CHAPTER XXVI.

CAMPAIGN IN TRANSOXIANA.

Through already a septuagenarian, al-Muhallab was still active and energetic enough to embark on an expedition beyond the Oxus. In the year 80 A.H. he crossed the river near Balkh and proceeded to Kish, the modern Shahr Sabz(1), where he established his camp. At the time his vanguard was three thousand strong and was commanded by a reputed knight, 'Abū al-'Adham Ziyād b. 'Amr al-Zimānī, who was generally counted as equal to two thousand men in bravery, strategy and sound judgment.

It will be remembered that Transoxiana was not an untraversed land for al-Muhallab. In his early life he had more than once marched victoriously up to Samarqand and Bukhārā. The country, however, was yet far from being permanently subdued and had to be conquered again and again.

From his base at Kish al-Muhallab dispatched two expeditions, one against the king of al-Khuttal(2), a mountainous region lying between the Wakhshāb and the Jaryāb (i.e. the upper course of the Oxus), and the other to Rabinjan, a small town in the country of Ṣughd Samarqand. The expedition against the king of al-Khuttal was undertaken at the invitation of a disgruntled cousin of his who personally visited al-Muhallab at Kish and offered his help and services in the venture. Al-Muhallab accepted the

(1). Le Strasburg 469.
(2). Le Strasburg 438.
suggestion and appointed his son Yazīd to lead an expedition in company with the officious visitor. Yazīd laid a siege to the castle of al-Sabāl, as the king of al-Khuttal was called, and forced him to sue for peace on payment of a particular sum.

The other expedition to Rabinjan was headed by al-Muhallab's another son, Ḥabīb. Ḥabīb met with considerable opposition from the king of Bukhārā whose forces numbered forty thousand. Although the enemy is reported to have retreated once or twice yet it is not clear if the expedition achieved any conclusive results(1).

Throughout the annals of al-Muhallab's two year campaign in Transoxiana, we always find him in his camp at Kish, sending out expeditions and directing the operations from there. Only once, however, in the year 81 A.H. we see his camp shifted to 'Ākrūn (near Shūmān) where an incident involving the murder of Bahīr b. Warqā, a distinguished warrior, took place. Bahīr was the person who on the orders of 'Umayya, al-Muhallab's predecessor in office, had executed an ambitious pretender, Bukair b. Wishāh, with whom he also had a long-standing personal rivalry. The murder of Bukair roused one of his kinsmen Sa'āda b. Ḥarb al-‘Auffi, to work for vengeance. In pursuance of the same object he proceeded to 'Ākrūn and cleverly managed to obtain the hospitality of his intended victim. Further, he ingratiated himself so much into the

(1). Tab. 2/1040-42.
confidence of Bahir that the latter even used to take him
to the company of al-Muhallab. On one such occasion while
Bahir was sitting in the assembly of al-Muhallab, Sa’Sa’a
stabbed him in the belly with a dagger tempered in ass’s
milk. The treacherous assassin was at once captured and
brought before al-Muhallab who, evidently to extort the
desired confession from him, said to him that Bahir was
unhurt. In reply Sa’Sa’a rejoiced in the appeasement of
his passion for revenge and boldly asserted that he was
sure his victim was none other than Bahir and that the
stab was so successfully administered as to make it
impossible for him to survive it. Thereupon, according to
some narrators, al-Muhallab sent the culprit to Bahir who
slew him just before he succumbed to his wound the next
morning. According to another version, al-Muhallab himself
had Sa’Sa’a beheaded whereupon his tribesmen, the <Auf and
the ‘Abnā‘, raised a great uproar that the sentence was
unjust and unjustified because, they asserted, Sa’Sa’a had
but taken his legitimate revenge and was not guilty of
an aggressive crime. The dispute soon threatened to assume
the form of a tribal strife by reviving the old animosities
between the <Auf and the ‘Abnā‘ on the one hand and the Buṭūn
and the Muqā‘is, the partisans of Bahir, on the other. But
the ugly situation was saved by promptly arranging a
compromise according to which the ‘Abnā‘ were paid blood-
money for Sa’Sa’a(1) while Bahir was held to counterbalance

(1). The blood-money was paid by the people according to Tab.
2/1051,13 and by al-Muhallab himself according to
Ikhālūn 3/46.
Bukair. Thus the episode was closed but al-Muhallab regretted very much the loss of a great knight like Bahir. (Tab. 2/1047-51).

In the year 82 A.H. we again met al-Muhallab at Kish which town he was still besieging. It was there what he received the news of the death of his son al-Mughira at Merv in the month of Rajab, 82 A.H. The position of al-Mughira at Merv is described by a few reporters as the Collector of Taxes of Khurasan while al-Muhallab, according to them, was only the head and the Commander of the military forces (Tab. 2/1039, 11-13; 1063, 9-10). This obviously is a misunderstanding which arose out of the fact that al-Muhallab was during the major part of his governorship of Khurasan (from the middle of 80 A.H. onwards) engaged exclusively in military operations while al-Mughira attended to the civil administration of the province at Merv. But the above report is only a later interpretation of this state of affairs is proved by the fact that there is no mention of al-Mughira in the reports of al-Muhallab's appointment which explicitly describe the latter's designation as the 'wali' of Khurasan. Nor is it specifically mentioned as to when at a subsequent date did the appointment of al-Mughira on behalf of al-Hajjaj take place. Thus the correct statement seems to be that al-Mughira only acted as his father's deputy at Merv during the latter's absence from Khurasan (1).

(1) Tab. 2/1077, 12; I Ath. 4/228; I Kh. 2/147.
The news of al-Mughira's death was for some time withheld from al-Muhallab and was broken to him only when Yazid allowed the women to cry out the customary lamentation. Al-Muhallab was so overwhelmed with grief that he could not control himself. Yet with tears flowing down his beard, the grief-stricken father dispatched Yazid to fill the place of al-Mughira at Merv and even in his agony did not fail to instruct the new incumbent as to what to do. The bereavement weighed heavily upon al-Muhallab in his old age and, perhaps, even hastened his death.(1)

Not long after the death of al-Mughira when the siege of Kish had lasted for two years, al-Muhallab agreed to retire in consideration of a money payment on behalf of the inhabitants of the town(2). Thereafter he departed for Merv, leaving behind Huraim b. Qutba, a client of Khuzaha, with instructions to release the hostages as soon as full payment was made to him. On crossing the Oxus, however, he made a halt at Balkh and wrote to Huraim not to release the hostages immediately on receipt of the money but to detain them till he reached Balkh because it was feared lest the natives should attempt a raid when the hostages were handed back to them. Huraim informed the king of Kish of

(1). Bel. 417,10.

(2). The conclusion of an agreement with the inhabitants of Kish is mentioned in Tab. both under the year 80 (2/1042,8) and the year 82(1080). It is, however, clear that it is an event of the latter year and that it is referred to under the former year just to complete the account. The narrator in both the places is the same Ali b. Muhammad and it is explicitly mentioned that the siege lasted two years (1041,14).
al-Muhallab's fresh orders with the offer that he was prepared to contravene them and to release the hostages immediately provided the money was paid without delay so as to make it possible for him to tell al-Muhallab that he had already released the hostages before the receipt of the letter. The king of Kish promptly availed himself of the offer and Huraith released the hostages immediately on payment of the money and then started for Balkh. On the way, he was intercepted by a band of Turk brigands which had already done the same with Yazid b. al-Muhallab on his way from Kish to Merv in order to succeed al-Mughirra. The brigands confronted Huraith with a demand for money payment on behalf of himself and his party, saying that Yazid had also submitted to such payment before. Huraith rejected the demand outright and the reference to the example of Yazid evoked from him the derogatory remark that if he were to do likewise he will expose himself to the contempt of being 'born of Yazid's mother.'(1)

The slighting words of Huraith concerning Yazid had preceded him to al-Muhallab who naturally took strong exception to them and was indignant that 'the slave' should deem it a dishonour to be born of Yazid's mother. Then Huraith joined al-Muhallab at Balkh, the latter asked him as to where the hostages were who, according to later instructions, were not to be released till his arrival at Balkh. In reply, Huraith put forward the same excuse that

(1). Yazid's mother was a captive from Kabul. Kam. 523 note a.
he had already cooked for the occasion, adding that there happened no such incident as al-Muhallab was apprehensive of. Al-Muhallab refused to accept the excuse which he declared to be false and accused Ḥuraith, probably on the basis of some secret reports previously communicated to him, of seeking favour with the king of Kish and disclosing the contents of his letter to him. Al-Muhallab must also have had the disparaging words of Ḥuraith in mind when he proposed for him the punishment that he be stripped of his clothes and then whipped thirty times. Ḥuraith considered it a matter of great shame to be stripped of his clothes and took the disgrace so much to heart that he vowed to kill al-Muhallab. Henceforth Ḥuraith was always on the lookout for an opportunity of fulfilling his vow. One day while al-Muhallab was riding, with Ḥuraith following him behind, the latter ordered his two accompanying slaves to strike at the former. Fortunately one of the two slaves refused to obey and went away while the other one dared not embark on the murderous act single-handed.

Afterwards Ḥuraith discontinued his visits to al-Muhallab on the pretext of illness. On learning that the illness was a mere feint and that Ḥuraith was plotting against his life, al-Muhallab asked Thābit b. Ḥiba, Ḥuraith's own brother, to bring him again to the court. He, with his characteristic kindness, further assured Thābit that he treated Ḥuraith as one of his sons and that he had punished him only with a view to teach him better ways just as he often punished his sons in their own interest. Thābit adjured Ḥuraith to accompany him to
al-Muhallab but Huraith proved unyielding. He declared that he could not reconcile himself to visiting al-Muhallab after the latter had treated him in such a humiliating manner and further said that he thought it even imprudent to go to one who was both distrusted and distrustful. The unabated rancour of Huraith disconcerted Thabit who apprehended lest his brother should invite a disastrous retribution upon the whole family by murdering al-Muhallab. Therefore he, along with his brother, slipped away to Tirmidh where he joined مُسَىٰ بن عبدالله بن خزيمة who was still defying the Umayyids and formed the clustering-centre of the disaffected elements in the neighbouring country.

Al-Muhallab's attitude towards مُسَى, the son of 'Abdullah b. Khazim, provides us with a fine example of his deep insight into the affairs of the State. مُسَى still remained unsubdued when al-Muhallab assumed charge of the governorship of Khurasan. His predecessor, 'Umayya, had launched an expedition against him which, however, ended in failure. Al-Muhallab deliberately left the rebel unmolested. His motive, as he explained to his sons (Tab. 2/1151, 18-1152, 2), was his intelligent apprehension that as soon as مُسَى was removed al-Хайجع would deprive him and his family of the governorship of Khurasan. The reason for this apprehension was that al-Хайجع was parvenu a Qaisite and would have very much liked to supplant the Azdite al-Muhallab by a Qaisite chief. The only factor which made a Qaisite governor undesirable was the continuance of the rebellion of مُسَى because مُسَى himself being a Qaisite had the sympathies of the Qais on his side and a Qaisite could
not be trusted against aligning himself with the rebel. This at least was the assumption of the people and the subsequent events amply proved it. Yazid stuck to the policy of his father and spared Musa as a useful foe. His brother and successor, al-Mufaddal b. al-Muhallab, however, departed from this policy and launched on active hostility towards Musa in 85 A.H. The result was that as soon as he had got the better of Musa he was removed from his post after being in possession of it just for nine months. Not only was it a personal loss to al-Mufaddal but the fateful event also brought about the fall of the whole family of al-Muhallabids as well as the end of the ascendancy of the 'Azd-Rabi'a (or the Yaman) confederacy vis-a-vis the Mu'tarite Arabs in Khurasan.

Al-Muhallab again received a reproachful letter from al-Hajjaj, who was still as severe and haughty as ever, when upon his return after the conclusion of the armistice, he ordered the release of a party of Mu'tarite suspects whom he had previously kept in detention while at Kish. Al-Hajjaj wrote to al-Muhallab criticising his action on the ground that if he was right in ordering their detention, then he erred in releasing them and, conversely, if he was right in releasing them, then he was unjust in detaining them. Al-Muhallab's simple reply was that he detained the suspects so long as he apprehended danger from them and let them free as soon as he felt himself secure against them(1).

(1). Cf. Tab. 2/1042.
The argument of al-Muhallab well illustrates the spirit behind the severity of his methods which was never excessive beyond the needs of the situation.

The accounts of al-Muhallab's campaign in Transoxiana are very brief and inadequate for the purpose of making a comparison with his former campaigns. Still it appears from the existing reports that the declining age had to some degree affected his former energy and activity. We do not hear of any instance of personal valour or any stroke of strategy and leadership. For the greater part of the two years he only remained stationed in the camp at Kish and except on one occasion, seems to have moved out very seldom. Even the achievements were not of any great significance nor did they leave any great lasting effect. The prolonged siege of Kish ended only in acceptance of a mere money payment. Similar was the result of Yazid's expedition to al-Khattal while Habib's expedition to Rabinjan seems to have returned without any achievement at all.

Other conquests mentioned in Bal.(417) are the town of Khujandah, far off on the Sir river, and the town of Nasaf to the south-west of Kish. There is no doubt that ultimately the country proved a wearisome embarrassment for al-Muhallab. In reply to a suggestion to attempt a full-fledged campaign in al-Sughd and the country beyond he is reported to have said that he would consider himself fortunate if his army could return safely to Herv after the completion of the limited operations already in hand. (Tab. 2/1041,14-16).

Thus the governorship of Khurasan which lasted 4 years (1) brought no fresh military honours to al-Muhallab.
Nevertheless his coming to Khurāsān was of great importance in another way. He brought with him the Azdite warriors, his own tribesmen, who had till then fought with him against the 'Azāriqa. The arrival of the 'Azd in Khurāsān was as important an event in the history of tribal relations as their immigration in al-Baṣra. Here in Khurāsān too they entered into an alliance with the Bakr and the Rabīʿa and so affected the balance of power and strength as to make an end of the supremacy of the Muʿdarites (Tamīm and Qais). Henceforth the 'Azd played an important role in the tribal affairs of Khurāsān.

* Naw. 532, five years on the assumption that al-Īmāllab died in 83 and not in 82 as we have assumed.