

THE MOSQUE AT WOKING A MINIA-TURE OF MECCA IN THE DAYS OF THE PILGRIMAGE

By KĀZĪ 'ABDU 'L-HAQQ

“ Most surely the first house appointed for men is the one at Bekka, blessed and a guidance for the nations.”—Holy Qur-án, iii. 95.

It was in 1916 that Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, the founder of the Woking Muslim Mission, gave us an extremely interesting account of his first visit to the Mosque at Woking. He told the story to certain of his friends who went to pay their respects to him on the occasion of his visit to Lucknow. He said that when he opened the locked-up House of God in November 1912 he found the floor chock-full of straw and other rubbish, the accumulations of the many years during which its doors had remained closed. Then he perceived an old copy of the Qur-án placed on a carved wooden receptacle—*Rihal*—lying in a corner, and opening the Holy Book at random he found the following words that met his eyes in the first line of the page: “ Most surely the first house appointed for men is the one at Bekka, blessed and a guidance for the nations ” (Qur-án, iii. 95). The word *Bekka*, the alternative name of Mecca, in ancient times literally means a place where people gather together in multitudes. It seemed to him a prophetic name, and so it has proved.

These words touched the Khwaja's heart and he fell on the bare cold floor of the Mosque, prostrating himself before the Lord with tears in his eyes. He wept like a child and the following prayer was on his lips, if my memory does not fail me:

“ O Creator of Nations and All-powerful God, Thou madest Mecca the holiest place in the East, and didst bring nations in multitudes to that city. Make this Mosque, I pray Thee, in like manner the Mecca in the West.” The words welled up from a true heart. They were heard by the Lord: and the answer was not long in coming.

The Khwaja was formerly a successful lawyer, and had relinquished a lucrative practice in response to a call from

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within. He journeyed to England and there gave tireless service to the Cause; he kept no count of day or night; he denied himself every pleasure and relaxation and in the onset became seriously ill, but medical advice fell on deaf ears when his doctors urged him to take a few months' rest. He had without doubt achieved a unique success, such as honesty and integrity, accompanied by diligence and the infinite taking of pains, most properly deserve; but every moment of success tightened up the harness of labour. Single-handed he worked on, till he lay on what seemed likely to prove his death-bed. Various diseases have assailed him one after the other during the last three years, some of them mortal, such as pthisis, chronic diabetes, and heart trouble. Like a willing martyr he prepared to meet his death, as he saw the seed sown by him in a barren land growing into a fruitful tree. His prayer to the Almighty that he might see the Mosque at Woking a Mecca in the West had been heard.

His illness caused great anxiety all over the country, but the gracious Lord has spared his precious life to us.

Eid-ul-Azha at the Woking Mosque presents a spectacle that can be matched only in Mecca itself. Almost all Muslim nations in the world are represented in the gardens of the Mosque, prostrating themselves before their God and magnifying the Most High, even as they magnify Him at Mecca on this sacred occasion. Woking is the only town in the world which becomes on such days a replica in miniature of the Ancient House of God in Arabia.

The Khwaja gave us also another interesting account of the day. Some time in 1913, when he went to Woking in order to take charge of the Mosque and the Sir Salar Jung memorial house with their appurtenances. He reached Woking in the forenoon. The time for the noon-prayer came, and accompanied by the late Shaikh Noor Ahmed, his saintly companion who was to act as Muezzin—that is to say, one who calls to prayer—proceeded to the Mosque precincts. We find in the Tradition that the first Azan—call to prayer—in the days of the Holy Prophet was given at the same hour. A touching scene occurred when Mr. Noor Ahmed came to that portion of the Azan which

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runs: "Hasten to the prayer and hasten to success"; his voice broke with emotion, and he wept. The Khwaja was the only observer of the solemn scene and the only worshipper then present to respond to the call. Afterwards, when the late Shaikh was asked the cause of his emotion, he replied that the Azan of Bilal—the Muezzin in the days of the Holy Prophet—brought nations to Mecca; but how utterly unable he was to have worthily replaced him—Bilal—a passing thought that brought tears to his eyes.

"Be happy, O blessed soul in heaven, thy voice has been heard and the Woking Mosque draws to itself at the times of Eid representatives of every Muslim nation."

Thus I address the spirit of the late Shaikh who is no more with us in this world. I cannot conclude without expressing a Muslim's gratitude to the royal family of Bhopal, seeing that the Mosque itself is a gift from that illustrious house to the Muslim world. The late Doctor Leitner, who built the Mosque with the Bhopal money, published a letter in the early 'nineties in the London Press in which he maintained that the Mosque was intended only for a few selected persons and could in no case be regarded as a centre of Muslim activities in England, far less as the headquarters for a campaign for the conversion of English people to Islam. But coming events were to give his words the lie. The Mosque is not only the centre of Muslim religious activity in the British Isles but the seat of the Islamic Mission that has witnessed hundreds of conversions to Islam. I pray for the soul of the late Begum Sahiba. It is gratifying to note that H.H. the Nawab-mother of the present ruler of Bhopal, promised the Khwaja a considerable sum for enlarging the Mosque and on her last visit to England laid the foundation-stone of the contemplated extension. I hope that Muslims will soon celebrate the coming Eids within the four walls of the new building, as it will be far too cold to remain out in the open.

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