CHAPTER XXI.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE 'AZĀRĪQĀ

Fourth Period (Continued).

Fourth Phase: 'Azārīqā Wiped Out Of Fārs.

After the departure of 'Attāb al-Muhallab stayed in Sābūr for about a year (1), which period is also barren of any major engagement and seems to have been spent in mere skirmishing to which the operations had to be confined ever since the battle at Kāzarūn. As a matter of fact, the conditions were such that no advance was possible. This was amply demonstrated by the various engagements that took place under the eye of al-Ḥajjājī's emissaries. The Azraqites were still undaunted and the balance of power was almost equal on either side. Any attempt to force the enemy back resulted only in heavy losses on both sides without any advantage to either. It was, therefore, but wise and expedient on the part of al-Muhallab to wait patiently for such time as the Azraqites were worn out and showed signs of weakness.

Such an opportunity seems to have occurred about the end of the year 77. When al-Muhallab had been at Sābūr for about a year after the departure of 'Attāb, he launched an attack on the Azraqites which is mentioned in the annals as the Day of al-Bustān(2). No details are available and

(1) Tab. 2/880,14.
(2) Tab. 2/1003.
even al-Bustān remains unidentified. Yet the battle seems to have been a major one initiated at the instance of al-Muhallab. Thus it can be taken as marking a turn in the course of war. Now at last the right moment to strike had come and al-Muhallab was not the man to ignore it. The Azraqites had 'let loose one end of the cloth' and it was now his turn 'to pull the other end(1)'. Henceforth he would allow no respite to the enemy. He at once launched a drive aimed at squeezing the Azēriqa out of Fārs. At the same time he also played another trump card which succeeded singularly and profited him immensely.

The distinguishing quality of al-Muhallab was that he combined in himself a mastery of 'al-khadṣa' (الخُصّة) with skill and experience in 'al-Ḥarb' (الحَرَب). This was the reason why he succeeded where others failed miserably. It must be remembered that the Azraqites were not mere rebels or depraved criminals. They were the selfless champions of a certain religious creed, no matter however destructive it was. It was their faith that inspired them with fanatical zeal and inexhaustible courage and fortitude, qualities which carried them through all the ordeals and sustained them in the face of overwhelming odds. It was vain to hope for their extermination so long as they were united on the tenets of their creed. It is impossible to subdue a militant religious sect with mere persecution and force of arms. The destruction of their unity and their faith is a prerequisite

(1). Vide the words of Qaṭarī supra p. 112.
of their own annihilation. Al-Muhallab had clearly realised this from the very beginning when he said that he counted upon a split among the 'Azāriqa themselves for their destruction. But dissensions were not left to arise themselves; al-Muhallab himself sowed the seeds of discord. Kam. (677-79) records three successive moves on his part in this direction(1).

1. It so happened that there was an 'Azraqite blacksmith called 'Abzā who made poisoned arrows which were used against the army of al-Muhallab. When the matter was brought to the notice of al-Muhallab he promised to deal with it successfully. The plan that he hit upon was specially well-adapted in view of the rash fanaticism of the Azraqites. He commissioned a man to go secretly and cautiously to the camp of the Azraqites with a letter and a purse of one thousand dirhems and to drop them there. The letter was addressed to 'Abzā and contained the following:-

"I am in receipt of your arrows and am sending you one thousand dirhems. So receive the amount and send us more of the arrows."

As designed the letter and the dirhems fell into the hands of Qatari who summoned 'Abzā and questioned him about the matter. 'Abzā, innocent as he was, denied all knowledge of

(1) It is clear from Kam. that these incidents were not the immediate cause of the final disruption as they appear to be in I Ath. (4/213).
the letter or the dirhems. He was, nevertheless, beheaded by orders of Qatari. This action of Qatari met with the disapproval of a prominent follower of his, 'Abd Rabbih al-Ṣaḡīr, a 'mawla' of Banū Qais b. Tha-laba, who came to him and protested that it was rather rash to condemn a man to death without making sure of his guilt by a careful investigation of the charges levelled against him. Further he stressed that the whole thing about the letter and the dirhems was equally likely to be true or false. To this Qatari only replied that the murder of a man in the common interest of the community could not be objected to and that it was no business of the subjects to criticise the actions of the Imam who had full authority to do whatever he deemed to be necessary in the interests of the common weal. This authoritative reply silenced but not satisfied the conscientious objector who, along with a number of his own way of thinking, was henceforth inwardly opposed to his leadership.

Seeing that the first seed of discord had fallen on fertile ground al-Muhallab followed it up by another two clever moves which speak of his thorough understanding of his enemy and his deep insight into the peculiar sentiments and psychology of the Azraqites. The Azraqites had a particular foible for quibbling over subtleties of the orthodox Sharī'at law and their extreme puritanism often led to a ludicrous emphasis on letter at the expense of the spirit. Al-Muhallab proved himself shrewd enough to play upon this besetting weakness and to exploit it to his advantage.
2. The second move of al-Muhallab was to despatch a Christian with instructions to fall prostrate before Qatari and, on his deprecating the worshipful act being done to him, to affirm that he had done it to none other than him. The Christian did accordingly and when Qatari admonished that 'sujūd' belonged to Allah alone he asserted, "I did it to none but yourself." An Azraqite was quick to seize at it and urged that the worshipful act of the Christian had placed Qatari under the category of "those whom you worship instead of Allah" who, together with their worshippers, the Qur'an declares, will be turned into fuel for the fire of Hell. (1) Qatari argued in vain that the Christian worshipped Isā b. Maryam without the practice entailing any harm to the latter. In the meantime another Azraqite hastened to kill the Christian which action further accentuated the controversy because Qatari denounced it openly on the ground that the Christian was a 'dhimmī' and as such was entitled to protection. This move left the Azraqites still more divided than before.

3. The third move was to confront the Azraqites with a poser calculated to give rise to a theoretical controversy. At the instigation of al-Muhallab, a man went to the Azraqites and asked them as to their judgment about two emigrants one of whom died on his way towards them while the other reached them but failed to come up to the test.

(1). Cf. Qur'an (21, 78)
Some declared that both were infidels while others made an exception in favour of the former whom they pronounced to be a 'mu'min' entitled to a place in paradise.

Although it took some time before the 'Amēraţa suffered actual disintegration, the differences among them, as a result of the foregoing machinations engineered by al-Mihallab, were now sufficiently acute to paralyse their warring activities. While the differences showed no signs of abatement Qāţerī withdrew across the boundary of the neighbouring district of 'Istakhr where he spent one month in idleness and inactivity. Then he turned again for a battle with al-Mihallab which was precipitated by his vociferous lieutenants Šāliḥ b. Mihraq and 'Amr al-Qanā who were now seized with a sort of penitence for the dissensions in their ranks which, in the words of the former, 'had cooled the eyes of their enemy and had emboldened him against them? 'Amr al-Qanā gave the signal for a renewal of active warfare by darting forth with the following verse on his lips:

The lull was at last broken and brisk fighting took place in which al-Mughīra b. al-Mihallab achieved some notable feats (1). It is not recorded whether the

(1). Kam. 679.
battle ended in a decisive advantage for either side. But henceforth we cease to hear of the 'Azāriqa in Šābūr and thus it may safely be assumed that after this battle they had lost their footing in Fārs and were steadily retreating towards Karmān.

An incident during the above battle affords us a further illustration of al-Muhallab's unrelenting vigilance. It so happened that the sons of al-Muhallab had left their cattle unguarded. Al-Muhallab was not slow to apprehend a raid upon them. But he had hardly pointed out the danger to his sons when there came a messenger with the news that Sāliḥ b. Mīkhrāq had already carried out the raid. Al-Muhallab was much grieved at it and admonished his sons saying that everything which he himself did not personally attend to was spoilt. Thereupon Bishr b. al-Mighīra b. 'Abī Ṣufra, his own nephew, calmed him, saying, 'If you wish for your own equals then, by Allah, not one of us is worth the strap of your sandal.' Al-Muhallab then ordered that the raiding party be forthwith intercepted on its way back. Accordingly Bishr b. Mīgīra and Mūdirik and al-Mufaddāl, sons of al-Muhallab, darted forth and made full amends for their neglect by successfully wresting the cattle from the enemy.

The position was now clearly untenable for the 'Azāriqa. Fārs was fast slipping out of their hands and thus they were deprived of the commodities of that rich province. They were now hard pressed for supplies. No doubt they still possessed Karmān but the problem of
transport bristled with difficulties because the distance was very considerable (1). So the pinch of scarcity compelled them to retire into Karmān while al-Muhallab established his sway over the districts of 'Iṣṭakhr and Darābjird.

It was in one of the villages of 'Iṣṭakhr that al-Muhallab received the fifth commission from al-Ḥajjāj consisting of two men, one belonging to the Kalb and the other to the Sulaim (2). When the two messengers exhorted him, on behalf of al-Ḥajjāj, to embark upon rash warfare, he recalled the following verse:

\[ \text{وَمَنْ يَحْمِدَ بَيْنَّا بَيْنَنَا لِيُهْدَيْنَآ إِلَى الْمَسْلِحَةِ} \]  
\[ \text{وَلَوْ نُبِينَهُمَا الْبَرَاءَةِ عِنْدَهُمَا} \]  
\[ \text{(Kam. 681).} \]

Then, as on previous occasions, he ordered his son Yazīd to seek an engagement with the enemy. The engagement provided the two messengers with a convincing proof of the might of the 'Azāriqa. An Azraqite speared a soldier of al-Muhallab with such vigour and skill that the spear transpierced his thigh together with the saddle. Pointing out the incident to the two messengers, al-Muhallab said, "How can we fight a people who spear like this?" Still, the attack of Yazīd succeeded in routing the enemy.

This engagement also served in an indirect way to bring about a reunion between Bishr b. al-Mughīra b. 'Abī Șuṭra and his cousins, the sons of al-Muhallab. There had been some estrangement between the two parties and

(1). Tab. 2/1003.

(2). According to Dain. 285 the two messengers were
Bishr was anxious for a reconciliation. In this engagement Bishr distinguished himself by his feats of arms and he thought it best to make an appeal to his cousins while they were impressed with his worth. So he put before them the trivial position to which he had been reduced by their neglect and indifference and asked that he be given an honourable place that was due to him. The sons of al-Muhallab agreed to and al-Muhallab also approved of the reunion.

While al-Muhallab was yet struggling with the 'Azraqites, al-Hajjaj hastened to appoint a man, Kardam by name, to be his agent in Fars. This appointment must have been generally distasteful to the army of al-Muhallab because it involved the loss of the means of its maintenance. A man even indulged in a pun on the name of the new incumbent:

\[\text{که‌روده‌ی عیاره‌ی حضرت‌العضا} \]
(Kam. 684).

Al-Muhallab naturally felt compelled to protest against this action. He wrote to al-Hajjaj asking him to leave the two districts of 'Ishtahhr and Darabjird for the maintenance of his troops. It is even reported (Tab. 2/1004) that Abd al-Malik also wrote to al-Hajjaj advising him to leave the two districts in the hands of al-Muhallab because their revenue was indispensable for meeting the war expenses. Al-Hajjaj thereupon acceded to the reasonable demand and al-Muhallab set about occupying the two districts.

Qatari(1) had razed to the ground the city of 'Ishtahhr.

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(1). Kam. 684.
because its inhabitants were in correspondence with Al-
Muhallab. He intended to do the same with the city of Fasa in the district of Darabjird but the safety of the town was purchased from him by Azdhwmar b. Al-Hirbidh for a hundred thousand dirhems. Al-Muhallab ousted Azdhwmar after a fight, drove him to Karmm and even sent his son al-Mughira in his pursuit. The occupation having been completed, he appointed his son al-Mughira and the notable chief al-Ruqad to collect taxes from the two districts(1).

During Al-Muhallab’s stay in Sibur several minor clashes are also mentioned to have occurred at various other places in Fars, viz., Shib Bawwán (one of the four 'heavens on earth', near Al-Nabdjan to the north of Kazaran), Dasht Barin (to the south of Kazaran) and Jubairin (2). No details are, however, available.

The eventual weakening of the Azariqa which permitted the circumspect Al-Muhallab to take the initiative and embark on the long-awaited offensive, was an occasion of great rejoicing in his camp. It is reported that Al-Muhallab celebrated the flight of Qatari from Sabur by organising a levee at which he was presented with encomiums by various speakers and poets. Al-Mughira b. Ḥabūr, a poet and

(1). Kam. 684; Tab. 2/1004.

(2). Cf. the qasīda of Kāb al-‘Ashqarī quoted infra p. 246. Relevant verses from the same are also quoted in Yaq. under the place-names concerned.

The event at Dasht Barin is also mentioned by *
warrior, recited an excellent 'qasida' on the occasion which opened thus:

(AGH. 11/157-8).

For this ode, the poet was rewarded by al-Muhallab with ten thousand dirhems, a noble horse and an increase of five hundred dirhems in the pay.

al-Nu‘mān b. ‘Uqba al-‘Atakī, a warrior and poet in al-Millahab’s army:

(Aqṣ. 2/576).