

RABIA AL-ADAWIA

Umm al-Khair (1) Rabia, the daughter of Ismail, a woman celebrated for her holy life, and a native of Basra, belonged to the tribe of Adi (*Adawia*), and was allied by enfranchisement to the family of Atik. She was one of the most eminent among the holy persons of the time, and the anecdotes related of her sanctity and piety are generally known. Abu 'l-Kasim al-Kushairi says, in his treatise (*on Sufism*) (2) : “She used to say, when holding converse with God :

“Consume with fire, O God, a (*presumptuous*)
heart which loveth thee !”

And on one of these occasions, a voice spoke to her and said :
“That we shall not do ! think not of us an ill thought.”

— Sofyan ath-Thauri exclaimed one day in her presence: “O, what anguish is mine !” on which she said: “Speak not a lie, but rather say : O, how little anguish is mine ! If thou wert really in affliction, thou couldst not sigh.”

— One of the sufi brethren relates as follows: “In my prayers I used to invoke Rabia al-Adawia [*most likely for Isaal al-sawab – blog author*], and she appeared to me in a vision and spake: “Thy offerings were presented to us on trays of light and covered with napkins of light.”

2

— She often said : “If my (*good*) works appear (*to the world*), I count them as nought.”

— And one of her counsels was: “Hide thy good deeds as closely as thou wouldst hide thy sins.”

— The shaikh Shihab ad-din as-Suhrawardi quotes the following verses of hers in the *Awarif al-Maarif*:

I reserve my heart for thy converse, (O Lord !) and leave
my body to keep company with those who desire my
society. My body is thus the companion of the visitor,
but my dearly beloved is the companion of my heart.

She died A. H. 135 (A. D. 752-3), according to Ibn al-Jawzi in the *Shuzur al-Okud*, but in A. H. 185 (A. D. 801), according to another authority. Her tomb, which is situated on the mount of Tor, on the eastern side of Jerusalem, is an object of pilgrimage.

Ibn al-Jawzi has an article on Rabia in his *Safwat as-Safwat*, and he there gives the following anecdotes respecting her, the authenticity of which is certified by a list prefixed to them, in which he enumerates the names of the persons through whom they passed down successively from Abda the daughter of Abi Shawwal to himself.

3

He says : “(Abda), one of God’s excellent handmaids and the servant of Rabia relates as follows: ‘Rabia used to pass the whole night in prayer, and at morning dawn she took a slight sleep in her oratory till daylight; and I have heard her say, when she sprang in dread from her couch: *O my soul ! how long wilt thou sleep ? When wilt thou awake ? Soon thou shalt sleep to rise no more, till the call shall summon thee on the day of resurrection !*

This was her constant custom till the time of her death. On its approach she called me and said: *O Abda ! inform none of my death and shroud me in this gown.* This was a gown of hair-cloth which she wore when praying, at the time in which the eyes of others were closed in sleep. I shrouded her in that gown, and in a woollen veil which she used to wear; and about a year afterwards, I saw her in a dream clothed in a gown of green satin and a veil of green silk, the like of which for beauty I never beheld. And I said: ‘O Rabia ! what has become of the gown in which I shrouded thee, and of the woollen veil ?’ To which she answered : ‘By Allah ! it was taken off me and I received in exchange what thou seest on me; my shroud was folded up, a seal was put upon it, and it was taken up to the highest heaven, that by it my reward might be complete on the day of resurrection.’ ‘It was for this,’ I observed, ‘that thou didst work when in the world.’ — ‘And what is this,’ she rejoined, ‘compared with what I saw of Almighty God’s bounty to his saints !’

I then asked her in what state was Obaida (3), the daughter of Abu Kallab, and she replied : ‘It cannot be described ! by Allah ! she has

surpassed us, and reached the highest place in paradise.’ — ‘And how so?’ said I, ‘when the people considered thee far, far above her.’ To which she answered : ‘Because, when in the world, she cared not what her state might be on the next morning or the next night.’ — ‘And what doeth Abu Malik Daigham?’ — ‘He visiteth Almighty God when he pleaseth.’ — ‘And Bishr Ibn Mansur (4)?’ — ‘Admirable ! admirable ! he hath received a recompense far beyond his hopes.’ I then said to her: ‘Tell me a means by which I may approach nearer to Almighty God.’ And she answered : ‘Think on him often, and by that thou wilt, after a little while, be happy in thy tomb.’ ”

(1) Omm al-Khair means the mother of Khair or of good.

(2) See note (2), page 422.

(3) Obaida, the daughter of Kallab, a celebrated saint, wept for her sins during forty years, and then lost her sight. (*Siar as-Salihat* MS. No. 855, f. 28.)

(4) Abu Muhammad Bishr Ibn Mansur as-Sulami (belonging to the tribe of Sulaim) was celebrated for his intense application to the practice of devotion. As a Traditionist he is considered a sure authority, and is cited as such by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. He died A. H. 209 (A. D. 824-5). —(*Mirat az-Zaman*, No. 640, fol. 69.)