

The Lady of the Taj

"Not Architecture as all others are
But the proud passion of an Emperor's love
Wrought into living stone, which gleams and soars
With body of beauty shining soul and thought;
Divinely fair, unrivaled before our eyes—
Some woman, beautiful unspeakably—
And the blood quickens and the spirit leaps,
And will to worship bend the half-yielded knees,
While breath forgets to breathe. So is the Taj!"

Three centuries ago, in a wide-stretching Indian palace overlooking the melancholy waste of sands through which Jumna, the revered, crawls sluggishly past temple and shrine and ruin of the past, a little girl was born—dark-eyed, petite, impetuous, sensuous and subtle, a little princess with all the matchless dignity of a race stretching far back into the times of dim antiquity, with all the passionate ardor of the East in her throbbing veins, with all the Persian's inborn and inbred sympathy with beauty and the poetry of life, with all the regal devotion and self-oblivion of perfect womanhood, when in her eighteenth year that womanhood was called into life and being by the hand of fate which beckoned to a throne—the throne of the Great Mogul.

Arjumand Banu Begum she was named, the daughter of that Asaf Khan who was the brother of Empress Nur Mahal, wife to the great Jehangir, and thus the grand-daughter of the Sultan Jehangir's famous Prime Minister Itmad-ud-Daulah, whose tomb today sentinel the lower river and keeps green in undying memory the sweetest romance of the Persian poets.

The Princess Banu lived her short girlhood thus, as did and do all others of her race and rank, secure from the rude world's storms within the shelter of the Zenana's whispering cloisters, learning those duties, arts and graces which to the Persian and the Aryan mind are jewels meet for the crown of the perfect woman and mother; nor dreaming for one golden-winged hour that she had been marked by the stars of destiny as worthy to inspire the greatest poem in architecture conceived by human heart and brain and fashioned by human hands—nay, infinitely more than any climacteric accomplishment of master-builder's art, "this most divinely fair, embodiment of queenship and gracious womanhood."

Not dreamed she that while little Princess Banu and all her royal race are by the world of today forgot—read of perchance with languid curiosity as a people that has passed—she would herself find place among the immortals as "the Great Begum," Mumtaz Mahal, "The Crown of the Palace," the serene, the all-loving, the unapproachable and incomparable among women.

Mumtaz Mahal, although Fate made her a Queen, was all Woman. When at the age of eighteen, (which in the Orient is spinsterhood far advanced) she was bestowed in marriage upon the Shah Jehan, then Prince Khurram, aged barely twenty-two and already married, she gave herself unreservedly to her lover and her lord—content that she should be herself absorbed and perfected in the self-surrender. From then until the end, Shah Jehan was her husband, her heart, her life—her utmost pleasure to exercise his cares, to find completest happiness in being the sunshine of his life, to understand his every thought and interest and ambition, to build up such perfect sympathy of love and understanding that theirs should be indeed a royal marriage of congenial souls.

For herself Mumtaz Mahal had no high ambition. She sought no separate place in history, save only a little niche, her due as loyal and loving wife to her most gracious lord. To hold the heart of Shah Jehan and help to make him great, to comfort him and share his every grief and happiness with ready and entire sympathy; to bind his people to him and so conspire with Fate that he, her king, should be throughout the earth renowned for justice, wisdom, strength and clemency—this was the goal of her activities. She sought not prominence, not to amend conditions affecting the normally dull monotony of woman's life behind the lattice of the East. She shrank from individual celebrity.

From such progressive females as the unsexed and shrieking suffragette, the "Crown of the Palace" would have shrunk in unutterable horror, as from some foul, unnatural, pestilential thing, unspeakably opposed to Nature's plan and therefore doubly vile.

She was a WOMAN and her sceptre and glory the great love of a woman rightly wed. And thus she ruled the chamber, the palace, the court, the empire of her lord: not wittingly but because such great love is a power beyond all else.

And thus today, though three hundred years have passed, the tomb wherewith her royal husband and lover sought to perpetuate her memory and symbolize the surpassing beauty of her perfect womanhood commands the reverence and admiration of the world, serenely pure and lovely, the priceless gem of all existing architecture, and infinitely more than this—a master-poem, flawless and beautiful, matchless, unique, superb; shaming and banishing all mundane, petty thoughts; raising each one who views it to loftier planes of thought and nobler aspiration.

When one reads that the building of the Taj demanded the services of an army of twenty-five thousand of the world's best workmen constantly employed both by day and by night for a period of twenty-two years, the mind scarce can grasp the magnitude of the undertaking to make such demand upon labor. When one has seen the Taj and gone reluct-

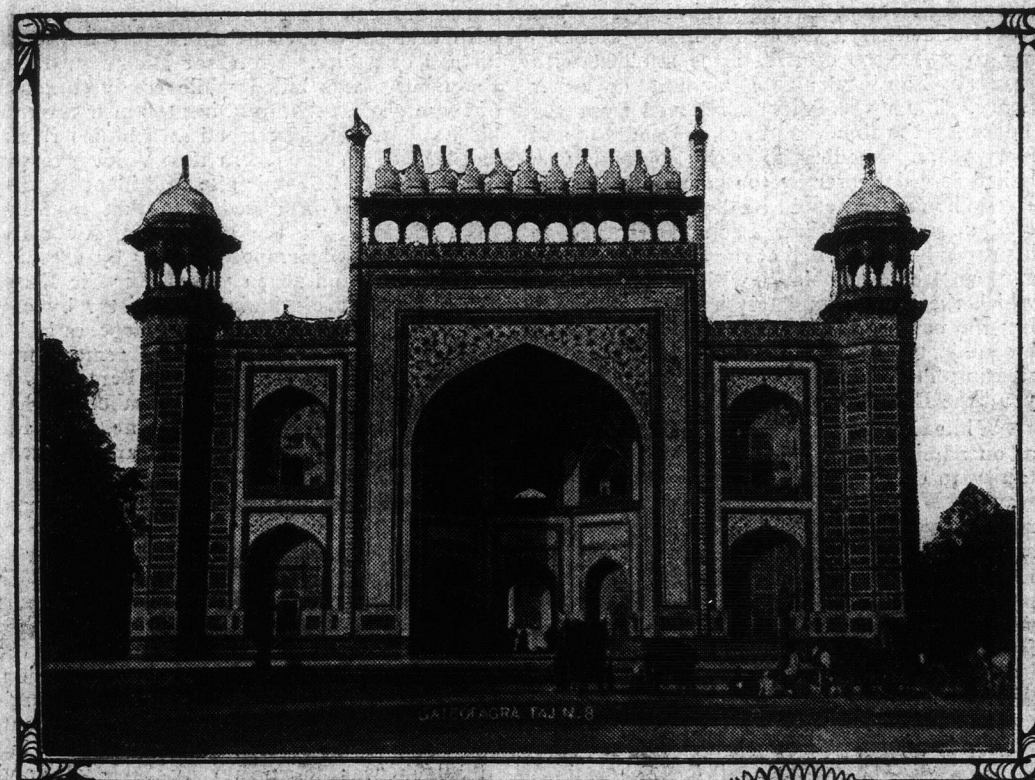
antly from out the radius of its serenely hypnotic spell—for there can be no thought of gross materialism at the Taj—the wonder is that human brain and hands with all the treasures of the world to draw upon, could have accomplished this triumph of an almost god-like genius.

As there are poems of wondrous power and beauty; master paintings for which the artist has mixed his colors with the heart's blood of the race, great symphonies that sweep the souls of men—so is the Taj, the symbol of the religion and force of beauty, the spirit of Woman gleaming divinely fair.

From whatever viewpoint one selects, from whatever distance, in whatever condition of

itself the predilection of the Persians for the representation of flowers and foliage in jewel mosaic is very freely displayed.

From this main gateway—one of the finest in India—an avenue of cypresses extends to the Taj itself, some three hundred yards in length, bordering an artificial lake with marble banks—a court of fountains is the accepted descriptive phraseology—the vista being closed in with the exquisite dome of the Taj, in purest white marble. Through the beautiful screen of marble lacework exactly under the dome, one can see almost to the heart of the shrine—the false tombs themselves. The real sepulchres are precisely underneath, identical replicas of the false tombs.



LOOKING BACKWARD TO THE MAIN ENTRANCE GATEWAY FROM WITHIN THE GROUNDS OF THE TAJ.

atmosphere—in the dull gray of early morning, in the blaze of the noonday sun, the calm of evening or under the serene light of the slow-sailing moon—the Taj is ever beautiful.

It is the one architectural wonder of the world which never disappoints.

It is the one building of the world which possesses an almost uncanny spirituality and exercises an ever-present individualism, supremely powerful and compelling, although elusive and delicate as a dream.

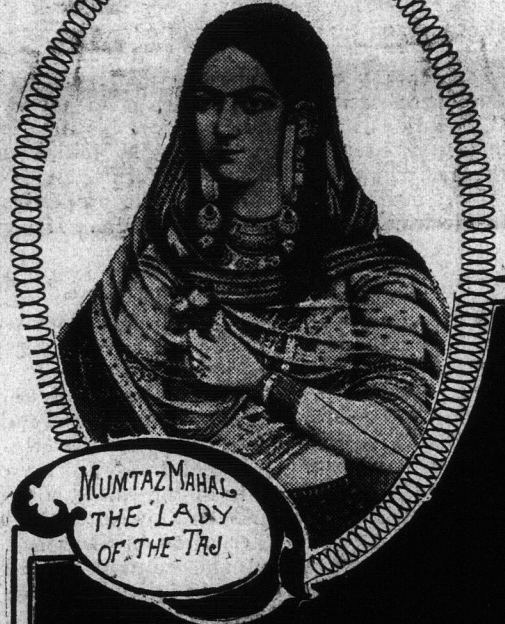
It is this eerie magic which draws all who have seen the Taj back at each possible opportunity to its peaceful gardens, wherein the white-robed priests flit silent-footed, the song of nightingale and the coo of mating doves merge with the murmuring of the fountains, and the far-reaching call to prayer of the muzzelin goes forth at the rising and the setting of each day's sun.

Some faint perception of the magnitude of the master thought in the conception of the Taj may perhaps be gained from the fact that the builders were required to study the effects of first view of the dome and minarets from distances of from ten to twenty miles—that five hundred acres of beautiful park are imperatively traversed before the outer gates of the Taj gardens themselves are reached, the eye thus being soothed and the mind tranquilized preparatorily—that these gardens were almost three hundred years ago stocked with Italian nightingales in order that the note of sound might be in harmony with the Great Thought expressed in enduring marble richly jewelled.

To mention that the Taj is wholly constructed of purest marble and precious stones, but for the exception of the sandalwood doors which lend fragrance to the vast interior of the mausoleum proper—that in the last days of the Moguls five thousand priests and workmen were permanently employed in the care of the grounds and the jewel of which they are the setting—and that the materials congregated in the Taj, its mosques and approaches are estimated to have cost approximately three billion lakhs of rupees, or roughly \$1,500,000,000, are material details the mention of which is perhaps unworthy, and an offence against good taste in talking of the Taj.

After making the acquaintance of this "miracle mausoleum of the widest world," mention of such material constituents seems quite as incongruous as to discuss the wearing of winter flannels and the price of butter with an angelic visitor from the gleaming spheres.

The instinct of colossal dramatic stagecraft which has provided the preparatory approach through the tranquilizing greenery of beautiful gardens, is further in evidence at the noble outer gateway through which a first near view of the Taj is obtained as of a magnificent picture worthily framed.



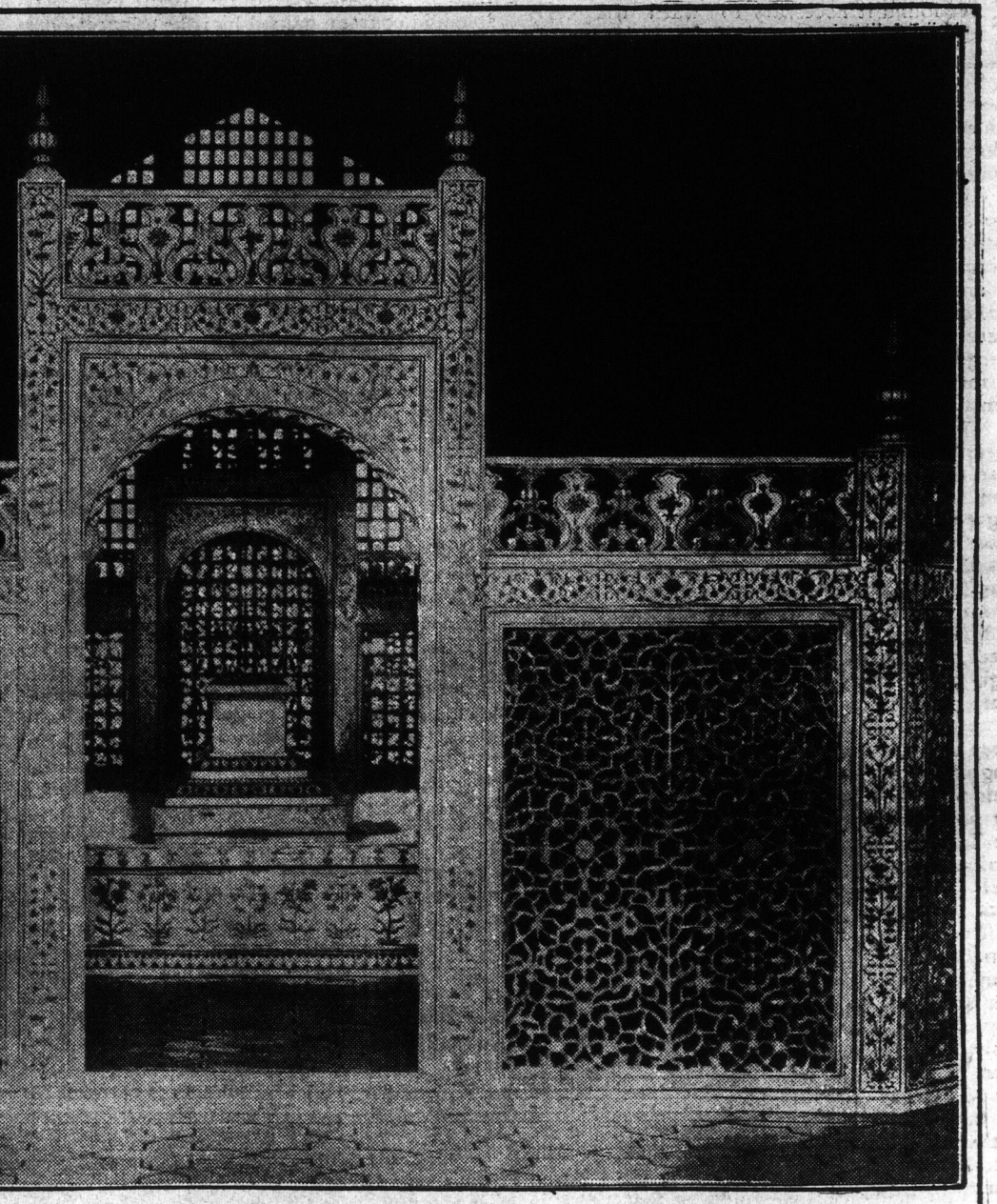
MARBLE SCREENS ABOUT THE CENOTAPHS OF SHAH JEHAN AND HIS QUEEN; THE FALSE TOMBS ARE SHOWN WITHIN THE SCREEN; THE REAL TOMBS, IDENTICAL IN SIZE, FORM AND DECORATIONS, ARE IN THE CRYPT BELOW

These tombs, both false and real, are of marvellously carved solid blocks of marble, so elaborately mosaiced with jewels that the mind is staggered in contemplation of the prodigality of use of what in the western world are jewellers' treasures. To see such semi-

precious stones as usually are associated with the adornment of beauty or the jeweller's tray, employed as builders' materials on a gigantic scale benumbs the mind, or places perhaps a saner valuation on non-essential articles of rarity and beauty. The splendor and the variety of the jewels are almost invariably underappreciated, so marvellous is the craftsmanship displayed by the dead and gone master-craftsmen in mosaic-making, and with such exceeding cunning have they been harmonized with the pure white loveliness of their setting. Yet no mausoleum in the world was ever so richly jewelled, the whole of the Orient having seemingly been laid under tribute to adorn the tombs of Shah Jehan and his well-loved

jade, goldstone, sardonyx, topaz—and all so naturally employed in foliage and floral scroll on marble that one is lost in spellbound admiration of the composition, and quite forgets the sordid element of the costliness of the materials employed. To estimate the number or the value of the jewels employed in these the finest extant examples of the extinct art of Florentine jewel-mosaic is quite beyond possibility.

On a panel of the actual shrine is found a significant descriptive line, which also has a place in the decorative scheme at the outer gateway, placed on the tomb by special direction of the Shah Jehan himself. It is not a verse from the Koran, as the guides invariably translate each Persian inscription for the bene-



consort: Jasper from the Punjab, diamonds from Golconda, sapphires and lapis-lazuli from Ceylon, onyx from Persia, turquoise from Kashmir and Thibet, agate from Yemen, coral from the Red Sea, crystals from Malwar, garnet from Bundelcund, rubies from Burma—

fit of the passing tourist, but a quotation from the Hudees, or very ancient traditions, which would seem to indicate that the philosophy and teachings of the Nazarene found their way almost immediately to the priests of India—as indeed do all philosophies; while the Koran

contains many poetical precepts of Christ which are not found in the Bible. This quotation reads:

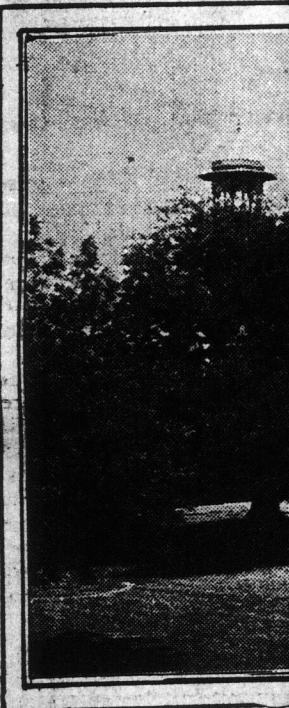
"Thus saith Jesus, upon whom be this world is a bridge. Pass the bridge but build not upon it. The bridge is but one hour—give its minutes Thy prayers, for the rest is unse-

The shrine itself, despite its monumental, gives an impression of artistic restraint—the peace and sanctity. The visitor here lowers his voice, speaking with reverence and as may be: Again the my dominance of the Taj! Altho of the marvellous echo, which attendant priest fully ten spoken words, few even a tourist throng are vandals of the shrine of the Taj to sa curiosity.

Perhaps it is because of associations woven about this his incomparable queen—great Shah Jehan's latter long years his own son's pious only consolation being the completion of his beloved deathbed request that he be to the Jasmin Tower, his boudoir, so that his eyes last upon that snowy dome and ing, delicate minarets, outsharpness against the deep sky.

Whatever the reason, the queen are nearer, dearer, more people of today than any of dead kings and forgotten queens are strewn over this land of crumbling monuments of a

MAIN ENTRANCE GATEWAY FROM THE APPROACH



peoples whose craftsmanship out eclipse the kindred accomplishments are grotesque.

Who of the present day, could the Taj or create a parallel? Where could the erect such an architectural nail or beam or screw or support? Where the mosaic water genius to study out all of sound, of cumulative dramatic climaxes as contributory to

The peoples of Great Britain regard themselves as high man of India as an inferior. The people of America regard the people of America gross materialists, whose based on barbaric force and wholly in augmentation of of raiment, of adornment, of hoarded wealth. They races, who set themselves, high mental or spiritual disscorn wealth or its purchase of progressive civilization. They claim to have passed magnificence; while they their formative period of did not fail to produce such the Taj as testimony to the spiritual attainments, far over all accomplishments of erica.

There are those of course something to disapprove even burden of their complaint is tion is "architectural effemin way they proceed to comparously, upon this text, with other classical buildings. the very effeminacy compling triumph, since the Taj is as the tomb and monument, but also as symbolic of w charm. Were it not femin its purpose.

How to describe the Taj The task has been essays as centuries have passed been quite successful. Percription in the English is Arnold, although a Persi have more accurately caught uality, which invests the T