CHAPTER XXV.

GOVERNORSHIP OF KHURĀSĀN.

It will be remembered that the two border provinces of Khurāsān and Sijistān had been excluded from the domain of al-Ḥajjāj at the time of his appointment to the governorship of al-‘Irāq. The prefectship of these two provinces was held by Ḥumayya b. Ḥabīl b. Ḥālid b. Ḥābid directly on behalf of ‘Abd al-Malik and independently of al-Ḥajjāj. In the beginning of 78 A.H. (1), however, ‘Abd al-Malik passed orders deposing Ḥumayya b. Ḥabīl b. Ḥālid b. Ḥābid and extending the supremacy of al-Ḥajjāj over Khurāsān and Sijistān. Al-Ḥajjāj had not yet appointed any prefect when there arrived al-Muhallab after the successful termination of his campaign against the ‘Azāriqa. Al-Ḥajjāj forthwith bestowed the two provinces upon al-Muhallab but al-Muhallab himself pointed out to him that Ḥabīl b. Ḥābid b. Ḥabīl b. Ḥālid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥābid b. Ḥāb
and there was no reason why he should have felt so diffident of successfully governing Sijistan in addition to Khurāsān particularly when he himself had once been so far as Kabūl and the Indus (during the governorship of 'Abdur Rahman b. Samira in the years 43-44). No doubt, 'Ubaidullah b. 'Abī Bakra had had a longer and more varied experience as wālī of Sijistan but such relative difference is seldom a sufficient motive for prompting a great, capable and particularly self-confident man such as al-Muhallab was, no matter however generous he may have been, to shrink from an extension of the boundaries of his sway. In view of this the report by 'Ali b. Muḥammad in Tab. 2/1034 seems more plausible. According to it, there never occurred any question of al-Muhallab being appointed to both the provinces; he was to have only one of the two while the other was to go to 'Ubaidullah b. 'Abī Bakra. In the first instance al-Hajjāj appointed al-Muhallab to Sijistan and 'Ubaidullah b. 'Abī Bakra to Khurāsān. Al-Muhallab felt a dislike for Sijistan in comparison with Khurāsān and wished that the latter province be allotted to him. That al-Muhallab should have preferred Khurāsān to Sijistan is quite natural and understandable because of his very old and intimate connections with the former rather than the latter. Hence, al-Muhallab worked for the desired change in the dispensation of the provinces and for this purpose found a convenient excuse in the fact that he knew Khurāsān better than Sijistan while

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(1) According to Bal. 397, he was wālī of Sijistan from 51 to 53 A.H.
'Ubaidullah b. 'Abī Bakra was better acquainted with Sijistan than himself. Al-Muhallab did not make a direct approach to al-Ḥajjāj but instead sought the intervention of 'Abdur Rahman b. Ubaid b. Tariq al-‘Abshamī, al-Ḥajjāj's Chief of Police, who in turn also secured the support of Zādān Farrūkh, the Persian clerk of al-Ḥajjāj, in the matter. 'Abdur Rahman put the case before al-Ḥajjāj and Zādān Farrūkh seconded him whereupon al-Ḥajjāj reversed his previous order and assigned Khurāsān to al-Muhallab and Sijistan to 'Ubaidullah b. 'Abī Bakra.

Al-Muhallab's appointment to Khurāsān is by common agreement an event of the year 78 A.H. As it followed his return to al-Basra after the victory over the 'Azāriq, the assumption, on the basis of the chronology previously followed, is that it must have come off very shortly after the middle of the year 78. Al-Muhallab himself did not proceed to Khurāsān immediately but instead dispatched his son Ḥabīb at the head of his vanguard. On reaching Khurāsān, Ḥabīb made no attempt to disturb 'Umayya, who had not yet relinquished his post, or his agents. He only waited quietly till the arrival of al-Muhallab ten months later.

Al-Muhallab arrived in Khurāsān in 79 A.H. when Ḥabīb had been there for ten months (3) and took over

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(1) Anon. 343 * ترکیب الفیروز بن کیپس الخوراسان *

(2) According to Dain. 289 al-Muhallab received the governorship directly on behalf of 'Abd al-Malik. It was only after the death of al-Muhallab that Khurāsān was placed under al-Ḥajjāj.

(3) Thus in Tab. 2/1035,8. In Bal. 417, we have 99 which is undoubtedly a mistake for 79. Yaq.(2/907) is *
charge of office from the outgoing prefect, 'Umayya b. 'Abdullah who left the province thereafter.

It was late in the same year that al-Muhallab, at the instance of al-Hajjāj, appointed one Wakīb Bakr to be the interim successor to 'Ubaidullāh b. 'Abī Bakra who had died in Sijistān after his disastrous campaign against Zunbil of Mābul and Zābul (1). Not long afterwards, (2) 'Abdur Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. al-'Ash'ath, the Kūfī chief who on a former occasion was sent to the help of al-Muhallab, arrived in Sijistān as the new governor of the province. 'Abdur Raḥmān's first and foremost task was to deal with Zunbil (3) for which purpose al-Hajjāj had strengthened him with a numerous and well-equipped army called "the army of peacocks." 'Abdur Raḥmān determined to proceed with the campaign prudently and patiently, consolidating the ground gained and ensuring the lines of communication behind. In accordance with this calculated policy, he after subduing a part of the country, decided upon a pause and informed al-Hajjāj that he had done so in

* Grossly wrong in making al-Muhallab reach Khurāsān so early as in Safar, 76 A.H. and in asserting that his governorship of that province lasted seven years. T.T. 10/330 even mentions that al-Muhallab's governorship of Khurāsān lasted nine years. This is obviously impossible.

(1) Thus in Anon. 317 where it is added that Khāb al-'Ashqari denounced al-Muhallab's choice of Wakīb in the following verses:

In Jah. 3/240, however, the above verses are ascribed to Thabit Qutnā and Wakīb is said to have been appointed wali of some part of Khurāsān.

(2) Ibn al-'Ash'ath arrived in Sijistān in 79 according to Anon. 320, and in 80 according to Tab. 2/1044, 16; Dh. 41.

(3) A proper name as well as a title. The orthography is *
order that the soldiers may get accustomed to the nature of the mountains. Al-Ḥajjāj was as impatient with ʿAbdur Rahman as he had been with al-Muhallab. Neither the success of al-Muhallab nor the calamitous failure of ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAbī Bakra had taught him a lesson. With his characteristic impetuosity, he addressed ʿAbdur Rahman sharply and incriminatingly exactly as he had done with al-Muhallab, and even threatened him with supersession if he did not immediately rush headlong with the campaign. The reaction of ʿAbdur Rahman to these reproachful messages which poured upon him one after another in quick succession, was quite different from that of al-Muhallab. The contrast is very useful in throwing into bold relief the sterling qualities of the latter which distinguished him clearly and unmistakably from his colleagues and contemporaries.

While al-Muhallab would exhaust all means of proving and demonstrating his own wisdom and rectitude with admirably strong but calm courage of conviction, ʿAbdur Rahman called together the chiefs of his army and, having put the whole thing before them, declared that he would advance or pause according to their advice. The men of al-ʿIrāq, who constituted the army of ʿAbdur Rahman, hated al-Ḥajjāj and were always anxious for an early return to the luxurious life at home. So they lost no time in disowning allegiance to al-Ḥajjāj and doing homage to ʿAbdur Rahman who promised to rid them of the former (1).

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*(uncertain and frequently it is also written as Ṣutbīl Well. (231) adopts the pronunciation Ṣunbīl.*

(1). Tab. 2/1052 seq.; Anon. 320 seq.
No doubt al-Muhallab could far more easily do what 'Abdur Rahman did because he commanded unbounded personal obedience from his army which comprised an overwhelming number of his own tribesmen, the 'Azdites. But, while his keen sense of honour and self-respect would not let a single affront of al-Hajjaj go unanswered, at the same time his sense of discipline and loyalty would not allow him to go beyond the threat 'to relinquish the command rather than act against his own judgment.'

On learning of 'Ibn al-'Ashath's mutiny in Bijistan, al-Muhallab's sense of fidelity and, what is still more remarkable, his concern for the larger interests of the unity and the solidarity of the Muslim community vis-a-vis the non-Muslims, prompted him to write a letter to 'Ibn al-'Ashath dissuading him from the perilous and unpatriotic path which he had set before him. The letter, which must have been written very shortly after the outbreak of the mutiny(1) sought to impress upon 'Ibn al-'Ashath the serious implications of the revolt. First, it involved renunciation of sworn allegiance which in itself was deprecable. Secondly it led to sheer waste of much precious Muslim blood and dealt a heavy blow at the unity and solidarity of the community. The letter concluded with an earnest appeal to turn all the energies and resources against the infidels instead of frittering them away in internecine warfare(2).

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(1). For Arabic text see Appendix p. Y seq.

(2). According to Anon.,332,12 the letter was written from Khurasan i.e., before al-Muhallab started on his campaign in Transoxiana about the middle of the year 80 A.H.
A little later Ibn al-‘Ash’ath wrote to al-Muhallab inviting him to join hands in the rebellion. Al-Muhallab received the letter in his camp at Kish and, having gone through it, remarked that he would not be disloyal after he was more than seventy years of age and that it simply made him wonder that he should be exhorted to rebellion by one who was even younger than some of his sons. He wrote no reply to Ibn al-‘Ash’ath but only sent a word through the messenger who had brought the letter to be fearful of Allah as regards the blood of the Muslims. Afterwards he sent the letter of Ibn al-‘Ash’ath to al-Hajjāj in order to assure him of his fidelity in that critical hour(1).

When the army of Ibn al-‘Ash’ath moved on towards al-‘Irāq in the year 81 A.H., al-Muhallab also volunteered a piece of advice to al-Hajjāj as to how to deal with the mutineers. He wrote to him not to try to stem the onrushing tide of the ‘Irāqī troops but to let them proceed unchecked to their homes where the luxuries of a comfortable family life were bound in course of time to damp their enthusiasm for fighting which will ultimately give rise to dissensions in their ranks and consequently to a considerable weakening of their strength. When the troops lose enthusiasm and strength it will be no hard task to deal with them as they deserved (2).

(1). Anon. 329; Tab, 2/1042, 10.

(2). For Arabic text see Appendix p. A.
This was, indeed, a very precious advice based on strategic wisdom, ripe experience and a deep insight into the changed temperament of the 'Irāqī troops who had become enervated enough to be averse to fighting and to do everything and anything not to part with their homes where the vastly growing resources of the State had provided them with ample luxuries. But it was clear that only a patient and calculating mind like that of al-Muhallab himself, could appreciate and act upon this advice. Al-Hajjāj, quick and impatient as usual, was by his very nature incapable of adopting it. He not only rejected it outright but even expressed doubts about the motive underlying it (1). He chose for himself the same course that he had so vigorously sought to impose on al-Muhallab and 'Ibn al-'Ash'ath. A rash attempt was made to check the advance of 'Ibn al-'Ash'ath with the result that in the first encounter which took place on the Dujail near Tustar the rebel army achieved a clear victory (10th Dhu 'l-Hijja, 81 A.H). The army of al-Hajjāj fled back to al-Baṣra and the victorious rebels marched unchecked into the town. This stunning blow could not fail to drive home to worsted al-Hajjāj the truth of al-Muhallab's advice. In a remorseful mood, he asked for the letter of al-Muhallab, read it, and then rued his imprudence in the words, "What a great man of war he (al-Muhallab) is. He gave the right advice to us but we did not adopt it."(2)  

(1). Tab. 2/1059,11 ; Anon. 336, 11-12.  
(2). Tab. 2/1061,16-18; Anon. 336, 13-14.