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The Mission Chapel at Basrah

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I think that this is the first time a picture of the Basrah Chapel has appeared in NEGLECTED ARABIA. Its position among the date trees has made it a difficult matter to get a satisfactory view, and moreover, we have had to wait until the photograph itself has been provided by a kindly neighbor. As will be seen, the matter of architectural display did not receive much consideration in its planning, but it has proved to be well adapted to our needs, and has been a great comfort in our evangelistic work. The large audience room in front will comfortably seat a hundred; a smaller room opening out of it at the back, a quarter of that number.

In the early years of our Mission, when in Basrah we all lived in Arab built houses, it was a comparatively easy matter to cut through partitions in the lower rooms, which were seldom used for living purposes, and make a fairly comfortable place for religious services. It was certainly convenient for at least one of the missionary families to simply go downstairs to church; and, a matter of considerable moment, the Turkish government could not object on the usual ground that we had "no firman for a church." There were, however, disadvantages; and one was always apprehensive that some necessary change to other and smaller houses, might leave us without a gathering place for our English and Arabic congregations.

When building operations were actually begun on our own compound, the hospital, and the house occupied by the doctor, were the first to be erected, and the only ones for which we had funds. But when these were finished, it seemed that the time had come when we might seriously plan for the other need. The first step was to raise the money, but how and where? To get it from home would be a tedious, uncertain undertaking, and the Church at Bahrein, and the Peter Zwemer School at Muscat, argued that something might also be done at Basrah without appealing to the Mission treasury. Nothing, however, *was* done, until one day a

passing stranger, whom we had entertained for a few days in our home, gave us, on leaving, a couple of sovereigns for our work. When the question of the disposal of the same came up, we decided then and there to open a fund for a chapel.

The raising of the money proceeded rapidly and without a hitch. First of all, each of the missionaries subscribed a small sum. Then a paper was circulated among the English residents, stating the purpose and plan, and each one of them gave, and so far as we heard, gave cheerfully. The English Consul, a Mr. Crow, kindly interested himself, and from his friends at home, and from those who had some small acquaintance with Basrah, obtained for us substantial gifts. From these and one or two other sources we eventually realized over two thousand dollars,



MISSION CHAPEL AT BASRAH

just enough to complete the building as it now stands. Our native Christians were not asked to help. Because, primarily, the Chapel was built for our English services, and secondly, its location on our compound, midway between old Basrah inland, and the new town on the river, was inconvenient for them, and would not take the place of a church which must eventually be built in one of these places. As a matter of fact, however, up to the present, it has been used as much for Arabic preaching as English. The site chosen was at one side of our compound near the Hospital, so that it could be used as a gathering place for the Hospital force, and for those of the patients who could walk the short distance.

This hope has in measure been realized. At one time, when the Arabic Christian congregation worshipped in Basrah, we had a short service on Sunday for the Hospital, and one for those Moslems living near who could be persuaded to attend. The closing of our Hospital, however, did not allow us to continue, under favorable auspices, this experiment of having a service especially for Moslems. I believe we have come to the conclusion that in Basrah, our enquirers and converts, and Moslems generally, will feel more at home, and get more good, from a service more adapted to their own needs, than at that where the large majority of worshippers are those born in the Christian faith. We always have, however, in our general service, a certain proportion of Moslem hearers; the total attendance, being under favorable circumstances fifty or sixty.

Our friends among the English residents were the more ready to recognize the need of a Protestant place of worship, as the alternative meeting in a private house, either theirs or ours, was not always convenient, or in the minds of some of them, suitable. The fact that our subscription list was circulated among all, without regard to denominational ties, made it necessary to state that while the building would be under Mission control, yet it would be always available for any regular religious service whatsoever. Before the war it was used by the Church of England Chaplains from India, at the time of their semi-annual visits to the Gulf ports. A year or two ago, when the presence of the troops at the Base necessitated large audience rooms, we were asked if our Chapel could be used by the military Chaplains, and if it was not found large enough, if we would consent to its enlargement. We agreed to this, but it was finally decided to build a Garrison Church. In pre-war days an attendance of from twenty to twenty-five was considered an excellent showing, while on Easter and Christmas we could count upon a larger number. With the coming of the troops we often had sixty and more. After the erection of the Garrison Church, not far away, with its officiating chaplains, both Church of England and Non-Conformist, this number was greatly reduced. Our service has always been held in the late afternoon, but at times during the summer have been discontinued, when at that hour the building has been unendurable from the heat.

Besides the Arabic and English services, we have been glad to have it used for services for the many Indian Christians now in Basrah, belonging both to the army and labor corps. This service has usually been in Urdu. We have also loaned the building several times to the Y. M. C. A. At one Christmas reception to Indian Christians they provided for a thousand guests.

The fact that the Chapel has been used to such an extent by the Force has enabled us to ask from the Military, for the installation of both electric lights and fans, and to obtain from them a substantial reduction in the charge for the current. We hope eventually to have a bell, and to make some needed improvements in the interior arrangements. In the meantime we have been assured that it has been a Church-home to others besides our missionaries; and we know that some have there met and become better acquainted with their God and Father.