austria, the Duke of Burgundy, the Count of Flanders sallied forth with their armies against the lonely Sultan and his few chiefs and relatives who had to defend the honour of Islam.

Negotiations of Peace:

Both the parties which had been arrayed against each other in a sanguinary combat for five years at last got tired of the fruit-less, harassing and decimating struggle. They came to an agreement at Ramla in 588 a. h. which recognised Salah ud-din as the sovereign of the whole of Palestine leaving the principality of Acre in the hands of the Christians. Thus ended the Third Crusade and with it the task entrusted to Salah ud-din by God. Lane-Poole describes the

inglorious end of the Third Crusade in these words:

"The Holy War was over; the five years' contest ended. Before the great victory at Hittin in July, 1187, not an inch of Palestine west of the Jordan was in the Moslems' hands. After the Peace of Ramla in September, 1192, the whole land was theirs, except a narrow strip of coast from Tyre to Jaffa. Saladin had no cause to be ashamed of the treaty. The Franks indeed retained most of what the Crusaders had won, but the result was con-temptible in relation to the cost. At the Pope's appeal, all Christendom had risen in arras. The Emperor, the Kings of England, France, and Sicily, Leopold of Austria, the Duke of Burgundy, the Count of Flanders, hundreds of famous barons and knights of all nations, had joined with the King and Princes of Palestine and the indomitable brothers of the Temple and Hospital, in the effort to deliver the Holy City and restore the vanished kingdom of Jeru-salem. The Emperor was dead; the Kings had gone back; many of their noblest followers lay buried in the Holy Land; but Jerusalem was still the city of Saladin, and its titular king reigned over a slender realm at Acre.

"All the strength of Christendom concentrated in the Third Crusade had not shaken Saladin's power. His soldiers may have murmured at their long months of hard and perilous service, year after year, but they never refused to come to his summons and lay down their lives in his cause. His vassals in the distant valleys of the Tigris may have groaned at his constant requirements, but they brought their retainers loyally to his colours; and at the last pitched battle, at Arsuf, it was the division of Mosil that most distinguished itself for valour. Throughout these toilsome campaigns Saladin could always count on the support of the levies from Egypt and Mesopotamia, as well as from northern and central Syria; Kurds, Turkmans, Arabs, and Egyptians, they were all Moslems and his ser-vants when he called. In spite of their differences of race, their national jealousies, and tribal pride, he had kept them together as one host—not without difficulty and twice or thrice a critical waver. But, the shrinking at Jaffa notwithstanding, they were still a united army under his orders in the autumn of 1192, as they had been when he first led them 'on the Path of God' in 1187. Not a pro-vince had fallen away, not a chief or vassal had rebelled, though the calls upon their loyalty and endurance were enough to try the firmest faith and tax the strength of giants. The brief defection, quickly pardoned, of a young prince of his own blood in Mesopotamia only emphasises, by its isolation, Saladin's compelling influence over his subjects. When the trials and sufferings of the five years* war were over, he still reigned unchallenged from the mountains of Kurdistan to the Libyan desert, and far beyond these borders the king of Georgia, the Catholicos of Armenia, the Sultan of Konia, the Emperor of Constanti-nople, were eager to call him friend and ally.

"To such allies he owed nothing: they came not to aid but to congratulate. The struggle was waged by Saladin alone. Except at the last, when his brother came promi-nently to the front, one cannot point to a single general or counsellor who can be said to have led, much less dominated, the Sultan. A council of war undoubtedly guided his military decisions, and

sometimes overruled his better judgement, as before Tyre and Acre, but in that council it is impossible to single out a special voice that weighed more than another in influencing his mind,. Brother, sons, nephews, old comrades, new vassals, shrewd Kady, cautious secretary, fanatical preacher, —all had their share in the general verdict, all helped their Master loyally according to their ability, but not a man of them ever forgot who was the Master. In all that anxious, laborious, critical time, one mind, one will was supreme, the mind and the will of Saladin."

Death of Salah ud-din :

On Wednesday, the 27th of Safar, 589 a.h. died Salah ud-din, the faithful ally of Islam, after working his way up to the summit of his ambition, in the fifty-seventh year of his age. Thus describes Ibn Shaddad the last days of Sultan Salah ud-din:

"It was in the night of the 27th of Safar, and the twelfth day since he fell ill, that the Sultan's illness took a serious turn. He had become too weak by then. Sheikh Abu Jafar, a pious and saintly person, was requested to stay within the castle during the night so that if the Sultan were to breathe his last, he might be available for recitation of the Qur'an at the last moment. It appeared as if the time of Sultan's eternal rest was drawing near. Sheikh Abu Jafar was sitting by his bed-side, reciting the Holy Qur'an while the Sultan lay unconscious for the last three days, regaining his consciousness only for brief intervals in-between. When Sheikh Abu Jafar recited the verse: He is Allah, than Whom there is no other God, the Knower of Invisible and the Visible? the Sultan opened his eyes and smiled; his face lighted up and he said joyfully, 'Verily, this is correct.' No sooner had he uttered these words that his soul departed. It was before dawn on Wednesday, the 27th of Safar, when the Sultan passed away. The day of his death was, for the Musalmans, a misfortune such as they had never suffered since they were deprived of the first four Caliphs, The fort, the city and the entire world appeared to be lamenting over-, his death. Whenever I was told earlier that sometimes people longed for offering their own lives for others, I thought it was just a figurative expression; but, I learnt, on the day the Sultan died, that it could really happen so. I was one of those who would have then gladly parted with their lives if there had been the slightest possibility, of saving the life of the Sultan by our sacrifice."-

Ibn Shaddad writes that the Sultan left nothing except one dinar and forty-seven dirhams when he died; nothing else did he leave by way of houses, or goods, or villages, or gardens, or any personal property. He had not left even as much that could suffice to defray his burial expenses and it had to be met by obtaining a loan in his name, while the shroud was provided by his minister and amanuensis, Cadi Fadhil,

The Saintly Sultan:

In regard to the character and disposition of Salah ud-din, Ibn Shaddad has left the following record:

"In faith and practice the Sultan was a devout Musalman, ever conforming to the tenets of the orthodox school of faith. He was regular in the performance of religious observances. Once he told me: 'I have not performed a single congregational prayer alone for the past several years.' Even during his illness he would send for the Imam and force himself to perform the prayer behind him. Assiduous in offering the prayers founded on the practice of the Prophet, he also performed the voluntary prayers during the night. If he could not somehow offer these supererogatory prayers during the night, he made up for these before the dawn prayers as allowed by the Shafeite school. I have seen him standing behind the Imam during his last illness and except for the three days when he had fallen into a stupor, he never missed his prayers. The poor-due could never become incumbent upon him since he never possessed, throughout his life, property of such estate and effects as was necessary to make him liable to pay that tax. Boundless in generosity, he gave away whatever he possessed to the poor and needy; and, at the time of his death, no more than forty-seven dirhams of silver and one of gold were found in his possession. He left no other property or goods.

"He always kept the fast during the month of Ramadhan. He had had to omit the fast once which he got noted down by Cadi Fadhil. Before his last illness he scrupulously made up for this involuntary omission against the advice of his physician. 'I do not know when death will overtake me, said he ; and, true to his words, he gave up the ghost soon after the payment of that omission. The Sultan ardently desired to accomplish the pilgrimage to Mecca but he could never get time to fulfil his desire. During the year he died he had an intense desire to set-out for the pilgrimage but he could not somehow leave for it.

"He delighted in hearing the Qur'an recited to him and it was not unoften that he listened three or four chapters of the Holy Scripture from the battlement guards whom he sometimes visited during the night. He listened the Qur'an with all his heart and soul till tears trickled down his cheeks. He had also a fancy for listening to the sacred Traditions. He would ask everybody present to sit down and listen calmly while the Traditions were read out to him. If any reputed Traditionist visited the town, he would himself go to attend his lecture; sometimes he would himself relate a Tradition, his eyes brimming with tears. He would some-times pause on the field of battle, between approaching armies, to listen the Traditions read out to him. He held the tenets of faith so reverently that it was on his command that a heretical mystic, es-Suhrawardy, was got executed by his son, al-Malik al-Zahir.

"The Sultan had an unflinching trust and confidence in the beneficence of Allah. He used to turn with his heart and soul towards God in the moments of difficulty. Once Sultan was present within Jerusalem which then lay almost helpless before the besieging Crusaders. The Sultan had, however, refused our request to leave the city. It was a cold wintry night before Friday when I was alone with the Sultan; we spent the whole night in prayers and supplication. I requested the Sultan, late after mid-night to take a little rest but he replied, 'I think you want to sleep. Go and take a nap.' After a short while when I went to him for dawn prayers, which we more often performed together, I found him washing his hands. 'I didn't sleep at all,' said he. After the prayer was over, I said, 'I have had an idea which may be of benefit to us. You should address yourself to God Almighty and beseech Him for help.' He asked, 'What should I do for that?' 'Today it is Friday,' said I, 'You should take bath before leaving for the Aqsa Mosque and also make some offerings secretly by way of charity. When you reach the mosque, offer a special prayer of two rak'ats between the Call and congregational prayers, at the place where the Prophet had offered prayers during the Ascension. I have read in a Tradition that the supplications made at that time are favoured with acceptance. You should thereafter beseech God 'thus: O my Lord, having lost all resources, I turn to Thee for help. I now submit to Thee; for, Thou alone can help Thy faith to attain success at this critical juncture. I hope that God shall accept your supplications.' The Sultan did likewise. I was by his side when I saw his head touching the ground in prostration and tears trickling down his beard on the prayer carpet. I did not hear what was he beseeching unto the Lord but I witnessed the signs of his prayer being answered before the day was over. Dissensions overtook the enemy camp from where we got heartening news for the next few days, till they broke their camp for Ramla by Monday morning."

Character of Salah ud-din:

A devout Muslim as he was, the dominant notes of his character were an acute sense of justice, charitableness, tender-heartedness, patience and courageousness.

Ibn Shaddad writes that he held courts twice a week on each Monday and Tuesday, which were attended by the chiefs of state, scholars, jurists and Cadis. Great and small, everyone found the door open. He used to read all the petitions and himself sign the orders dictated by him. He never allowed anyone to leave him without meeting his requirement. At the same time he also kept himself busy in the recollection of God. If anybody had any complaint to make, he would listen to him patiently and give his judgment. Once a man lodged a complaint against Taqi ud-din, the Sultan's nephew, who was immediately summoned to the court for answering the charges. On another occasion a man brought a suit against the Sultan himself who immediately made necessary investigations. Although the claim of the person presenting the suit was not established, the Sultan granted him a robe of honour and a handsome grant before allowing him to leave the court.

Kind and noble of heart, Salah ud-din was full of gentleness, patience and tenderness, and could never tolerate any injustice. He always overlooked the mistakes of his associates and servants; if anything unpleasant was heard by him, he never allowed his annoyance to be betrayed to the person concerned. Salah ud-din once asked for water which was somehow not procured for him. He reminded five times for it and then said: "I am dying of thirst." He drank the water which was brought thereafter without saying anything more. Another time when he wanted to take bath after a prolonged illness, he found the water too hot. He asked for some cold water to be brought in. The servant twice splashed the Sultan with cold water which caused him unpleasantsness owing to his weakness but he simply said to the servant, "Tell me, if you want to get rid of me." The servant apologised and the Sultan instantly forgave him. Ibn Shaddad has narrated a number of other incidents exhibiting Salah ud-din's charity and goodness of heart.

So generous and open-handed was he that sometimes he gave away the provinces conquered by him. After he had conquered Amad, one of his generals Qurrali Arslan expressed a desire for the city and the Sultan granted it to him. Sometimes he sold even his personal estates and effects for presenting a gift to his visitor. The treasurers of the Sultan always used to keep a secret balance for the emergencies, for, left to himself, the Sultan would have given away the last shell. The Sultan once cynically remarked that there were certain people for whom money and dust were alike. "I know," says Ibn Shaddad, "that he was indirectly referring to his own views in this regard."

The Sultan never allowed his visitor, even if he was a pagan, to leave him without a gift or some mark of recognition. The ruler of Saida once paid a visit to the Sultan whom he welcomed with open arms. The Sultan not only entertained him but also explained the tenets of Islam to him. He regularly sent ice and fruits to Richard, his greatest foe, during the illness of the latter.

He was of so noble disposition and kind of heart that he could not see anyone in distress without being moved. Once an old Christian woman came to him seeking her baby. The old woman, screaming and in flood of tears, told the Sultan that her baby had been taken away from her tent by the dacoits. She had been told the woman said, that only he could help her to get her child back. Touched by her lamentation, the Sultan broke into tears and asked his men to find out from the slave market where her baby was. After a short while her baby was brought back and the woman departed praying for the welfare of the Sultan.

Ibn Shaddad relates that the Sultan was very kind to the orphans. Whenever he found such a child he entrusted him to someone or himself made arrangements for his up-bringing. Similarly he was always grief-stricken to see the aged and infirm whom he considered to be his special

charge.

Saviours of Islamic Spirit **By:** Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi

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