CHAPTER XVI.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE 'AZARIQA.

Fourth Period, 74-78.

First Phase Under Bishr b. Marwan.

Although 'Abd al-Malik had taken particular care to give al-Muhallab a free hand in the choice of soldiers and to leave everything connected with the expedition to his unfettered discretion, yet a disgruntled and wilful subordinate could not fail to find a loophole or two to satisfy his own personal grudge. In obedience to the orders of the Khalifa, Bishr ordered that the registers be taken to al-Basra so as to facilitate his choice of soldiers for the expedition. Al-Muhallab deputed Judai b. Sa'id b. Qabisa b. Sarraq al-Azdi, maternal uncle of his own son Yazid, to do the work of selection for him. But Bishr was determined to hamper a free choice. He refused to give effect to the choice of al-Muhallab and reserved for himself a great number of the soldiers whom al-Muhallab had chosen. Further, with a view not to give him sufficient time for full preparations, he ordered al-Muhallab to quit al-Basra within three days.

Hitherto, the reaction of al-Muhallab to the malicious intrigues both of Khalid and of Bishr had consistently been one of dignified indifference. He behaved throughout as if he refused to take note of the sinister moves against him. Never

(1). Tab. 2/856, 2.
(2). Kam. 663.
did he stoop to protest against, or to murmur at, the obvious injustice of which he was a constant victim either in public or even in private. Never did it occur to him to requite evil with evil and to launch any counter-move against his unprovoked enemies. This attitude was commendable, indeed, but only so far as his personal interests were concerned. No sooner did he assume the formal command of the campaign than it became clear that any further intrigues were bound to affect seriously the very fortunes of war. Now, al-Muhallab's sense of duty prompted him to press home the adverse effect of these intrigues on the progress of the expedition in a way that was most likely not to slander his opponents but to yield useful results. Two such incidents are recorded in Kam. (663) which afford us a proof not only of al-Muhallab's honesty of purpose but also his great flair for turning every trifling opportunity to his immense advantage.

While al-Muhallab was at Shahartaq on his way to meet the 'Azraqites, an old man of Banū Tamīm came to him with the petition that he be excused from military service on the ground of old age. Al-Muhallab granted him his petition but only on condition that he served him in another way. Al-Muhallab deputed him to say to the Emir (i.e., Bishr) when he harangued the people to enlist for war, "How do you exhort us to war while you keep back the noble chiefs and chivalrous warriors from us?" The old man did accordingly whereupon Bishr said, "What have you to do with it?" "Nothing" replied the man whose only purpose was to fulfil the promise that he had given to al-Muhallab.
Similarly, al-Muhallab gave one thousand dirhems to a man for the only service that he should go to Bishr and urge upon him the necessity of re-inforcing al-Muhallab with police and military force. Bishr again asked him, "What have you to do with it?" In reply the man said that he only wanted to convey a sincere advice for the benefit of the Emir and the Muslims and that he was never likely to do the same thing a second time. Such protests and exhortations, coming as they did from apparently disinterested men, could not go without effect. Al-Muhallab's one thousand dirhems were well-spent when Bishr sent him a reinforcement consisting of both the police and the military.

Assuming the command of the campaign for the fourth time, al-Muhallab set out from al-Basra to meet the Azarqa who had advanced as far as al-Furat, leaving al-Ahwaz behind them. In the meantime that al-Muhallab was advancing towards the Azraqites, Bishr, in compliance with the orders of 'Abd al-Malik, wrote to his deputy in al-Kufa, 'Amr b. Hurairah, to raise an army eight thousand strong under the command of 'Abdur Rahman b. Mikhnaf al-Azdi and to dispatch it to help al-Muhallab. Accordingly the contingent left al-Kufa to proceed to the front via al-Basra.

While 'Abdur Rahman b. Mikhnaf was at al-Basra on his way to join al-Muhallab, Bishr gave another proof of his abiding rancour which was strong enough to sweep aside all scruples of honesty and fairplay no less than the vital interests of state and community. He invited 'Abdur Rahman to a private talk and, after flattering him with high
compliments, indulged in preaching disaffection, disloyalty and treachery to the would-be comrade of al-Muhallab. He exhorted him to defy al-Muhallab and to work for his failure. The response of the faithful 'Azdite, however, was only that of contempt' for the youth who, instead of exhorting him to fight the enemy and to work for the interests of the Muslims, incited him to betray his own 'ibn 'Amm (cousin, meaning al-Muhallab who was also an 'Azdite). When pressed by Bishr for a reply, he only said "I cannot but obey you in all matters that I liked and that I disliked", but came out bitterly resenting the preposterous folly of young Bishr in treating him, an old man, as if he were a fool who could easily be seduced or taken in.(1)

As soon as the 'Azraqites learnt of the approach of al-Muhallab, they withdrew from al-Furat without a fight. Al-Muhallab pursued them as far as Suq al-'Ahwaz and thence to al-Hurmuz where he entrenched himself with a ditch and after an engagement in which his 21-year-old son, Yazid, took a prominent part, inflicted a heavy defeat on the enemy.(2)

The defeat of the 'Azraqites at al-Hurmuz seems to have been very serious because it immediately roused in the camp of al-Muhallab a hope of their speedy end. When al-Muhallab showed his determination to press the advantage and dispatched his son al-Mughlira to pursue the enemy who had repaired into

(1). Tab. 2/356; Kam. 664.

(2). Kam. 664.
Fars, ʿAbdur Raḥmān b. ʿUbaṣṣ said to him, "O, Bahr, it is no wisdom to do away with these dogs because in that case you will have to sit idle in your home. Rather it is better that you should procrastinate with them and make your living through them." To this tempting suggestion which any selfish man would have gladly adopted, al-Muhallab replied, "This is not faithfulness."(1)

This significant incident must be borne in mind throughout our study of al-Muhallab's conduct during the next three or four years. It constitutes an advance refutation of the misgivings that sometimes agitated the mind of the stern al-Hajjāj who seems to have had a vague suspicion that al-Muhallab was deliberately deferring with the Azraqites in order not to lose his important position. There can be no doubt that the above reply was a genuine manifestation of a permanent trait in the character of al-Muhallab because it was made unostentatiously to a colleague who was obviously an ardent friend of him. It is an undeniable evidence of al-Muhallab's iron character, his high sense of duty and his unimpeachable honesty of purpose.

While at Kāmākurma, al-Muhallab was joined by ʿAbdur Raḥmān b. Mikhnaf who is reported to have pitched his camp at a distance of one or one and a half mile from that of al-Muhallab so that the two armies stood within sight of each other (2).

(1). Kam. 664, 14.
Al-Muhallab had passed barely one month (1) and Ibn Mikhnaf just ten days (2) at Ramal-Hurmuz when there came the news of Bishr's death at al-Basra. This news had a very aggravating effect on the discipline of the two armies particularly the Kufan army. The soldiers did not like the idea of being long in the field, far away from their wives and children. They were only waiting for a favourable opportunity to get back to the easy and luxurious life which they were accustomed to enjoy at home. Hence they proved only too ready to take advantage of the weakness of the local government due to the disappearance of its permanent head. The Kufan army was the first to disintegrate. The leaders of three out of the four tribal divisions of which that army was composed, defected and left the camp without permission (3). The contagion soon spread among the Basrans also. We have already seen that it was against the very grain of al-Muhallab to force any one to fight on his side unwillingly. Moreover, it was well-nigh impossible and certainly useless and inexpedient in the present circumstances to apply compulsion. Hence, he resorted to persuasion but the words he used on the occasion bear the stamp of his ingenuity. Addressing the Basrans, he said, "Your position is different from that of

(1) Kam. 664, 14.

(2) Tab. 2/857, 10. Thus Ibn Mikhnaf must have joined al-Muhallab after the latter had been in Ramal-Hurmuz for twenty days.

(3) Tab. 2/857, 13 seq.
the Kufans. You are fighting in defence of your own city, property and women."(1) This grim warning found a response among a section of the soldiers but still very many of them decamped. Al-Muhallab and 'Abd al-Muharrar continued in Kamarunuz with a handful of soldiers till the arrival of al-Ḥajjāj a short time afterwards(2).

The three Kufan chiefs, along with the multitude of other deserters, gathered at al-‘Awāz with the intention of proceeding to al-Basra. But before they could do so, they received a long letter from Khalid b. ‘Abdullah, the acting governor of al-Basra, in which he threatened them with death if they did not at once return to their camp. No doubt, the letter was received with jeers and booings but it had the effect of diverting the intransigents straight to al-Kufa. The prefect of al-Kufa, ‘Amr b. Ḥuraith, also prohibited their entry into the town. They, however, disregarded the ban and entered the city under cover of darkness where they remained till the arrival of al-Ḥajjāj(3).

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(1). Kam. 664-5.
(2). Kam. 665,7-8.
(3). Tab. 2/857-9;