CHAPTER XIII.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE 'AZARIQA.

Third Period 71-72.

Al-Muhallab assumed for the third time the leadership of the campaign against the 'Azariqa towards the middle of the year 71 A.H.(1). Although he does not seem to have achieved any great victory till Mus'ab's fall yet, no doubt, he succeeded very well in keeping the enemy in check. He dislodged Qatari from the threatening position that he had taken up in 'Idhaj and al-'Ahwaz and compelled him to retire to Karmân. But after a short while, the Azaqite leader again returned to al-'Ahwâz, where al-Muhallab had established himself, with an army which, despite the best and the constant efforts of al-Muhallab in that direction, was still far superior in equipment, arms and the number of horses to the army of the Basrans(2).

Faced with heavy odds as he was, al-Muhallab fought the

(1). The exact date cannot be determined. Mus'ab returned to al-Basra from Bajumaira early in the year 71 A.H.(Mas. 5/241) and then, after what seems to have been a short stay, again started for al-Kufa whence he proceeded against 'Abd al-Malik (Tab.2/804) for the decisive battle at Maskin (Jumada, 72). It was during his stay in al-Basra that al-Muhallab was transferred from al-Mauil to lead the campaign against Qatari. Reckoning backwards, according to the account of Abu Mikhnaf in Tab.(2/764-5), we find that al-Muhallab had fought the 'Azariqa for eight months when Mus'ab fell at Maskin. It must be noted that Abu Mikhnaf seems to place the transfer of al-Muhallab at a comparatively later date for, according to him, Mus'ab had left al-Basra when al-Qubais, whom he had left as his deputy, informed him of the onrush of the 'Azariqa with the request that al-Muhallab be sent against them.

(2). Kam. 652.
‘Azāriqa tenaciously at the old battleground of Sūlāf for eight months till Muṣ‘ab’s fall.(1)

Both the contending armies lay opposite each other at RāmaHurmuz (2) when Muṣ‘ab fell at Maskin. It so happened that the news of Muṣ‘ab’s fall reached the camp of the ‘Azāriqa a couple of days earlier than the camp of al-Muhallab. The ‘Azāriqa bethought themselves of putting their enemies to ridicule. So, standing on the bank of the ditch, they called out to the soldiers of al-Muhallab asking them as to what they believed about Muṣ‘ab and his enemy, ‘Abd al-Malik. Al-Muhallab’s soldiers, unaware of ‘Abd al-Malik’s triumph as they were, acclaimed Muṣ‘ab as 'their rightful and virtuous ʾImām, their lord in this world as well as in the next.' On the other hand, they denounced ‘Abd al-Malik as one who had strayed from the right path and who was even misleading others. They cursed his father and affirmed that they treated him as their enemy on a par with the ‘Azāriqa themselves. Thereupon the Azraqites broke the news of Muṣ‘ab’s fall, adding sarcastically, 'Tomorrow you will acknowledge ‘Abd al-Malik as your ʾImām while you have denounced him even today.' Al-Muhallab’s soldiers, however, did not believe them and declared them to be liars.

(1). Tab. 2/765,6; also 821,11. Here I Ath. (4/163,9) describes Sūlāf as 'a city in Fars on the bank of the sea.' Events, however, point out that it must have been in the district of al-ʿAhwāz which is also the description of Yaq.

(2). Anon. 124,12; cf. Kam. 652. where it is stated that al-Muhallab had driven the Azraqites to RāmaHurmuz when he received the news of Muṣ‘ab’s fall.
The next day, the news reached al-Muhallab and then came to him a letter from the victorious 'Abd al-Malik formally commissioning him on his behalf. His old master having fallen, al-Muhallab had no hesitation in acknowledging obedience to the new one and forthwith took the oath of allegiance to 'Abd al-Malik from his soldiers. When the hostile units again confronted each other, the 'Azraqites taunted al-Muhallab's soldiers with having acknowledged as their rightful imam one whom they had cursed a day before. The simple reply of al-Muhallab's soldiers was, "We acknowledged Mus'ab and have submitted to Abd al-Malik when each of them successively established his mastery over our affairs and our souls." But the fanatical 'Azraqites would not listen to any such plea. They only said, "Nay, you are the slaves of this world and the auxiliaries of Satan. May the curse of 'Allāh befall you." (1)

The incident typically illustrates the difference between the position and the mentality of the 'Azāriqa on the one hand and al-Muhallab and his warriors on the other. Al-Muhallab was but a military chief and he owed it as his duty to show obedience to every successive government that established itself in the land. He readily acknowledged 'Abdullāh b. al-Zubair the moment al-Baṣra went over to him. He served Mus'ab faithfully and loyally as long as the latter lived and wielded authority over the province.

(1). Tab.2/621-22; Kam. 653; Anon. 125; cf. also IN.107.
The loyal offer of his services that he, of his own accord, made to Mus'ab just when the other chiefs were busy promoting their treacherous designs, is a positive proof that al-Muhallab's honesty, integrity and loyalty stood above all suspicion and above all temptations of material wealth or worldly gain. With the fall of Mus'ab, however, al-'Iraq lay at the feet of the new conqueror. No doubt, 'Abdullāh b. al-Zubair was still there at Mecca but was he in a position to regain his lost possessions or even to maintain his authority over al-Ḥijāz against his powerful rival? Al-Muhallab, with his deep knowledge of military affairs, could not have failed to foresee that the position of the Caliph at Mecca was so precarious and untenable as to make his fall inevitable and just a matter of time. Similarly, al-Muhallab must also have realised that he alone, however powerful and influential he might have been, could offer no effective resistance to the Syrian conqueror especially when the chiefs of al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa had already betrayed and the internal conditions of the province were far from reassuring. In the circumstances, realism and prudence demanded what al-Muhallab did i.e., not to stick to a leaky boat when the leaks are irreparable beyond hope. Even if views may differ about the advisability of the course adopted by al-Muhallab, his motive, at least, was quite unimpeachable inasmuch as the events immediately preceding his change of allegiance, show that he was strong and scrupulous enough not to be guided by selfish considerations alone. It must be remembered that the faithful adherence of al-Muhallab to Mus'ab up to the
very last moment in contrast with the attitude of other nobles, was deeply impressed on the hearts of the people. At a later date al-Hajjaj pointed it out as an argument for mistrusting the Mahāliba but 'Abd al-Malik was sure that their fidelity to their former masters was only a guarantee of their fidelity towards him (Tab.2/1140; 1143-4).

It was during this period of al-Muhallab’s leadership that he dispatched a contingent against another Khārijite chief, 'Atiyya b. al-'Aswad al-Ḥanafi who by this time had established himself in Karman. 'Atiyya was formerly a lieutenant of Najda b. 'Amir al-Ḥanafi who, like many other Khārijite chiefs, had parted with Māfi as a result of the split in consequence of the emergence of the radical doctrines of the 'Azariqa. Leaving al-Baṣra, Najda betook himself to al-Bahrain where he founded the moderate sect called Najdiyya after him. In course of time, Najda lost the confidence of 'Atiyya who seceded from him and went across the sea to Karman. At Karman, 'Atiyya was overtaken by the contingent of al-Muhallab’s army which pursued him as far as Qandābil in al-Ṣind and killed him there. According to some, however, he was murdered by the Khārijites themselves (1).

(1). Anon. 135; IAth.4/99. Although the exact date is not mentioned yet the sequence of events following the expedition of Ibn 'Umar in 69 (Anon.133) justifies the assumption that the dispatch of the contingent by al-Muhallab should belong to this period.