

## A "GARDEN OF GOD."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—Nothing could give wider or deeper satisfaction throughout India than the announcement "Honouring the Indian Dead" in *The Times* of the 18th inst., and every Anglo-Indian will devoutly desire that the arrangements determined on may be faithfully fulfilled by us—that is, ungrudgingly as to the cost, and with the most sympathetic deference to the sentiments and traditions that influence the Muslims of India in the formalities observed in the burial and wardenship of their sacred dead.

In this northern hemisphere they lay the bodies with the head toward the north and the feet to the south, and on one side with the face turned toward Mecca. The proposed burial ground therefore should be open toward the east, and may be left open toward the west and south also, but toward the north it ought to be enclosed either by a grove of evergreen trees, or hedge, or wall—for, as with us, so with the Muslims (though not with the Hindus), "Diabolus sedet in lateribus aquilonis." If walled, the enclosure should take the form of a four-square cloister, arcaded on the inner side and lighted on the outer by windows of openworked geometrical tracery in stone, and give entrance and exit on the eastern and southern and western sides through wide, high-domed, and minaretted gateways, all of the purest white marble and designed by an architect learned and skilled in Saracenic architecture, and, if possible, executed under the direction of an Indian *Raj-Mistri*, or "Master-Craftsman"—"Opifex alienorum operum inspector."

The "grounds" should be laid out, not as a "necropolis," but as a "Garden of God," and if the cypress and yew are planted in it—and they are most desirable as a screen against the north, together with cedars, pines, and firs—it must not be as symbols of mourning, but of the life everlasting with God in Heaven:—

Young flowers and an evergreen tree  
 May spring from the spot of thy rest;  
 But not cypress, nor yew let us see,  
 For why should we mourn for the Blest.

In the Bombay Presidency I always found the *Crataeva religiosa* of Roxburgh planted in the Muslim "gardens of God," a beautiful shrubby Caper, which, when covered all over with its large long-stalked, white flowers in loose clusters, all appearing just after its leaves have died away—a true "arbor Resurrectionis"—always recalled to me the text (vii., 13 and 14) of "The Book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine." The Sanscrit name of the tree is *varuna*, "the encompassing," a name also of "the West," because in that direction lies the all-encompassing Indian Ocean. It is the same word as the Greek *ὀψαράς*, the "all-encompassing" Heaven; and *veranda*, the pillared cloister surrounding the four sides of our English "bungalows," i.e., Bengal-houses, in India.

The apparition of such a "Garden of God" for the sanctified dead of Islam in England, so built up and so planted, set beside the Mosque at Woking, would seem there as if let down from Heaven itself, and consecrate London a second Mecca in the devout regard and heart-felt affection of the Muslims throughout Europe and Western America.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your most obedient servant,

GEORGE BIRDWOOD.

St. Alphege's Day.