

India, April 16, 1894

## India.

A well known Boston architect, one whose opinion is universally respected and whose criticisms are always listened to with interest once said to me in speaking of Mexican architecture - "Don't waste your time on that, like Indian architecture it is barbarous and don't concern us." How often I have recalled those words in the past three months as I stood in the porches of the Druidian temples of the south, under the domes of the Moguls or <sup>in</sup> the courts of the Jains in the north, and thought how ~~often~~ we thoughtlessly prejudge the work of others when we <sup>often</sup> actually know nothing about it. The almost universal opinion of this, in its way, peerless art, in the far west is drawn from the isolated fragments of sculpture selected - I sometimes think ill-naturedly - for the purpose of holding up Brahminism in its most disgusting form. In spite of the magnificent work of James Fergusson - no one can appreciate that man's work until he becomes interested in India - we blindly fix our standard by those first impressions, and always turn aside from the examination of works that might be of the greatest benefit, as not concerning us more than as curiosities in the history of art. If I were asked the point blank question: "But what use is there in studying a Hindu temple or a Mohammedan mosque, we never intend to build either!" - I should answer, No use whatever for the architectural vampire who goes with foot rule and tracing paper to collect "material", but to a student with brains in his head, one who wishes to become an architect in the true sense of the word, and feel that he knows a beautiful building when he sees it and perhaps create one himself, the opportunities offered by India are perhaps unequalled by any other country. It is this very impossibility to use these forms and decorations in the west that constitutes the value of the study, For our eyes are not blinded by a desire to master the details as such, but we are left perfectly free to study the forms and proportions and their share in the ~~satisfactory~~ making of a satisfactory composition, in the appreciating of the value of different classes of

moment in accenting a member or creating a decorative touch or judging of the necessity of change in form, color and proportions when a building is not to stand alone but to form a part, principal or subordinate, in the composition of a group.

It is after having had my eyes opened to this fact that I leave the country with regret that my visit has after all been only a glance at a small part of the marvels to be found there, and my sincere hope is that I may some day be able to influence a competent student to seriously study this splendid art, and return to us with some of the inspiration that filled those "barbarians" and infuse some of the blood into our veins that filled those artists who were truly said to "Design like Titans and finish like Jewelers."

The architecture of India may be divided into two principal groups Hindu and Mohammedan. In the first group we place the earliest, Buddhist work - monuments, caves and temples, - and the later Brahminical and Jain buildings that form such a striking feature in <sup>nearly</sup> every Indian landscape. The Mohammedan remains are nearly always grouped in the great centres of the old Mohammedan Kingdoms - Benares, Agra, Delhi, Ahmedabad, and other places, where there is almost or quite a total lack of the other, Hindu, class of work, owing to the fanatical hate of the conquerors for everything that reminded them of the old religion. But in spite of this it is easy to see how the talents of the native workmen led them to adapt their knowledge, especially in the matter of ornament, to the new conditions. Beautiful examples of this blending of Hindu and Mohammedan work may be seen in the great mosque screens at Ajmere and at Kutb near Delhi in the mosque that possesses the famous iron pillar. Other cities, notably Ahmedabad, are full of mosques and tombs that are almost purely Jain in their character and show some of the most remarkable stone carving in India. In the great Mogul capitals Delhi and Agra the Hindu element is less strongly felt and beauty of material to a great extent takes the place of

profuse ornament, which here is applied as an inlaid surface decoration instead of the relief and incised work seen elsewhere.

My visit began at Colombo, Ceylon, and after a short trip up country as far as Kandy to gain some idea of the peculiar type exhibited in the famous Temple of the Tooth, I crossed to India at Tuticorin. From this port I travelled north in wide zig-zags crossing the entire peninsula three times and not turning south until I had reached Lahore in the Punjab - in all a journey of over 7000 miles. <sup>During</sup> this long journey I visited among other interesting places - Tinnevely, Trichinopoly, Madras, Tanjore, Chidambaram, Madras, Cojiveram & Vellore in the Deccan - the great cave temples at Badami, Karlee, Elephanta Island and Ellora - then the north - Calcutta <sup>Darjeeling,</sup> Benares, Jampur, Ajodya, Fyzabad, Lucknow, Gwalior, Agra, Delhi, Amritsar, Lahore, Ulwar, Jaipur, Amber, Ajmere, Mount Abu, Ahmedabad, and ending with an excursion into Kattywar to visit the highly interesting mountains of Gernar with its wonderful temples, and the ancient towns of Jounaghur, Verval and Patan - Somnath.

The south is the home of the great temple enclosures, entered by enormous gateways or gopurams - pyramidal masses which rise to a height of over 200 feet, in some cases, a solid mass of sculpture. Within these enclosures are the Tanks for bathing - an important item in Hindu worship - the Hall of 1000 columns, and the temple - the latter often supplemented by others dedicated to the wives of the principal deity or to minor gods. Detail features are the colonnades and open pavillions surrounding the tanks and the mandapams or porches of the temples. On the latter especially is often lavished a quantity of carved ornament that is simply astonishing and of a delicacy of workmanship and intricacy of design belonging rather to the jeweler's than the stonecutters art. Perhaps the most

remarkable of this work is to be found in a porch at Vellore and <sup>in</sup> a small shrine behind the great temple at Tanjore.

The largest of this class of temples is at Seringham near Trichinopoly - a veritable holy city within the temple walls. Here in concentric zones are the houses of the servants, a large bazaar, the residences of the Brahmins and finally the great groups of temples in the centre. The outer walls of this vast establishment are a half a mile on each side, entered by gigantic gateways on all sides. The sight through one of these openings down the long street that leads to the centre, under successive pylons, crowded by a multitude of worshippers in brilliant colors, sacred bulls and holy elephants, is simply indescribable, and it is only with a great effort that a visitor can collect enough of his sober senses to examine the architectural peculiarities of the style.

Here we have a typical example of these southern temples - the enormous gateways in the shape of a truncated pyramid, pierced by a large square doorway, the lower part of stone, the upper of brick covered with stucco figures of gods and goddesses, and often painted in brilliant blues, reds, greens and yellows; the series of small open pavillions in the passage towards the centre often sheltering a stone figure of Shiva's bull; and the Temple group, buildings of great extent, low with wide projecting cornice, and supported by the columns characteristic of the style - alternate square and 16 sided drums crowned by a capital made up of four elaborate brackets from the four sides. These temples are open to criticism on account of their lack of concentration, and <sup>the</sup> disappointing effect of an imposing gateway leading to a comparatively insignificant shrine. Only the temple at Tanjore is free from this objection, <sup>where</sup> ~~and~~ the great tower over the shrine is the most prominent feature. On this account and from the beautiful sculptured details Tanjore is perhaps the most satisfactory of its class.

In the north we meet with another class of Hindu work in the Jain temples. The typical form here is an open porch leading to an enclosed hall ~~and~~ with columns, and behind this

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the shrine crowned by a great pyramidal tower. Over each of these  
paths we usually find the peculiar Hindu dome built of overlapping  
horizontal courses and often richly ornamented on the interior. In  
the better examples as at Mt. Abu and Girnar the ex-  
terior of these domes also shows an original and striking  
treatment by being built up in pyramidal form by low-  
successive steps. These temples are nearly always surrounded by  
a cloistered court which has a single entrance opposite that  
of the temple. As regards design - culmination of effect and  
beauty of detail these buildings are; at least in our eyes-  
far superior to those in the south. Especially in the matter  
of detail and beauty of material, the Dilwanra temples on the  
summit of Mt. Abu are the finest in India. Here the profusion  
of ornament, carved with lace-like delicacy from a translucent  
marble, fairly bewilders the eye, yet produces an effect surpassed  
by few buildings in the world. I should like to describe more  
of these buildings - the temples at Benares, in the fort at Gwalior,  
on the summit of Mt. Girnar, and on the sea-shore at Patan - Som-  
nath, but with Fergusson at your elbow it seems unnecess-  
ary. There is another class of purely Hindu work that extends  
from the earliest times down to a comparatively late date, one  
that not only astonishes through the display of labor expended  
but forms an interesting study in decoration, and in the  
proportioning of architectural members placed under extra-  
ordinary conditions. viz: the cave temples and other rock  
excavations found in such great numbers especially in the  
centre of the peninsula. Owing to my limited time I was  
only able to visit some of the most characteristic. The earliest  
and in many respects most interesting of the caves date from  
the Buddhist period. - ~~From~~ Their form and size vary from the  
simple cell excavated by a hermit to the great chaitya caves  
at Ellora and Karlee. In the latter are many interesting features.

Although dating from about two centuries B.C. here are horseshoe arches and a ground plan that is almost exactly that of a gothic church with a round apse and ambulatory. I am not inclined to think that either show any connection with or influence over these forms where they are most familiar to us, but I think they ought to teach us caution as to assertions in regard to "first appearances" of architectural forms - as for example "the earliest example of the use of a pointed arch is probably found in the church of St Denis." It is in one of these caves - that at Karlee - that the wooden frame of the barrel vaulted ceiling still exists which has puzzled so many investigators. The later Brahminical and Jain excavations often show examples of great size - for example the Dhumar Lena at Ellora which is 150 feet square - and with details in columns, entablatures and sculptured panels of great beauty. Especially in the Elephanta Caves, on an island in Bombay harbor, there is an interesting study in proportion of members. Here the abacus and base are abnormally exaggerated while the shaft is short and thick. Taken by themselves they would appear absurd, but where they stand - under a mass of rock perhaps 40 feet high - I have seldom seen a more satisfactory sense of support expressed than in these columns. But by far the most remarkable of its class is the great monolithic Temple - the Kailas - at Ellora. In some respects the most wonderful building in the world. It is a perfect temple - surrounding cloistered courtyard, grand gateway, porches, pillared hall, pavillions and towers, all culminating in a great pyramidal tower at least 100 feet high over the shrine. The general design is excellent and the details profuse as well as beautifully executed. But when we consider that all this has been carved from a single great rock, cut away outside as well as inside, I think we are justified in considering it removed from the curious and remarkable into the regions of the marvellous and sublime.

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As I have already mentioned the Mohammedan architecture of India is collected, for the most part, in the several centres of the old Mohammedan governments established after the subjugation of the country, and it is interesting to note how each centre seemed to develop a peculiar variety of the common style and tend to over-elaboration or avoid that and adopt richness of material in its place. No one can, I think, fail to be struck by the great influence which the invaders exerted over the art of India during their sway. In fact, although we find modern temples still built in the pure Hindu styles, the bulb-shaped dome with the variations of the pointed arch, such as were developed by the Mohammedan Indians, <sup>are</sup> almost <sup>considered</sup> the cognisance of India, through the world famous buildings in that style built by the Great Moguls. The earliest examples of this new style are found in the north-west and north. The very earliest mosques were plain and bare, of rude workmanship, as a rule, built no doubt under the direction of some stern defender of the faith who prohibited all infidel innovations. But even here we occasionally find columns from an old Hindu temple used or a temple porch incorporated and it is not long before the Indian love of decoration again had full sway and the Mohammedan forms were covered with the richest ornament. In one respect, however, there had been a great change brought about. The native artist was now prohibited from introducing representations of animal life into his designs and consequently all his inventive talent was brought to bear on geometric forms and conventional foliage with the greatest success. Nowhere I am sure can be found such ingenuity displayed with such beautiful results as in the perforated stone screens in the Sidi Said mosque windows, and the panels on the minarets of the Shaik Hasan Muhammed Chisti Mosque - both in Ahmedabad, or the marble screens in the tombs and palaces ~~at~~ <sup>at</sup> Delhi and Syra. It is after the examination of this work and tracing its apparent origin that I have been led to doubt the Arabian origin of the art we are accustomed to call Arabian, and it seems more reasonable to



attribute the work we admire in Cairo, Granada and Seville to the tile makers of Persia and the weavers of India than to a race of nomad shepherds - especially after having seen a sample of both classes. But it is a subject that would require closer investigation than mere observation, and in default of historical books of reference and a knowledge of the intercourse brought about by the spread of Islam, of course I only express an opinion. ~~in contrast to~~ <sup>in contrast to</sup> Ahmedabad where the Jain style of ornament predominates, at Bijapur we meet with mosques, tombs and gateways with almost pure southern Hindu decoration. One building especially - the Mehtar Mahal, a small stone gateway to a mosque - is remarkable in giving us a perfect example of woodwork executed in stone, yet with such skill that it is not a mere imitation but becomes an adaptation such as we see in the Palace of Man Singh at Gwalior or in the Alhambra where stone and stucco take the place of tapestry without any change of importance in the patterns. In the famous buildings of Delhi and Agra we have a remarkable change from the system of decoration which was used in other parts of the country, and although it is not altogether gratifying to our sense of sentiment for the Orient, yet we must acknowledge that it seems quite probable that we owe the existence of the most famous building in India to the talents of a French adventurer.

This fact seems to suggest that the <sup>idea of the</sup> beautiful inlaid decorations seen in these cities was borrowed from Europe. The only other theory that could be advanced is that it may be a development of the glazed tile mosaics of Persia, but this hardly seems probable. This decoration may be divided into two classes depending on the material used - the white marble inlays on the warm red sandstone so frequently used, and the delicately beautiful designs inlaid on pure white marble in semiprecious stones - jasper, carnelian, agates and quartzites. It is said that even diamonds, emeralds and rubies were used for the same purpose, but quite naturally now only a blank space in the design marks where they may have been. The latter class is exactly like the Florentine mosaic familiar to

us, but instead of being confined to table-tops and plaques,<sup>(5)</sup> here we see the spandrels of huge arches, the panelled sides of large buildings and the drums of domes all ornamented with the same care and with the same rich materials usually only expended on a tablet or jewel case. Another class of ornament which I had almost forgotten is the glazed tile decoration, often developed into an intricate mosaic and completely covering the facade of a building. That this work originated in Persia and ancient Assyria - the home of the brick - I have little doubt but nowhere, not even in the domes of the Alhambra and the Alcazar at Seville, has the work been carried to the perfection seen in India - especially in the Punjab at Lahore. In our eyes the colors used with such an unspanning hand may appear a little crude and the ornament too profuse but these buildings show the possibilities of the glazed brick as a decorative material, even in the most elaborate work. As to the general design of these Mohammedan buildings we have opportunity to study nearly all classes of buildings for not only the mosques remain - almost always the open cloistered court entered by large gateways, and an open facade mosque, with domes, on the west side - but city gates, palaces, halls of audience and private houses still stand as perfect as the day they were built. To attempt any detailed description of these buildings would not only be too much for me to undertake while still en route, especially in this far away country by the Tigris where I should be preparing for the work in Syria, but I am afraid would be tiresome reading to one who is not a returned pilgrim, and not unreasonably enthusiastic on the subject. I will only say, then, that the days I spent in the Forts at Delhi and Agra, where the finest of the Mogul buildings are located - the Diwans, Mirror Palaces and Jasmine

Towers we read about, or by the tanks at Ulwan, Amritsar and Amber, where the landscapes on the blue soup plates of our childhood were materialized, were among the pleasantest and I believe most instructive that I have spent since I left Boston. not only through the study of the individual buildings, but of a style that has as yet needed no renaissance to galvanize it into life, but <sup>is</sup> is changing, growing and progressing today among the native architects undisturbed by the overshadowing Secretariats, Universities and Railway Stations of the present ruling class.

In order to bring my letter to a close, and at the same time mention the, to my mind, strongest point in the Mohammedan architecture of India - the display of talent in the composition of a group, as exemplified in that most frequently met with - the Tomb = Mosque group, I will copy an extract from my journal written in the garden of the Taj Mahal at Agra after enjoying an afternoon <sup>at</sup> ~~with~~ that famous <sup>place</sup> ~~place~~, which may be interesting as the impression of the moment, and written without any reflection.

"— There is something remarkable in the amount of thought that is displayed in the surroundings of the Taj. I believe that if the building itself were removed to a barren waste of sand such as surrounds the Tombs of the Caliphs at Cairo, it would be unmercifully criticised, It certainly is a little blocky in outline, the pinnacles at the angles are very slender, the four subordinate domes look as if they were merely set on the roof, There are dozens of little points for a hypercritical person to discuss, but taken with its surroundings even a cynic must be silenced. The Taj should not stand alone nor be judged alone. The entrance is a most imposing structure - in weaker hands it might have completely overshadowed the tomb itself. But that was obviated at once by omitting the great central dome, Instead we

find a multitude of smaller domes, turrets large enough <sup>(6)</sup> to give it dignity and finish, and ~~as there~~ an elaboration of ornament such as ~~the~~ Grand Vizier might be expected to assume in the presence of the Caliph. But it is prevented from taking away from the richness of the central figure by being given another color, I might almost say vulgarized by a brilliant color. The strong contrast of its red walls with the white inlays produces so different an effect from the delicate pietra-dura work of the Taj itself that there is no clashing. The arcades of the garden walls - the gardeners' houses and the mosque with its sister building which flank the Taj are all tempered by the same means. Yet in the case of the two flanking buildings there is a nearer approach, a leading up to the central feature. Here we find great domes - but not so great as the central dome, and again subdued by being placed in groups of three. The contrast in color is not so great, for the façades of the pavilions and the bulbs of the domes are executed in white marble. But again here the check is placed by the deep red frame of the building, its simpler ornament, and greater profusion of details. In this way the blockiness of the Taj seems not only justified, but almost demanded. Its violent contrasts in the size of details made necessary to make them striking for they are few. And its almost total absence of color, its dazzling whiteness, brings about an isolation, and a climax to the whole that could hardly be surpassed by any other means. The garden itself, beyond serving as a mere setting for the jewel, adds, too, to the opportunities of judging the building rightly. There is no difficulty whatever in choosing a point of view from which to compose a magnificent group with the

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snowy white building as the crowning point, or we may look down a long vista bordered by a multitude of different forms and colors in foliage and have the famous structure mirrored alone in the glassy surface of a great basin of water with nothing but the blue of the sky, the beautiful greens of the ~~blues of~~ the garden and the pearly marble to occupy the eye and mind. It is this that makes the the fame of the tomb - this is the Taj."

In reading this letter over a second time I feel that I should temper my tirade against the "material seeker" a little. I did not wish to belittle the work of those who furnish us with accurate drawings, dimensions and profiles. It would be simply impossible for any one man to carefully examine sufficient work to gain an exact knowledge of even a single style in any reasonable time, and it is to such drawings that he must resort, and which are often more valuable for immediate comparison than the buildings themselves. What I wished to condemn was the habit some - I will not say many - architectural students have of seeing nothing but available material, and returning with a load of fragments to be pieced together Chinese-puzzle fashion on their return. With that spirit in the architect we shall never progress. Travel is chiefly valuable in broadening ideas - in teaching the student how local peculiarities may be introduced without material change in the general style, and above all in giving him that charitable spirit towards the work of others that may lead him to even give up attempts to be the architectural Columbus of his country but be ready to follow up and fill in the lines laid down by the great genius when he appears. It is my firm belief that the architectural structure can only be built up by adding new work, not by grubbing out foundation stones to lay in the upper walls. In a word progress in architecture as in everything else is only possible through the development of contemporary work.

Justiney eng. Baghdad April 16<sup>th</sup> 1894