

# A Mania for Building.

The Most Exquisite Structure in the World.

By Frederic Courtland Penfield.

**A** MOGUL who did things was Shah Jahan, and he came of a race not content with ordinary achievements. His grand father, Akbar, was probably the greatest personage ever born in India. He it was "whose saddle was his throne, the canopy of which was the vaulted dome of heaven." Akbar made Eastern history, made it fast, blazoning it with proud records of conquest and empire extension. Akbar was the grandest man who ever ruled Central India, and it was he who developed the Mogul Empire to the loftiest importance it attained.

Shah Jahan embellished the empire with noble structures, and his impulse for building amounted to mania. Time annulled Akbar's achievements, but those of his grandson stand to-day, and the structures of his era are beautiful enough to attract admirers from every corner of the earth. A famous critic once said that Shah Jahan built like a giant and finished like a jeweller. His works have made Agra, of all cities in India, the place of unrivalled interest.

Agra's Taj Mahal is the most exquisite building ever erected by the hands of men, and as a romance as deftly wrought in marble as any writer ever fashioned in words. It marks a great man's love for a woman—Arjamaund Banu Begum, his wife. Shah Jahan was a Mohammedan despot who led a magnificent life, and had other wives; but in his eyes the peer of her sex was Arjamaund. When she died in giving birth to a child, he

declared he would rear to her memory a mausoleum so perfect that it would make men marvel for all time. And this he accomplished. More poetry and prose have been written about the Taj, with more allusions to it as a symbol of love, than of any other creation marking hu-

man affection—and the secret probably lies in the fact that all the world loves a lover.

Arjamaund had many titles of rank and endearment, but poets like Sir Edwin Arnold preferred to speak of her as Muntaz-i-Mahal, meaning the "Exalted of the Palace," when extolling the charms of this splendid niece of Nur-Mahal, who likewise had been famed for beauty and charity.

Shah Jahan ruled from 1628 to 1658, and had been on the throne only two years when death took from him his adored Arjamaund. Then came the resolve to erect to her memory a monument that might measure his love and grief. Since Akbar's time, the best architects, artists and skilled workmen of India, Persia, and Arabia had been attracted to Agra and neighbouring Delhi. All were summoned to Shah Jahan's court,

and the resources of his empire placed at their disposal. The Taj, consequently, was not the creation of a single master mind, but the consummation of a great art epoch. Its construction was commenced four years after Arjamaund's demise.

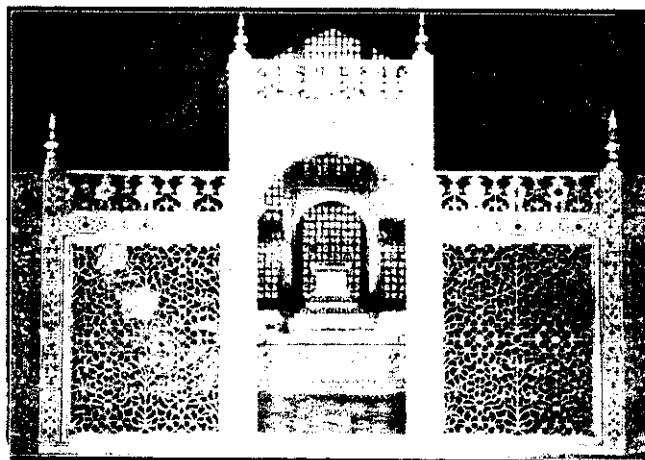
The bereft emperor had appointed a council of great architects of India to guide the work. Drawings of celebrated structures of the world, especially those in Moslem lands, were studied. More than one European was attracted to the Mogul court, and it is believed that Geromino Verronea, who had journeyed from Italy, laid several plans before Shah Jahan. There are records at Agra showing that certain suggestions of the Italian were adopted, but it is common belief that the general design was the creation of a Turkish or Persian architect named Ustad Isa.

In keeping with an old Tartar custom, a garden was chosen as the site of the tomb—a garden planted with flowers and fragrant shrubs, emblems of life, and solemn expressions, emblems of death and eternity. In Mogul days such a garden was maintained as a pleasure ground during the owner's lifetime, and used for his interment when dead.

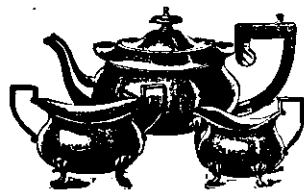
"And she who loved her garden, lieth now Lapped in a garden.  
And all this for Love?"

The labourers came from many parts of the world—the chief masons from Northern India and Bagdad, the dome builders from Asiatic Turkey, and the mosaic artists from Persia. Every section of India and Central Asia was drawn upon for materials. The marble, spotless in purity, was brought from Jaypore, 300 miles away, on the backs of elephants and camels or by bullock carts. The red sandstone was contributed by Fatepur Sikri; the jasper by the Punjab, the crystal and jade by China. The turquoises came from Tibet and the Red Sea, the sapphires and lapis lazuli from Ceylon, coral and cornelian from Arabia, onyx and amethysts from Persia, and the diamonds from Bundelkand.

It engaged the unceasing labour of



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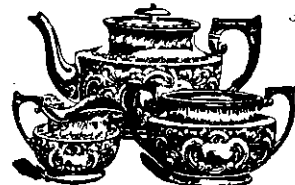
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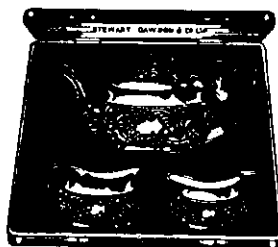
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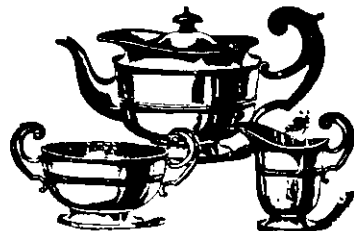
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