CHAPTER IX.

GOVERNORSHIP OF AL-MAUSIL.

Mus'ab had now to reckon with an enemy far more formidable than al-Mukhtar. Abd al-Malik, the Umayyid Caliph at Damascus, could not look with equanimity over the extension of the sway of his rival, Abdullah b. al-Zubair. He was only waiting for a favourable opportunity to make a thrust into al-'Iraq. Mus'ab turned seriously and earnestly to this imminent danger, which almost stared him in the face, immediately after he was relieved of al-Mukhtar. Prudently enough, he decided that a very strong and capable general should be placed at al-Mausil, the intervening region between al-'Iraq and Syria, as a buffer between himself and 'Abd al-Malik(1). He invited al-Muhallab to counsel him as to the choice of the man who should be placed in charge of that strategic point. Al-Muhallab recommended a panel of three names, viz., Muhammad b. 'Umar b. 'Uqayrib al-Darimi, Ziyad b. 'Amr b. al-Muhraf al-Ataki and Dā'ud b. Gahdam. But who could be more capable than al-Muhallab himself? Mus'ab requested him to take this onerous responsibility upon his own shoulders. Al-Muhallab, who never shrank from a difficult task, agreed and, accordingly, was appointed governor over al-Mausil, al-Jazira, 'Adhabījān and 'Armīnīya (2). Al-Muhallab took

(1) Kam. 643.

(2) Tab. 2/750; Anon. 111 'Adhabījān omitted. Dain. 316 is wrong in saying that al-Muhallab was sent back against the 'Azarīqa.
charge of his new post in the year 67 A.H. shortly after the murder of al-Mukhtar (14th Ramaḍān) (1).

Having despatched al-Muhallab to al-Mausil, Muṣʿab invited suggestions from the people of al-Ḍirās (2) as to who should be appointed to the leadership of the campaign against the ʿAzāriqa. The people of al-Ḍirās were of three opinions; some recommended the name of ʿUbaidullāh b. ʿAbī Bakr, others put forward the name of ʿUmar b. ʿUbaidullāh b. Māʿāth while a third party insisted that al-Muhallab be sent back once again to his former post because "there was none for them (the ʿAzāriqa) except al-Muhallab."

While the three suggestions were yet under consideration by Muṣʿab, the ʿAzāriqa heard of them and discussed the respective merits of the three nominees among themselves.

The opinion of Qatārī b. al-Ṭuğāʾa, who had also been a colleague of al-Muhallab in his early days, is very helpful to us in understanding the distinctive features of al-Muhallab's strategy as compared with that of his contemporary colleagues. He said to his Azraqite brethren:

"In ʿUbaidullāh b. ʿAbī Bakra there will come against you a noble and generous chief who would waste his army. In ʿUmar b. ʿUbaidullāh, you will have to face a brave, daring and energetic soldier who fights for his religion and his country with such an instinctive impulse as is

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(1). Tab. 2/743; Iʿāth. 4/135. Al-Muhallab was sent to al-Mausil as soon as ʿIbrāhīm b. al-ʿAshtār proceeded to join Muṣʿab after the murder of al-Mukhtar.

(2). Kam. 643. According to reports in Kam. and Anon. (p. 111), Muṣʿab returned to al-Ḍirās after his victory over al-Mukhtar at al-Kufa. Tab. also mentions this but has added another version to the contrary (2/751).
seldom found in any one else. I have seen him in many a battle. Never was there issued a call to arms but he was the first horseman to come forward and engage his foe till he struck him. As for al-Muhallab you are already familiar with him. If you caught one end of a cloth he would hold the other end. He would draw it when you let it loose and would let it loose when you draw it. He would not start a move against you unless you take the initiative first except in case he should see a seasonable opportunity which, of course, he will seize at once and take the full advantage of. He is the mighty lion, the sly fox and the lasting calamity." (1).

This is how al-Muhallab's method of prolonged warfare and his strategy of pounding the enemy with heavy attacks at particularly opportune moments, affected his foe. His colleagues could think of no other method of warfare than the old traditional one which was to overwhelm the enemy with superior force, dash and tenacity in one short decisive engagement. Al-Muhallab also had enough of dash and tenacity but he would use them only at the proper moment. For this purpose he patiently looked out for moments of weakness and unpreparedness on the part of his enemy. His motto was maximum results at minimum cost.

Maş'ab recognised the superior merits of al-Muhallab as much as, perhaps much more than, Qaṭarī did. But it was this very recognition of al-Muhallab's transcendent military ability that made Maş'ab not to remove him from

(1). Kam. 643-4.
al-Ma‘ṣil. The menace of the ‘Azāriqa was very great indeed, but the danger from Syria was still greater and al-Muhallab was to be reserved for the more difficult of the two military tasks. Muṣ‘ab’s choice, therefore, fell upon ʿUmar b. ʿUbaidullah b. Ma‘mar whom he appointed governor of Fars as well as leader of the campaign against the ‘Azāriqa(1). Al-Mughira, who had been acting as his father’s deputy, made over to the new incumbent and joined his father at al-Ma‘ṣil (2).

(1) Kam. 644; Anon. 114; Ibn al-ʿAthir (4/138) is obviously mistaken in placing the appointment of ʿUmar b. ʿUbaidullah to Fars and the leadership of the campaign against the ‘Azāriqa so late as in 68 at the beginning of Muṣ‘ab’s second term of office as governor of al-Baṣra. He has failed to note that al-Muhallab’s leadership of the campaign suffered a short break by his appointment to al-Ma‘ṣil shortly after Muṣ‘ab’s victory over al-Mukhtar. This discrepancy is probably due to the fact that Tab. (2/753,10) has mentioned the activities of ʿUmar b. ʿUbaidullah against the ‘Azāriqa during Muṣ‘ab’s first term of office (year 67 A.H.) together with the happenings during his second term (year 68) in one continuous account under the year 68. The accounts in Anon. 114 and Kam. 644 seq., however, make it clear that ʿUmar’s activities against the ‘Azāriqa began towards the end of Muṣ‘ab’s first term of governorship, were interrupted during the one year of Hamza’s regime and were again renewed on Muṣ‘ab’s restoration in 68. It must be remembered that Tab. has altogether omitted the fact that al-Muhallab was recalled from al-Ma‘ṣil by Hamza and entrusted with the campaign against the ‘Azāriqa for the period of his governorship of al-Baṣra.

(2) Raghib 8/37.
Al-Mughīra seems to have successfully checked the advance of the Ḥazāiriqa beyond Ṭarrajān (1) for they, under their leader al-Zubair b. ʿAlī, were still there at the time ʿUmar b. ʿUbaydullāh assumed charge of his duties (2). ʿUmar drove them to Ṭisfahān but they soon returned with fresh preparations and reinforcements till they encamped at Ṣābūr. ʿUmar advanced to meet them and pitched his camp at a distance of four 'farsakh' from the enemy. Malik b. Ḥassān of al-ʿAṣd, who had known and fully appreciated the value of al-Muhallab's habits of alertness and watchfulness, counselled ʿUmar to emulate the example of his predecessor who used to send spies and keep himself alert and vigilant against a night-attack even when he was at a greater distance from the enemy than ʿUmar happened to be at that time. ʿUmar, however, felt a bit irritated that he should be asked to follow the methods of his predecessor and only replied to Malik "Do you think that you will die before the appointed hour?" Al-Muhallab's wisdom and foresight, however,

(1). According to ʿIṣān (311) al-Muhallab, before starting for al-ʿBaṣra, had managed to arrange an armistice with the Azraqītes for a period of eighteen months. This may seem plausible because al-Mukhtar was a common enemy and also because we do not hear of any activity on the part of the Ḥazāiriqa during al-Muhallab's absence. Nevertheless, it remains unconfirmed and a bit improbable. At any rate ʿIṣān is wrong in saying that at the time of the conclusion of the armistice al-Muhallab was in Karmān and that the leader of the Ḥazāiriqa was Qatāḥ b. al-Mujāʿa.

(2). Kam. 644. Here the account in Kam. is more perfect and elaborate. According to Anon. ʿIṣān al-Zubair b. ʿAlī was at ʾIṣṭakhbahr at the time of ʿUmar's appointment. But the account in Kam. makes it clear that the engagement in which ʿUmar lost his son came off only after the return of the Ḥazāiriqa from Ṭisfahān whither they had previously been driven from Ṭarrajān by ʿUmar.
were soon vindicated when the 'Azāriqa did launch a night-attack on 'Umar's camp. No doubt, 'Umar met the attack with his characteristic composure and bravery. He fought the attackers gallantly and energetically till dawn when they were compelled to retire without any gain. But when he turned with a sense of exalted pride to Mālik, expecting from him a tribute to his success, Mālik only said, "Allāh saved us, indeed, but they (the 'Azāriqa) dared not show even so much boldness against al-Muhallab." 'Umar was now obviously offended. It was clear that his soldiers did not have the same confidence in him as they had in al-Muhallab. Indignantly he said, "If you were as sincere to me as you were to al-Muhallab, I hope I could dispose of this enemy. But you say about me, 'He is a Quraishite hailing from al-Ḥijāz. His home is far off. His glory would not be ours.' Hence, you fight with me only half-heartedly" (1).

Later on 'Umar achieved some signal victories over the 'Azāriqa, but they were a tenacious foe and swooped down again and again with unabated zeal.

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