

# Homage to a Friend

—Professor Sirajuddin

I first got acquainted with the late Professor Hamid Ahmad Khan when he joined the Government College Lahore as a fifth year student—in 1927 for the Master's degree in English Literature. Dr Imdad Husain, Professor Inder Mohan Verma and myself, were members of the same class, all working under the inspiring guidance of teachers of the calibre of Professors Langhorne, Firth, Dickinson, M.G. Singh, and for a short period, Professor Mirza Muhammad Saeed, and finally Professor A. S. Bokhari, who returned to the Government College Lahore in September 1928 after a brilliant First at Cambridge. We were also lucky to be the pupils of the venerable Professor Mowbray Velte at the Forman Christian College, Lahore, there being an arrangement for co-operative teaching between these two colleges at that time.

The quality that struck us most about Hamid Ahmad Khan was his quiet, unobtrusive devotion to Literature, both English and Oriental (i.e. Persian and Urdu); he never pushed himself forward blatantly, never struck an aggressive pose, but quietly went his way in a sort of dignified, but modestly self-assured anonymity. We were all good students but we knew that in Hamid Ahmad Khan we had a formidable rival, though he never gave the impression that he was striving against anyone. The qualities of his personality which were so brilliantly revealed in later years, were all latently present in him as a student: a genuine pursuit of the best that has been thought and written, and an unself-conscious attempt to model his life on values and patterns of intellectual honesty, integrity, compassion, reverence and a healthy self-examination.

Our ways parted for sometime in 1929 when I went up to Oxford and Hamid Ahmad Khan took up a teaching assignment at the Islamia College Lahore, an institution which he served with a love and a missionary zeal which is unparalleled in the history of any college. Islamia College was certainly not in the vanguard of so-called prestigious institutions in the province, but Professor Hamid Ahmad Khan, through his individual devotion, talent and dedication made it so, at least as far as the teaching of English Literature was concerned. He scored over us in the Government College by virtue of his superiority in the knowledge and understanding of Persian and Urdu Literature, thus achieving a

synthesis which was denied to those of us who specialised only in English language and literature.

It was Professor Hamid Ahmad Khan's self-examination which kept alive in him a secret and noble ambition, that of crowning his studies at one of the two great universities of Oxford and Cambridge. He ultimately found his way to Cambridge at the age of 49—a period of life when it is almost impossible to become a student all over again. But Hamid Ahmad Khan accomplished the impossible, which is a further proof of the flexibility, the *livingness* of his intellectual, scholarly and spiritual pursuits. I consider it a great feat—his acquisition of the M. Litt. degree from Cambridge.

To Professor Hamid Ahmad Khan, on his return from Cambridge, belongs the credit of elevating the Islamia College Lahore to the position of a post-graduate college in the teaching of English Literature. As Principal of that College, and later as Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Punjab for six years (1963-1969) Professor Hamid Ahmad Khan reached the peak of his maturity as an educational administrator, loved and respected for his absolute uprightness, sustained hard work, a never failing sense of duty to his Alma Mater whose destinies he guided with a compassionate firmness, benevolence, charitable impartiality and generosity. To his vision we owe the launching of the literary history project in the University, the University Journal of Research and the revitalising of the Encyclopedia of Islam. To me, personally, he was a noble benefactor, for it was he who appointed me Professor Emeritus, a boon for which I shall bless him as long as I live.

Scholars and gentlemen of the distinction and stature of Professor Hamid Ahmad Khan, are born perhaps once in a hundred years. It shall be a long wait before Pakistan gets another like him—if at all. The breed is rare, and I shall not be surprised if it died with him on 22 March 1974.

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