CHAPTER V.

AL-MUHALLAB'S VISIT TO MECCA.

We already know that 'Abdullah b. Khāzim ousted al-Muhallab from the governorship of Khurāsān and even killed the Tamīmite whom the latter had left behind as his deputy. It was, no doubt, a clear affront to al-Muhallab's honour and prestige and, naturally enough, he should have felt it the more keenly because his rival belonged to the Mūṣār tribe which had all along been hostile to the 'Azd in al-บาṣra and consequently also in Khurāsān which was a mere colony of al-باسra and whose population consisted largely of Basrans who had been transplanted there. That tribal jealousy was still a potent factor in State affairs and that the traditional animosity between the 'Azd and the Mūṣār counted with 'Abdullah b. Khāzim as much as personal ambition are clearly brought out by the words of 'Abdullah b. Khāzim himself who is reported to have pulled up Salm b. Ẓiyād at Nīsābūr for having handed over the province to a man of 'Muzūn 'Umān' (1).

In the circumstances, therefore, it is just possible that al-Muhallab should have set his heart on repairing the damage to his position and prestige by supplanting Ibn Khāzim in Khurāsān, if possible. Happily enough the internal conditions in that province immediately following

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(1). Tab.2/489. The remark of Sulaimān b. Marthad (ibid.) was also in the same strain.
the coup de etat of 'Ibn Khāzim, were also tempting and favourable for such a design. During the years 64 and 65, the province was seething with discontent, disorder and disintegration consequent upon the wars of 'Ibn Khāzim against Sulaimān b. Marthad of Merv and 'Aus b. Tha'laba of Harat, his haughty and cruel treatment of the Bakrites and his eventual break with his erstwhile supporters, the Tamīmites(1). By a significant coincidence it was about the same time that al-Mihallab undertook a journey to Mecca where he met 'Abdullāh b. al-Zubair and received from him the writ of appointment as governor of Khūrāsān. Al-Mihallab may or may not have asked for it because it is not clear if the visit was designed particularly for this purpose but in either case the disorderly conditions in the province must have been an important factor in influencing the decision of 'Abdullāh b. al-Zubair to depose 'Abdullāh b. Khāzim whom he, according to Sal. 414 and Ygb. 2/304, had previously confirmed in the stattholdership on the latter's acknowledgement of his authority.

An incident during al-Mihallab's stay at Mecca is significant enough inasmuch as it gives us a clue as to the height of fame and glory that he had attained by now. While 'Ibn al-Zubair was closeted with al-Mihallab and was busy in conferring with him, there came to him 'Abdullāh b. Ṣafwān b. Ṣumaiya b. Khalf b. Wahb al-Qurashi al-Jumahi,

(1). Tab. 2/490 seq.; 593 seq.
who asked "O Commander of the Faithful, who is this man that has kept you engaged today?" Ibn al-Zubair replied, "Do n't you know him? He is the Chief of the people of al-’Iraq." Thereupon 'Imrân Safwân exclaimed, "Then he must be al-Muhallab b. 'Abī Ṣufra." (1).

We do not know when al-Muhallab started on his journey to Mecca because his whereabouts after his withdrawal from Merv cannot be ascertained. We, however, know that he returned to al-Basra just when al-Zubair b. 'Ali was threatening the town from the east (2) which event, as determined hereafter, must be placed in the fourth month of the year 66 A.H.

The governorship of Khurāsān was indeed a great triumph for al-Muhallab but a greater task and a greater triumph was yet in store for him at al-Basra.

(1). Ikh. 2/146.
(2). Tab. 2/583, 2-3.