CHAPTER XVII.

CONDITIONS UNDER AL-HAJJAJ B. YUSUF.

The death of Bishr, although its immediate effect was a temporary breakdown of al-Muhallab's war-effort, proved in the long run to be a blessing in every respect. It rid al-Muhallab of the malignant jealousy which not only affected his life and personal interests but also caused an inhibition of the much-needed assistance for the prosecution of the campaign. This alone, however, was not sufficient for an intensification of the war. The hope of an improvement in the situation lay only in the appointment of a worthy successor. Fortunately, 'Abd al-Malik did not agree to confirm Khalid b. 'Abdullāh, the nominee of the deceased Bishr, whose hostility towards al-Muhallab we have already known. The lucky choice fell on al-Hajjāj b. Yusuf, the right man of the hour for the truculent province, who, whatever may be the view about the moral admissibility of his methods, was singularly adept in reducing the rebels to obedience and evolving order from chaos.

It is the generally accepted view that al-Hajjāj was at al-Madīna, where he had been governor of al-Mījāz, when he received the orders of 'Abd al-Malik transferring him to the governorship of al-'Iraq. Accordingly he proceeded to al-Kūfa straightaway from al-Madīna (1). Mas., however,

(1). Tab. 2/663,14; Anon. 267, 2; IATH. 4/182, 7.
records a different account of the circumstances of his appointment which is lacking in other sources. According to it (1), 'Abd al-Malik had appointed to the governorship of al-Basra 'a weak man' who did not render full aid to al-Muhallab with the result that the 'Azraqites pushed forward till they reached al-Furat. Al-Muhallab, thereupon, made a strong representation to 'Abd al-Malik saying that he had no troops left with him and that if he received no reinforcements, he would be compelled to give up contesting the forward march of the 'Azraqites and to leave the way to al-Basra open to them. This led 'Abd al-Malik to decide that Khalid, whose incompetence and bungling with the administration were already well-known to him, should immediately be replaced by a competent and strong man. He, therefore, offered the post to the grandees present at his court of whom al-Hajjāj alone had the courage to come forward and undertake the onerous charge.

Now the 'weak man' referred to in the above report can easily be identified with Khalid b. 'Abdullah, the immediate predecessor of al-Hajjāj whose weakness was amply proved by his ignominious failure to force the deserters from al-Muhallab's army to go back to the front. That al-Muhallab in his utter helplessness should have written to 'Abd al-Malik in the manner described in the report, is quite understandable and particularly consistent with the previous report in Mas. itself that 'Abd al-Malik had personally guaranteed a regular supply of troops to al-Muhallab before the latter consented to assume the command.

(1). Mas. 5/291,4 seq.
Further, the presence of al-Hajjāj at the court of ‘Abd al-Malik about the time of the death of Bishr and his own appointment to the governorship of al-‘Irāq, which is the only feature of the report that can be held to militate against its veracity, is corroborated by a report in Anon. (69,1) where it is expressly asserted that al-Hajjāj proceeded to al-Kūfa from Syria whither he had been on a visit to ‘Abd al-Malik. Thus the report in Mas. is credible enough to be taken as filling a gap in the account of other authorities.

Armed with his letters patent as the governor of the whole of al-‘Irāq, (excluding, of course, Khurāsān and Sijistān), al-Hajjāj entered al-Kūfa on a Friday in the month of Rajab, 75 A.H. (1) Soon after his entry he delivered to the Kūfans a powerful speech which is still remembered for its roaring and thundering oratory. In it, he set forth in unequivocal terms his determination to rule with an iron hand and to brook no disrespect for law and authority. 'Using sword where his predecessors used the rod.' Then referring to the most urgent problem of the hour, he swore by ‘Allāh that he would put to sword all such deserters who failed to rejoin the camp of al-Muhallab within a limit of three days. Further in pursuance of the above declaration he promulgated a number of prompt and stern measures which left no doubt as to his earnestness about it. For instance, he ordered his

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(1). Friday: Anon. 274,2: Rajab, 75; Anon. 270,1; cr. Tab. 2/944:9. In Tab. 2/872,9 it is placed as late as in the month of Ramadān but that is impossible. The chronology of subsequent events does not allow that.
Chief of the Police to wield his sword as freely as a rod after the expiry of the three days' limit and also enjoined upon the "Urafa" to produce before him certificates from al-Muhallab to the effect that their men had joined the colours.(1)

Thus the firmness of resolve with which al-Hajjaj emphasised his threats worked like a magic wand in effectively cowing the Kufans. Those whose duty it was rushed with all speed to join al-Muhallab, not delaying even so much as to take their luggage which they left behind to be sent afterwards(2). It is reported that even new bridges had to be improvised for the passage of the large number of returning troops.(3)

From al-Kufa al-Hajjaj proceeded to al-Basrah where he delivered a similar speech in which he again gave three days to the people to join al-Muhallab, threatening the defaulters with death(4). But the Basrans did not wait for any such express orders which they had already anticipated from the news of the events at al-Kufa. Most of them had left for the front even before the arrival of al-Hajjaj(5).

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(1). Kam. 665; Anon. 270; Tab. 2/666.
(2). Mas. 5/301,9; Kam. 665.
(3). Mas. 5/300.
(4). Anon. 276,1.
(5). Kam. 666.
As a result of these stern measures which were executed both in al-Kūfā and al- Bsra with a merciless insistence on the letter of the ukase, there was a stampede at the bridge of Ra'maHurμμ where al-Muhallab was still camping(1). Within ten days the troops poured upon him in such large numbers (2) that al-Muhallab exclaimed, "This new governor of al- Iraq is really a very strong man. Now, certainly, the enemy will be successfully fought out."(3)

Al-Muhallab spoke the above words with his characteristically intelligent and farsighted vision. What al-Muhallab needed, and what had hitherto been lacking, for bringing the campaign to a successful end was a stable and strong provincial government and an earnestly helpful governor. The return of the troops was a convincing proof that the essential need had been

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(1). Tab. 2/874, 1. According to Mas. 5/293, 6, al-Muhallab was at the time at Mhrifjān Nadhaq, a district in the south-west of the province of al-Jibal near the border of al-Iraq (Yaq.; Le Stra. 202). This is quite improbable.

(2). The continuous influx of troops is vividly described by a poet in the following verses:

(Anon. 277)

(3). Mas. 5/302; Tab. 2/874, 1; Anon. 277, 1.
fulfilled and that a final victory was only a matter of course. Subsequent events justified the confident hope of al-Muhallab and the arrival of al-Hajjāj stands out as the beginning of the concluding phase of the campaign against the Āzāriqa.

At the top of all these measures for the restoration of strict military discipline came a proof in black and white of al-Hajjāj's recognition of the exceptionally high and unrivalled position of al-Muhallab. Al-Hajjāj wrote to al-Muhallab:

"While Bishr dealt with you under duress and professed that he could do without you, I affirm my need of you. So show me earnestness in fighting your enemy. Whomsoever you suspect of disobedience there, kill him for I will kill all such people here. If there be here a friend of any one who deserted you, let me know of his place because I propose to punish a friend for friend and a namesake for namesake." (1)

The opening lines of this letter reveal al-Hajjāj as an able administrator who did not belittle the merits of his subordinates and was ready to recognise greatness in them. They also show how widespread was the denunciation and condemnation of the policy that Bishr had adopted against al-Muhallab. In reply al-Muhallab wrote to al-Hajjāj:

"Here with me there is none who is not submissive and repentant for his sin. Verily, when the people fear punishment they hold offence as some thing very great;
when they are assured of impunity they treat it as something trifling; and when they despair of forgiveness they are incited to rebellion. Therefore, send over to me those persons whom you have called disobedient because they are but chivalrous horsemen and I hope that 'Allāh may kill the enemy through them."

The above reply bears out very vividly the fine contrast between the policy of al-Muhallab and the methods of al-Ḥajjāj. Al-Ḥajjāj ruled with an iron hand, al-Muhallab with a firm but gentle hand. Al-Ḥajjāj knew no mercy; al-Muhallab's sense of discipline was tempered, but not corrupted, with consideration and kindness. The result was that while al-Ḥajjāj struck terror, al-Muhallab commanded love and willing obedience.

Al-Ḥajjāj showed extraordinary zeal for strengthening the hands of al-Muhallab and intensifying and accelerating the campaign against the Azārīqa. Not content with the above measures, he himself, along with a number of Başran and Kūfān chiefs, moved to Rustaqābād in the beginning of Sha'ban, 75 A.H.(2). Rustaqābād stood at a distance of eight farsakh from al-ʿAhwāz and eighteen farsakh from the camp of al-Muhallab(3). Al-Ḥajjāj had carried out

(1). For Arabic text see Appendix p. r.
(2). Tab. 2/874,3. Ibid 1. 9 has " کخرشیات " but the former seems to be more credible.
(3). Anon. 277, 10 ; cf. Tab. 2/874,10.
this move with a view to strengthening the rear of al-
Muhallab and he originally proposed to stay there till
the extermination of the Azraqites(1). His plans, however,
were soon upset by a revolt in which he embroiled
himself by his untimely announcement to discontinue the
increase in pay previously granted by Maqṣab b. al-
Tubair(2). Naturally enough this unpalatable announcement
caused a rebellion which, according to the short account
in Tab. (2/874), does not seem to have been a very long
and serious one. But the detailed version in Anon. (277 seq)
which has also been adopted by Ḥb al-ʿAthīr (4/185 seq)
depicts the incident as a grim episode which took several
months to come to a head and the ferocity of which at
least for a time made the very fate of al-Ḥajjāj tremble
in the balance. According to the latter version the
final breach between the rebels and the adherents of al-
Ḥajjāj came off only as late as in the month of Tabiʿa II,
76 A.H. (3). Ultimately the rebellion was successfully
crushed and ʿAbdullāh b. al-Jarūd, the head of the
rebels, was killed along with a number of his associates.

This untoward rebellion was particularly inopportune.
It completely defeated the object which al-Ḥajjāj had

(1). Anon. 279.
(2). An uniform increase of hundred in the pay, Anon. 280, 5.
(3). Anon. 281, last line.
envisaged in effecting the move to Rustaqābādh. Instead of being a demonstration of solidarity and strength it only served to weaken the position of al-Muhallab in the eyes of the 'Azāriqa, who began to cherish hopes of profiting thereby. The damaging effect of this incident was, however, repaired when the heads of the rebels were sent to the camp of al-Muhallab and displayed to public view at Ḥamahurmuz(1). Still, contrary to his original programme, al-Ḥajjāj had to cut short his stay at Rustaqābādh and return to al-Baṣra.

(1). Tab. 2/874,5; cf. Anon. 292,2.