CHAPTER XIX.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE AZARJOA.

Fourth Period (Continued).

Third Phase: The Lull.

After the death of 'Abdur Rahman b. Mikhnaf the Kufan army was amalgamated with the Basran army under al-Mihallab who invested with its command his son Habib (1). The Kufans had fallen in such disgrace that the Basrans were often tempted to upbraid them with their ignominious conduct at Kazar. A man is reported to have taunted Ja'far, the son of Ibn Mikhnaf with the following verse:

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\text{Al-llihallab, who had no partiality for his own townsfolk, the Basrans, to relish the taunts hurled at the soldiery of the rival city of al-Kufa, felt it necessary to stop these provocations which were likely to embitter the relations between the two sections of his army. He consoled the Kufans by saying that they had shown no cowardice; only they had disobeyed their Emir. Further he reminded the Basrans that it did not lie in their mouth to upbraid the Kufans with their flight because they themselves had behaved likewise at Dulab, had fled from 'Uthman at Daris (2) and had even deserted himself in the past (Kam.671).}
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(1). Kam. 670,16.

(2). The author of Raghba (8/81) has taken it to refer to 'Uthman b. Qat'an who was sent by al-Hajjah against Shabib. This is an error for various reasons. First, *
Habīb retained the command of the Mīfān army till the arrival of ‘Attāb b. Marqā‘al-Riyāḥī in the month of Jumādā I or II of the following year, 76 A.H. During this period of seven or eight months, both the contending armies lay opposite each other at Sābūr. No major encounter is recorded and it seems that both sides contented themselves with occasional skirmishes. An idea of the nature of these skirmishes is afforded by the report of two incidents recorded in Kam. 673-4.

1. One night it rained heavily at Sābūr where the camp of al-Mihallab stood in such close proximity to the Azraqites that only a mountain pass intervened between them. Foreseeing danger from the direction of the mountain pass, al-Mihallab asked his soldiers if any of them would come forward to keep a watch at it. When no response came al-Mihallab himself put on his armour and proceeded towards the pass, followed by his son al-Maghīra. Soon the soldiers repented their inaction. A man called ‘Abdullāh said, "The Emir called upon us to guard the pass in our own

*‘Uthmān b. Qatān was killed on the river Haulāyā near al-Bat (a district of Baṣrā) and not at Dāris or Dāris where according to al-Bakrī is a place near Maṣrūqān, a village in the province of al-Baṣra. A reference to Dāris in Tab. 2/332, also suggests that it must be somewhere near al-Ahwāz. Second, ‘Uthmān b. Qatān was killed so late as on the 10th Dhu ‘l-Hijja, 76 A.H. (Tab. 2/933) whereas the words of al-Mihallab were apparently spoken long before that date. Third, considering the occasion and the context, the reference can only be to an act of the Baṣrans and not of the Mīfāns. Hence, it can only mean ‘Uthmān b. ‘Ubaidullāh b. Maṣmar who led a Baṣran expedition against the Azraqites in Dhu ‘l-Qa‘da, 65 A.H. ‘Uthmān b. ‘Ubaidullāh was killed and his army put to flight in the vicinity of Dīlāb (near al-Ahwāz).
interests but we did not obey him." Thereupon a number of soldiers followed him and all of them went to the pass where they found al-Muhallab and al-Mughïra unaccompanied by any third person. Seized with gratitude, the soldiers requested al-Muhallab to return to the camp, assuring him that they would suffice him the vigil at the pass. At dawn, the Azraqites appeared on the mountain-road but were successfully repulsed by Mudrik b. al-Muhallab with the help of a number of brave soldiers.

2. It was the Day of al-Nahr (10th Dhu 'l-Hijja), and al-Muhallab was addressing the people from the pulpit when the Azraqites suddenly swooped down upon them. Al-Muhallab was rather piqued that he should be attacked and compelled to fight even on such an auspicious day. But as the other side had thought it fit to take the initiative he felt justified in resisting it by every means(1). So he promptly ordered al-Mughïra to meet the attackers. Accordingly al-Mughïra went forth, preceded by Sa'd b. Najd al-Qardûsî, a knight of proverbial valour, and followed by a number of warriors. The Azraqites were successfully repulsed but in the encounter al-Mughïra suffered a fall. Sa'd b. Najd and Dhubyân al-Sakhtiyâni, along with a number of other warriors, defended him till he was able to ride his horse once again. In the meantime, however, a few people fled and informed al-Muhallab that al-Mughïra had been killed. Later

on Dhubyān al-Sakhtiyānī came with the news that al-Mughīra was safe. Al-Muhallab was so pleased that he set at liberty all the slaves that happened to be in his presence at that time.

Al-Hajjāj had already given sufficient indication of his impatience to bring the war against the 'Azāriqa to a speedy conclusion. It was difficult for him, far away from the theatre of war as he was, to have a true estimate of the realities and the limitations of the situation. The prolonged lull after the storm at Kazarūn was sufficient cause to make him fret and fume at what he suspected to be a deliberate attempt on the part of al-Muhallab to put off the extermination of the 'Azāriqa in order to maintain himself in an advantageous and lucrative position. He, therefore, continued to send reproachful messages and special envoys in order to impress upon al-Muhallab his extreme indignation at the delay and to urge him to give up the waiting game for a forcing one. Two of such messages, the second and the third of the series, apparently belong to the period under review before the arrival of ‘Attāb b. Wārqā.

1. The first of the two envoys was al-Barā’ b. Qābīṣa (b. ‘Abī ‘Aqīl al-Thaqafi). His mission is also confirmed by a detailed account in Tab. (2/1004 seq) though there it is placed in a later date(1). Al-Barā’ came to al-Muhallab

(1). In Tab. the mission of al-Barā’ is placed after al-Muhallab had arrived at Jīraft and had wrested the whole of Fars from the ‘Azāriqa, i.e., about one year after the departure of ‘Attāb b. Wārqā (in the beginning of 77). Chronology is, of course, often neglected and confused in *
with a letter from al-Hajjaj further elaborating the charge that he wanted to make a living through the 'Azariqa because, otherwise, he could easily crush them only if he wished to do so. It was further stated that al-Barā' had the mission to rouse him to push the offensive without any further delay. The letter ended with a warning that al-Muhallab should no more indulge in any lame excuses which will not be acceptable at all.

Al-Muhallab had no hesitation in giving to the messenger of al-Hajjaj a demonstration of the futility of the course of action so strongly and persistently urged by his overlord. He ordered his troops to move and to seek an engagement with the enemy. Accordingly, the forces advanced in perfect battle array with proper dispositions. The sons of al-Muhallab were allotted a leading role and every one of them was put in command of a division. Al-Barā' b. Qabīsa watched the battle from a mound nearby. Men attacked men and divisions fell upon divisions; a bloody war raged from the time of morning prayers till noon when there was a short break. In the afternoon, al-Muhallab

* Kam. but in the present case it appears that the eight dispatches of al-Hajjaj are mentioned in order of their occurrence. Besides it must be borne in mind that in the year 77 al-Barā' was acting as the wall of 'Isfahān (Tab. 2/994,1) and also took part in the expedition against al-Muṭarrif b. al-Mughira b. Shukba (Tab. 2/996 seq). It is just possible, although it is not definitely known, that he should have taken this appointment in immediate succession to 'Attāb. Hence it is more likely that he should have been sent as al-Hajjaj's emissary before 'Attāb joined al-Muhallab.
again lead the people to battle, with his sons at the command of their respective divisions, and another foray like the previous one followed (1). During the battle al-Muhallab's soldiers left no doubt as to their dash and tenacity. Even as regards perseverance, they always refused to retire unless the 'Azārīqa were the first to leave the field. But, despite all that, they failed to make any impression upon their inveterate and fanatical foe.

This practical demonstration of earnestness, however, served its purpose perfectly well. Al-Bara' was convinced that the 'wait and see' policy of al-Muhallab was not due to inert complacency, lack of courage or any selfish motive. Rather it was based on a realistic estimate of the peculiar situation in which the impotency of mere force was a stark reality. It was a vain hope to subdue the enemy by rushing headlong into a reckless encounter. Giving his impressions of the previous day's engagements, al-Bara' acknowledged to al-Muhallab that he had never seen before chivalrous knights like his sons or warriors like his Arab soldiers. "Nor", he said, "have I ever known an enemy more persistent and mightier than the people whom you are fighting. By 'Allāh, your excuse is fully proved." (Tab. 2/1005,4-6).

Al-Muhallab then bestowed ten thousand dirhems, loads of presents and robes of honour upon al-Bara' and gave him

(1). Tab. 2/1004 seq.; Kam. 671 seq.
a hearty send off as befitted an emissary of the governor of al-'Iraq (1).

On his return al-Barā' conveyed to al-Ḥajjāj his own impression as given above and also the reply of al-Muhallab which stated that he had faithfully carried out the order to attempt an offensive under the eyes of the special envoy who would bear witness to what he had seen as to the outcome of it. As for the charge of deliberately prolonging the campaign with a selfish motive, al-Muhallab urged that the situation was really so difficult as not to allow of any useful move and assured that he deemed it a criminal breach of his moral and religious duty to the community, the governor and the Khalīfa to delay the operations any longer than absolutely necessary (2).

The text of the above letter as preserved in Tab. (2/1006), however, lacks a very significant sentence which is quoted in Kam. 672,4 as having been written by al-Muhallab to al-Ḥajjāj on this occasion. It was this: "I am looking forward to one of three things to befall them; quick death, distressing hunger or a split in their views."

This affords us a proof that al-Muhallab was throughout acting according to a calculated plan for the extermination

(1). Tab. 2/1005.
(2). For Arabic text see Appendix p. 15.
of the 'Azāriqa. He had thought out at such an early date the effective means of destroying the enemy. It will be seen in the following pages that it was a combination of the same three causes mentioned above that brought about the final end of the 'Azāriqa. Al-Muḥallab never missed an opportunity of inflicting losses upon the enemy whenever he could do so without massacring his own ranks, he gradually extended his control over the raw materials of Fārs till his enemy began to feel the pinch of scarcity and then finally he worked his clever intrigues for dividing the 'Azāriqa among themselves.

2. After a short time al-Ḥajjāj dispatched another envoy, al-Jarrāḥ b. ʿAbdullāḥ(1), with a letter to al-Muḥallab containing a repetition of the old accusation of deliberate procrastination despite superior military strength. Al-Ḥajjāj, however, made it clear that in his opinion the delay on the part of al-Muḥallab was not due to any spirit of defiance or cowardice but simply on account of the temptation of greater material gain. He, therefore, warned him that he would treat him quite differently if a battle was not undertaken forthwith.

On reading the letter al-Muḥallab said to al-Jarrāḥ that he had employed every trick and exhausted all means and that in the circumstances it was no surprise that the final victory should be delayed. "The strange thing is" he added with an anguished heart," that the decision should

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(1). Kam. 674 seq.
lie with him who has the authority to enforce it, instead of him who is competent enough to judge it." (1) This sentence which is often quoted as a pearl of wisdom, very faithfully and poignantly depicts the anomaly that al-Hajjāj, by virtue of his superior authority, should seek to dictate to al-Muhallab who was the man on the spot competent enough to judge the right course. Al-Muhallab, however, treated al-Jarrāḥ in the same manner as he had treated al-Barā'. His troops engaged the Azraqites and fought them for three days from morning till asr time when either side retired with losses of killed and wounded. Al-Jarrāḥ was even more convinced of al-Muhallab's honesty of purpose than al-Barā'.

Giving his impressions of al-Muhallab and his troops he said to al-Hajjāj, " O Emir, by 'Allāh I have never seen a man like him and I do n't think that any one could continue in the circumstances in which he is placed." Further he testified that he had watched for three days the warriors of al-Muhallab going to and returning from furious engagements as if it were a matter of habit and daily routine with them. Upon these words al-Hajjāj exclaimed, ' How greatly have you extolled him, 0 'Abū 'Uqba."' Abū 'Uqba replied that he had only given the irrepressible 'truth'.

Al-Muhallab's reply which al-Jarrāḥ brought with him to al-Hajjāj read as follows:-

"I am in receipt of your letter. You accuse me of delay in fighting the people despite the fact that you

(1) Kam.674.13-14.
do not attribute defiance or cowardice to me. Still you have reproved me as a coward is reproved and have threatened me as a disobedient man is threatened. So please inquire of al-Jarrāh.'(1)

It will be seen that this reply further proves how jealous of his honour and self-respect al-Mihallab was. He would leave no stone unturned to convince al-Ḥajjāj of the futility and the folly of the course of action suggested by him. But he could not brook any threats or disparagement of his own exalted position. That is why he politely and mildly pulled up al-Ḥajjāj for addressing him as if he were guilty of cowardice or defiance.

(1). For Arabic text see Appendix p. 3.