

Europe. At the end of each flight we got the idea of being in some little terrace or colonnade rather than a tower. We stood high above the lofty arch and looked down upon the majestic flight of steps at its entrance, a sheer descent of 150 feet at least, but still we ascended. Below us lay the ruined portions of the silent city and the uninjured palaces of bygone kings, courtiers and priests. There was the tower adorned with elephants' tusks—as larded pork adorns a capon—on which the great Akbar sat to shoot the deer hunted past him from the preserves around. There was the royal sleeping-house; the royal baths or hummums; the mint for coining long obsolete pagodas and rupees; the royal cook-rooms, where trembling cooks once waited to hear the royal verdict upon their latest novelty in “kabobs,” or how many heads royalty intended to take off for the extra turn given to that “kid stuffed with pistachio nuts.” There was the huge quadrangle, of the rich red stone, which was once the royal mews; loose boxes there for hundreds of horses, the stone rings for the head and heel ropes still there, marked by the chafing of halters long worn out, of horses long since dead. None of these places built as English kings have built, in brick and stucco, but all in rich purple sandstone, inlaid with coloured marbles, or laboriously carved in patterns deeply cut.

Then we found ourselves crossing the court-yard leading to the zenana. Fish-ponds and fountains long since dried up. In the centre the colossal chess, or “puchesi” board, of inlaid marbles, where the mighty caliph played the game, not with paltry figures made by humanity, but with humanity itself—in the shape of the laughing girls from the zenana, clad in different colours and moving from square to square as motioned by the imperial smoker, sitting on the marble throne, at the head of the gigantic board. We, profane Feringhees, sons of burnt fathers, saw the bath-room where dark-eyed beauties had splashed through the sparkling fountains. We wandered through the palace, or rather maze, of richly carved stone, two stories high, full of double galleries, niches and loopholes where Lights of the Harem, slaves and favourites—long since dusty skeletons or portions of Jumna mud—had played at hide and seek or blind-man's buff. Now all deserted, silent and dead, though the rooms and passages yet show the marks of gliding slippered feet, and only require re-peopling to look as they must have looked three centuries ago.

Then we visited the council-chamber, where the caliph talked with his wuzeers; like no other chamber one has ever seen. A square stone hall, with hollow walls containing staircases; in the centre, reaching half-way to the roof, a thick pillar of red stone, massive, and heavily carved, the capital some eight feet in diameter; from it to each corner of the room led narrow causeways, about four feet wide, the balustrades of delicately carved white marble; on each causeway opened a door, having a private staircase leading to it in the hollow wall. There, in the centre, on an ivory throne, with diamond-encrusted legs, beneath that richly fretted roof, sat the great caliph, and there at the four corners stood his wuzeers, offering counsels, hands crossed, beards drooped upon their breasts, each at his own little door, before his own little balcony, leading to the mighty presence in the centre.