CHAPTER III.

THE BACKGROUND.

One cannot have a fair estimate of the immense difficulties involved in the task of crushing the 'Azariqa, nor, indeed, of the momentous significance for the future course of history of al-Muhallab's decisive triumph over them unless one is familiar with the background of major events immediately preceding the time when al-Muhallab agreed to undertake the hazardous campaign. Further, in order to be able to view the events in their proper perspective, a real insight into the beliefs and the tenets prompting the activities of the indomitable sect, is almost indispensable. In the present chapter, therefore, we propose to preface the account of the most eventful as well as the most glorious years of the life of al-Muhallab, of which fortunately we possess greater and richer details than the rest, by a short review of the particular circumstances that had a direct bearing on the events with which we are mainly concerned.

It would only suffice for our purpose to pick up the threads of the history of the Kharijites at the point of the death of Yazid b. Mawiyah in Rabia I, 64 A.H. (1) Mecca, whither the rival Caliph, 'Abdullah b. al-Zubair, had sought an asylum, was at that time besieged by the Syrian expeditionary force commanded by Husain b. Numair. Among

the defenders of the Holy City was a party of the Kharijites, including Nāfi‘ b. al-ʿAzraq which had gone thither all the way from al-ʿIraq in order to join ʿAbdullāh b. al-Zubair for the specific object of saving the Sanctuary from the ravages of the heretic tyrants, the Umaiyyids of Damascus. As long as the siege lasted, these Kharijite zealots were too preoccupied with defence operations to care about a minute and detailed examination of the views of ʿIbn al-Zubair. Only a vague promise on his part that his views were not very different from theirs (1), was, under the storm and stress of the impending danger, sufficient enough to make them forget all other thoughts except the thought of the defence of the city. But no sooner was the threatened calamity at last averted because of the retreat of the besiegers on the receipt of the news of Yazīd's death than the band of Kharijites instituted what they called 'al-ʿImtihān' (or 'al-ʿMihnah'), a sort of Inquisition into the views of ʿIbn al-Zubair. They asked him that he should acknowledge ʿAbū Bakr and ʿUmar, renounce ʿUthmān and ʿAlī, and condemn in unequivocal words ʿAlī and al-Zubair, his own father (2). ʿIbn al-Zubair's answers to such direct questions revealed, as they were bound to, a wide gulf between his own views and the cherished doctrines of the Kharijites. This disappointment was the signal for

(1). Tab. 2/514; Kam. 605.
(2). Kam. 606.
the parting of the ways. The Kharijites dispersed from Mecca in more than one direction. A number of them, including Nafi' b. al-'Azraq, 'Abdullah b. Ja'far, 'Abdullah b. 'Ibad, Hanzalah b. Baihas, the three sons of al-Mahuz, (viz., 'Abdullah, 'Ubaidullah and al-Zubair) and others (1), headed towards al-Basra and only added another potent disturbing factor in the disorderly conditions that prevailed there ever since the death of Yazid.

THE FLUX AT AL-BASRA (64 A.H.).

Let us now turn to the state of affairs at al-Basra. On receiving the news of the death of Yazid, the Basrans chose 'Ubaidullah b. Ziyad, the erstwhile powerful governor of al-'Iraq, as the interim Amir. Very soon, however, it became apparent that a storm was brewing and Ibn Ziyad had no doubts left that his authority was lost. He, therefore, fled and took cover in the protection of Mus'ud b. 'Amr, the then head of the tribe of al-Azd. Now the various tribes represented in the garrison town of al-Basra were divided into two main tribal groups. The Tamim and the Qais joined by the Persian 'Asawira constituted one group while the other group consisted of al-Azd and the Habika. These two groups were traditionally hostile to each other and there was a perpetual rivalry between them for ascendancy and predominance in state affairs. The overthrow of Ibn Ziyad, who inherited from his father and himself scrupulously maintained a deep friendship with the 'Azd(2),

(1). Kam. 609; Tab. 2/517.

(2). The friendship of al-Azd with Ziyad and his family began
was generally taken as a victory for the rival group of Tamīm and, therefore, it was but natural that the Ḥazd should oppose it. Thus, apart from a few provoking incidents characterised by a display of tribal frenzy which further accentuated the tension, Ibn Ziyād needed very little to do in order to induce Masʿūd to take up his cause and thus to assert his own group once again.

So, Masʿūd went into the mosque and, ascending the pulpit, exhorted the people, according to two different versions, either to restore Ibn Ziyād to the governorship (1) or to agree that he himself should occupy the high office (2). In any case, it was, as Wellhausen has conclusively proved, an attempt of one tribe (al-Ḥazd) and its head to put itself at the head of the whole (p. 410). The attempt was foiled. While Masʿūd had not yet finished his speech a number of men variously described by some as Persians under Māh Ṭifrīdūn (3), the old allies of the Tamīm and by ʿAwāna as Ḥāwārīj instigated by Tamīm (4), broke into the mosque, dragged Masʿūd from the pulpit and slew him in the beginning of Shawwal, 64 A.H. The murder of Masʿūd flared up still further the animosity between the two rival groups. On behalf of al-Ḥazd and the Rabīʿa, Ziyād b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿAshraf al-ʿAtakī undertook revenge from the other group. Consequently

* in the year 38 or 39 A.H. when Ziyād b. ʿAbī Thi, then stateholder of al-Basra on behalf of ʿAlī, was driven to seek shelter with that tribe.

(1) Tab. 2/450.
(2) Tab. 2/461.
(3) Tab. 2/454.
(4) Tab. 2/461
a major war was threatened but averted only through the
efforts of a few peace-loving elders, particularly al-\textsuperscript{2}Ah\textsuperscript{2}naf
b. Qais, the leader of the other group, who acted with
commendable restraint and prudence. At last a treaty of
peace was concluded between the two rival groups and
amicable relations were restored.

The above sketch is intended to afford an idea of the
chaotic conditions that favoured the growth of the
Kh\textsuperscript{2}rijites by providing them with a respite in which their
lawless activities went unchecked. It is now necessary for
us to trace the re-establishment of the authority of State
in al-Basra because it forms the starting point for all
subsequent chronology. While 'Ubaidullah b. Ziy\textsuperscript{2}d was yet
the nominal emir, one Salama b. Dhu'\textsuperscript{2}aib of Tam\textsuperscript{2}m had already
begun enlisting the support of the people for the Caliphate
of 'Ibn al-Zubair. His appeal met with such a ready response
that only a little later al-\textsuperscript{2}Ah\textsuperscript{2}naf b. Qais felt helpless to
produce him before 'Ibn Ziy\textsuperscript{2}d and his activities had to be
left unchecked (1) till al-Basra finally went over to 'Ibn
al-Zubair.

As to the succession to 'Ibn Ziy\textsuperscript{2}d, two different
accounts have come down to us. According to one, it was
soon after the flight of 'Ibn Ziy\textsuperscript{2}d that the people placed a
Quraishite, 'Abdullah b. Sh\textsuperscript{2}iri\textsuperscript{2}b (b. Maufal b. al-H\textsuperscript{2}rith b.
'Abdu 'l-Mut\textsuperscript{2}talib) called "Babba", in his place. Babba

(1). Tab. 2/437-9.
entered the citadel in the beginning of Jumādā II, 64(1). To this must be added the statement in Anon. (93) that the Basrans later on had this appointment confirmed by ʿIbn al-Zubair who allowed Babba to continue for one year at the end of which he was deposed.

The other account is by ʿAwāna. According to him it was only after the death of Masʿūd and the settlement of the dispute that the Basrans united and chose as their Emir, first, ʿAbdul-Malik b. ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAmir, and then Babba for one and two months respectively. Then after three months they wrote to ʿIbn al-Zubair who appointed ʿUmar b. ʿUbaidullāh b. Maʿmar stattholder for them. ʿUmar b. ʿUbaidullāh held office for one month only and was succeeded by al-Ḥārith b. ʿAbdullāh b. Rabīʿa called ʿal-ʿubārā. (2)

Wellhausen has rejected the first and adopted the second account. His argument is that an agreement could hardly have lasted so long as the tribal groups were at logger heads with each other and that the choice of an Emir could only have been made as a result of the treaty of peace after the threatened rupture. He further supports his argument by saying: "It is thus also explained why Babba in ʿAbū ʿUbaida (the narrator of the first account) remains quite passive in face of the intrusion of the ʿAzd into the mosque and the citadel, -- just because he was not yet there as Emir." (3).

(1). Tab. ʿAbū ʿUbaida, 2/446-7; Wahb, 2/444.
(2). Tab. 2/463-4.
(3). Well. 409.
The arguments advanced by Wellhausen cannot stand the test of detailed scrutiny. Quite naturally, the question of the appointment of a successor must be the first and foremost concern of a citizen immediately after the governorship has fallen vacant. It seems well-nigh impossible that this urgent question should not have claimed the attention of the Basrans in the comparative quiet that preceded the storm of tribal strife. The appointment of Babba is placed so early as in the beginning of Jumādā II, 64, i.e., soon after the flight of Ibn Ziyād (1). The city, it must be noted, was not yet torn asunder by open discord; matters came to a head only as late as Shawwāl, 64 A.H. The full account in Tab. both of ‘Abū ‘Ubaydah and of Wahb is so rich in every minute detail as regards the method of choice etc. that it leaves little doubt as to its veracity.

No doubt, Babba remained inactive throughout the period of turmoil. It is clearly stated in the first account itself that he kept himself strictly aloof from the tribal feud because he "would not harm himself in an attempt to do good to others" (2). But how can this militate against the fact of his appointment as Emir a few months back? He remained passive just because he had a full realisation

(1). Dain. 392 confirms that it was only within nine days of the flight of ‘Ubaydullāh b. Ziyād that the Basrans chose Babba as their Emir.

(2). Tab. 2/451.
of the limitations of his authority. After all it is agreed that it was not till after the restoration of peace among the tribes that the authority of the State and, for that matter, of Babba was effectively enforced. The whole structure of law and order had altogether collapsed and did not allow of any useful intervention on the part of Babba even though he remained the nominal governor of the city.

Moreover, it is only the first account that fits in into the chronology of subsequent events. We will see in the following chapter that an expedition against the Azraqites was despatched in the month of Jumada II, 65 A.H. and that it was Babba who in his capacity of governor appointed Muslim b. 'Ubais to its command. Babba was dismissed, as will be established in the next chapter, shortly after the tragic end of this expedition and a little more than forty days before the despatch of another expedition under 'Uthman b. 'Ubaidullah in the month of Dhu 'l-Qa'da in the same year. This accords exactly with the statement that Babba was allowed by Ibn al-'Aubair to continue as governor for one year.

Here it must be pointed out that some reporters have erred conspicuously in placing the governorship of 'Umar b. 'Ubaidullah b. Makmar, who was responsible for the despatch of the expedition under his brother 'Uthman, in the year 64(1) instead of 65 although the month of Dhu 'l-Qa'da is

(1). Tab. 2/537; 465; Naqa'id 742.
almost undisputed which, by the way, is impossible according to the account of 'Awāna unless it is conceded that the Sasrans set about choosing an interim emir before the outbreak of tribal war. The sequence of events as related in the next chapter entirely precludes that the expedition of 'Uthmān and that of Ibn 'Ubais before it should have taken place in the year 64. Besides it must be noted that the outbreak of plague known as 'al-Jārif' during which 'Ubaidullāh b. 'Ubaidullāh is said to have been his brother's deputy in the governorship of al-Bāṣra, is placed in the year 65 and not in the year 64 (1). Consequently, the term of Babba's governorship should extend over the year 65, and the advent of al-Qubā, the successor of 'Umar b. 'Ubaidullāh should be placed in the year 66 (as in Anon 99) and not in 65.

It is indeed difficult to determine whether al-Mihallāb was present in al-Bāṣra during the days of communal strife. What is certain is that he was ousted from Khurāsān some time before the open war between al-'Azd and the Tamīm(2). As to where he went, the annals speak nothing. But the fact that his name does not occur in the annals of tribal strife

(1). Tab. 2/579-80.

(2). The advance of Ibn Khāzīm came soon after the withdrawal of Salm b. Ziyād and the people of Khurāsān are said to have revolted against Salm two months after they had sworn allegiance to him as the interim Amir (Tab. 2/439 I.2). Thus Bain. (261) may be right in saying that al-Mihallāb was in Khurāsān at the time of 'Usaidullāh's flight i.e., in Jumāda, 64. It must however be remembered that Bain is wrong in making al-Mihallāb continue in Khurāsān till his assumption of the command of the campaign against the 'Azāridā.
should cause no surprise, nor should it be taken as an indication of his absence or even of any lack of interest on his part in the fortunes of his tribe. It must be remembered that the chief role in all such tribal episodes belonged only to local heads of the respective tribes.