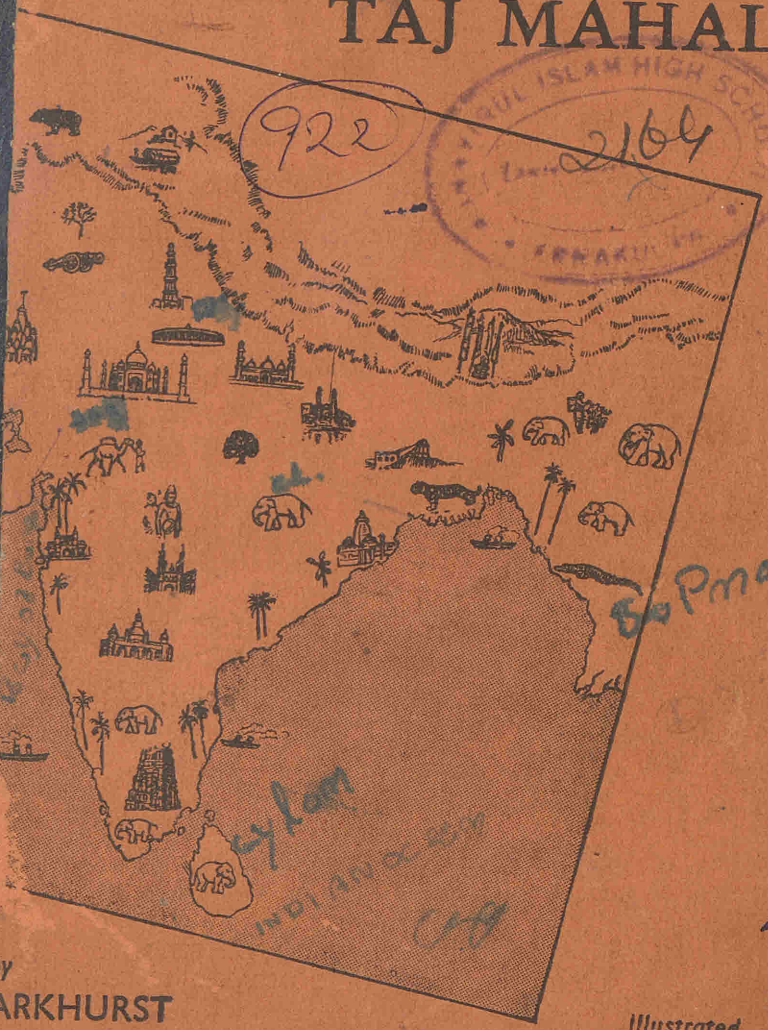
GRA AND THE TAJ MAHAL



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2164
ISLAM HIGH SCHO
ERNAKU

By
ARKHURST

Illustrated

VOCABULARY

standstone	..	a rock consisting of grains of sand compressed together.
lattice	..	a screen or window with small openings.
pavilion	..	an ornamental building.
cypress	..	a tall gloomy-looking tree.
vault	..	an underground building.
khadim	..	a servant.
pavement	..	a path.
handicraft	..	work done by the hands.

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AGRA
AND THE TAJ MAHAL

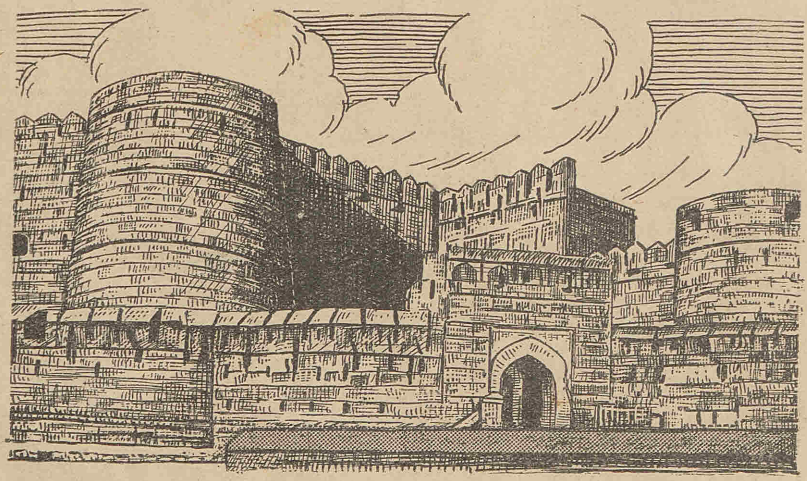
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Agra is situated on the western borders of the United Provinces, and is built on the right bank of the river Jumna. Hot sand-storms from the deserts of Rajputana often blow across the city.

Very little is known about Agra before the Mohammedans came there. In 1526 it was occupied by Humayun, son of Babar. Humayun was the

first of the Moghul conquerors of Hindusthan. His son, Akbar, the Great Moghul, was born in 1542.

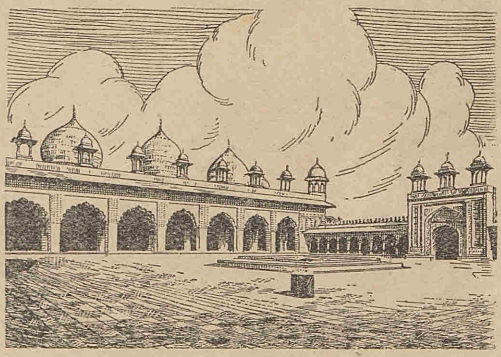
In 1555 Akbar became Emperor, and three years later made Agra his capital city. He at once started to build the Fort of Agra. Its high walls are made of red sandstone. They are still strong and in good condition.



AGRA FORT

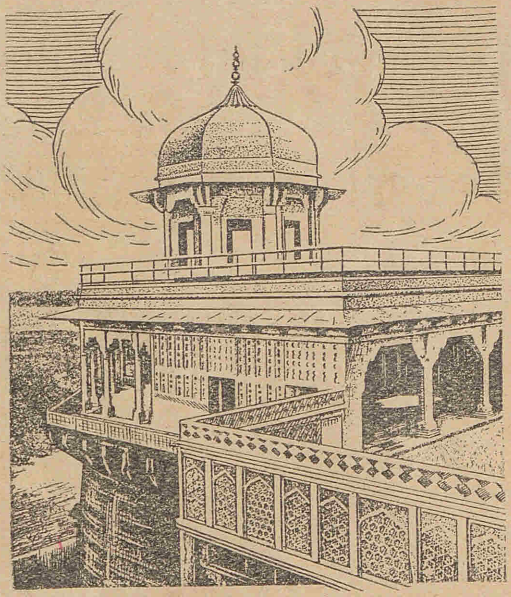
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ERNAKULAM

When Shah Jahan came to the throne, he began to build the marble palaces which we now see in Agra Fort. There are imposing halls called the Dewan-i-Am and the Dewan-i-Khas. When the Emperor and his court went to prayers, they assembled in the Moti Masjid, or Pearl Mosque. This mosque contains great columns of carved marble. It cost three lakhs of rupees to build.



PEARL MOSQUE, AGRA FORT

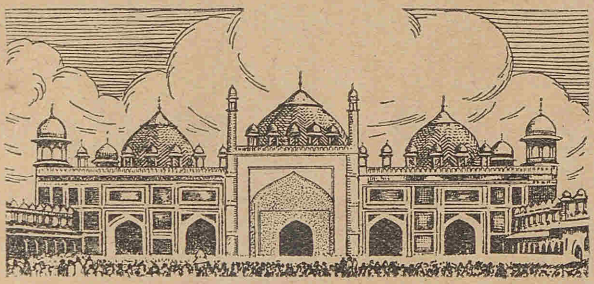
Near at hand is the eight-sided tower called the Musamman Burj. It has carved marble lattices and arches inlaid with precious stones.



MUSAMMAN BURJ, AGRA FORT

The Machi Bhawan, the Sish Mahal and other halls and pavilions can be visited whilst we are in the Fort. Memories of these fairy-like buildings in the red sandstone Fort will remain with us long after we have left Agra.

Outside the Delhi Gate of the Fort is the Jami Masjid. This mosque was built by Shah Jahan in 1648. It has three very large domes. A very good view of the Jami Masjid can be had from the Fort Railway Station.



JAMI MASJID, AGRA

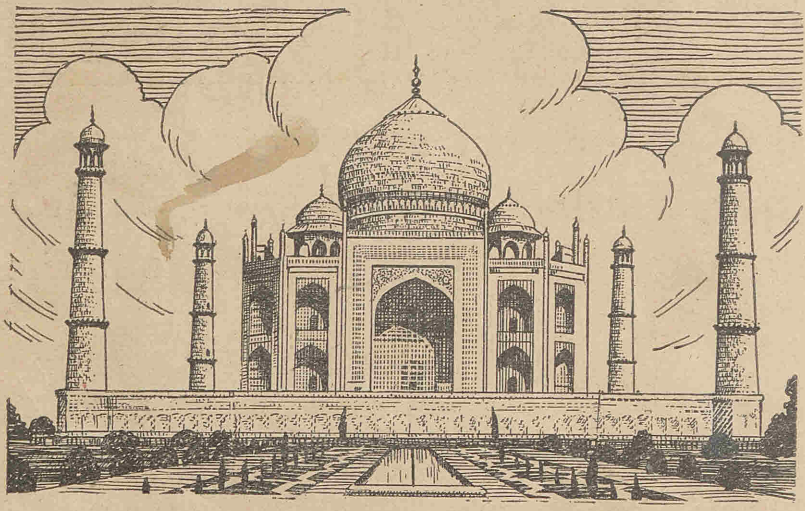
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3

The Agra Fort is justly celebrated but the Taj Mahal is far more famous. Although the Taj Mahal was not one of the original "Seven Wonders of the World," most people would place

it among them to-day. It is the best-known building in India.

The Emperor Shah Jahan ordered the building of the Taj Mahal. It covers the grave of his beloved wife,



THE TAJ MAHAL, AGRA

Mumtaz Mahal, who died in 1629. It took nearly twenty-two years to complete, and is the noblest tomb in the world. Its white marble domes

and minarets are so very beautiful that they seem as if they had been raised by some magician's spell, and might vanish from our sight in a moment. The whole mass of graceful marble looks as though it is resting in air.



SHAH JAHAN

Only a very great love could have made such beauty possible. Mumtaz Mahal was indeed Shah Jahan's loving and dutiful wife. Her very name means "the exalted one of the palace."



MUMTAZ MAHAL

Shah Jahan died in 1666 after a reign of thirty-one years. When he was dying, he was taken to the Musamman Burj in the Fort, so that he might look towards his wife's tomb. He was buried in the Taj Mahal beside Mumtaz Mahal.

4

We must visit the Taj Mahal by moonlight. There is a tinge of silver round its dome, and a pinkish hue is reflected over its walls. At its base is the deep dark green of the cypress trees, and above all the soft starlit sky.

We sit for a long time gazing at the lovely sight. As the moon rises

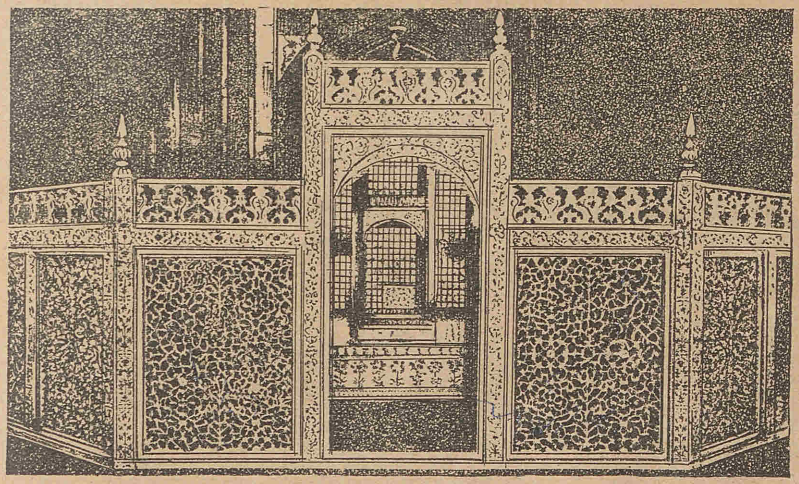


SHAH JAHAN'S LAST LOOK AT THE TAJ

higher in the heavens, its beams touch different parts of the Taj. As we sit and watch, the border of precious stones over the main doorway begins to sparkle like a bed of diamonds. A glitter here, a glitter there, a flash of colour from minaret or pinnacle—all reveal the presence of gems shining in the moon-beams.

Let us now go up on to the huge marble platform on which the Taj is built. Inside the carved doorway of the Taj we see copies of the graves of Mumtaz and her royal husband. The real tombs are in the vault below. An old man with a long white beard points out to us the countless jewels inlaid in the marble tombs. They are

arranged in a number of different patterns. The designs are perfect in every detail, although a single flower may be made from over fifty little pieces of precious stones. A beautiful



MARBLE SCREEN, TAJ MAHAL

marble screen surrounds these copies of the real tombs.

The old Khadim recites prayers in a loud voice. The echoes of

his voice soar round and round the lofty dome above and leave us spell-bound.

We then go down some stairs to the vault below. Here are the actual tombs of Shah Jahan and his Queen. It is quite dark down there, and we are glad of the Khadim's lantern. All is silent and peaceful. Here at last we are face to face with the last resting-place of the builder of the Taj Mahal, the Delhi Fort, the palaces of the Agra Fort and other splendid buildings. Here also we pay our respects to the memory of a beloved Queen and mother, Mumtaz Mahal.



5

About twenty miles from Agra is Fatehpur Sikri. At the village of Sikri, in Akbar's time, there lived a Mohammedan saint of great renown. His name was Sheik Salim Chisti. Now, Akbar longed for a son, and when he visited the saint he spoke to him of his longing. The saint told Akbar that his wish would soon be granted. When a son was born to the great Moghul, he named him Salim. Many years after, when Salim

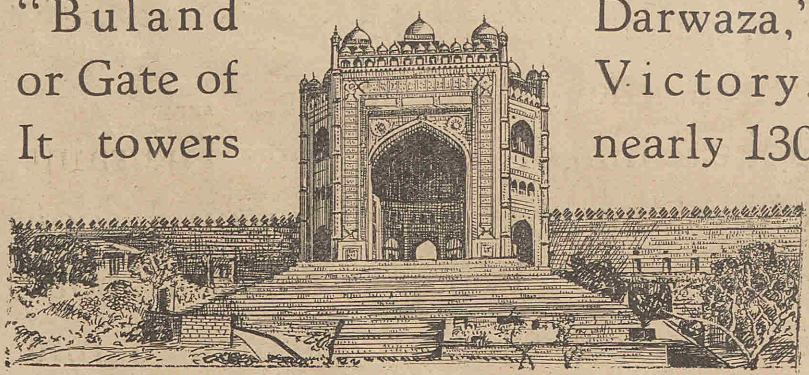


AKBAR

became Emperor, he took the name of Jahangir.

Akbar was so pleased at having his wish fulfilled that he decided to build a new capital city at Sikri. Quickly the great walls arose, and wonderful palaces and mosques soon took shape under the skilled hands of the workmen. Akbar called the city Fatehpur Sikri, or "The City of Victory."

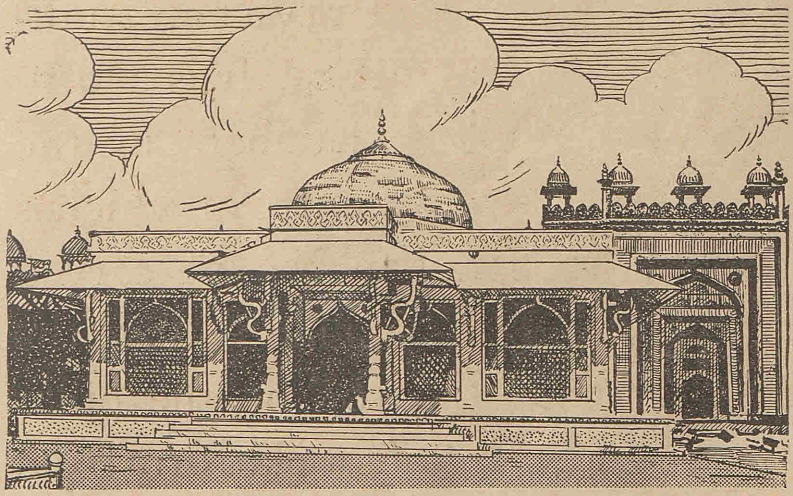
Its main gateway is named the "Buland Darwaza," or Gate of Victory. It towers nearly 130



BULAND DARWAZA, FATEHPUR SIKRI

feet above the ground, and is built of marble and red sandstone. The grand appearance of the gateway is increased by the huge flight of steps leading up to it.

In the courtyard of the great mosque stands the tomb of the saint, Sheik Salim Chisti. It is surrounded by beautifully carved marble screens.

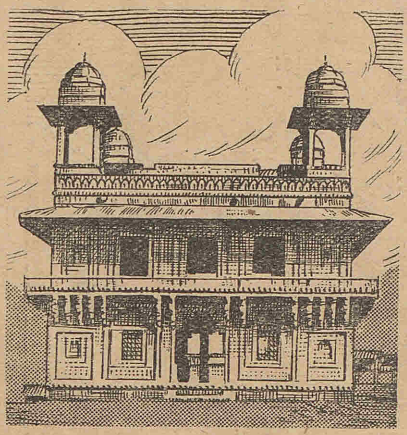


SHEIK SALIM CHISTI'S TOMB

It is still visited by pilgrims from far and near. Some of the guides who show visitors round the city are descendants of the saint.

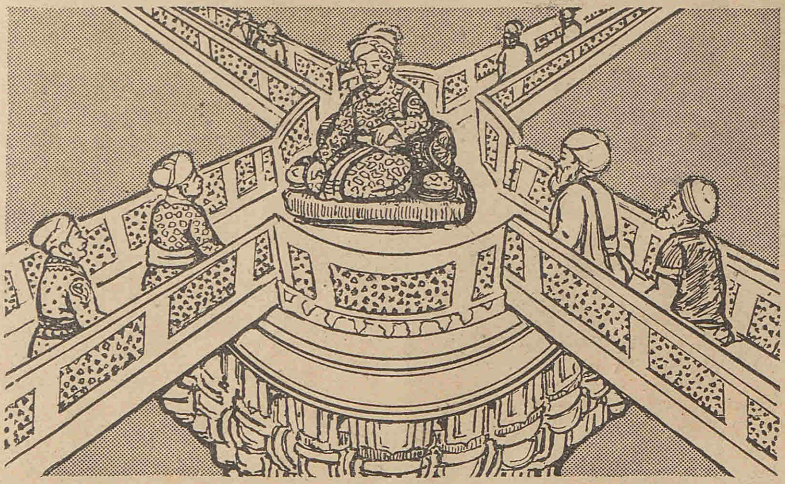
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A wonderful building in Fatehpur Sikri is the Dewan-i-Khas or Hall of Private Audience. It is a lofty chamber, in the centre of which is a massive carved pillar. On the top of the pillar is a platform from which four stone galleries lead to



DEWAN-I-KHAS

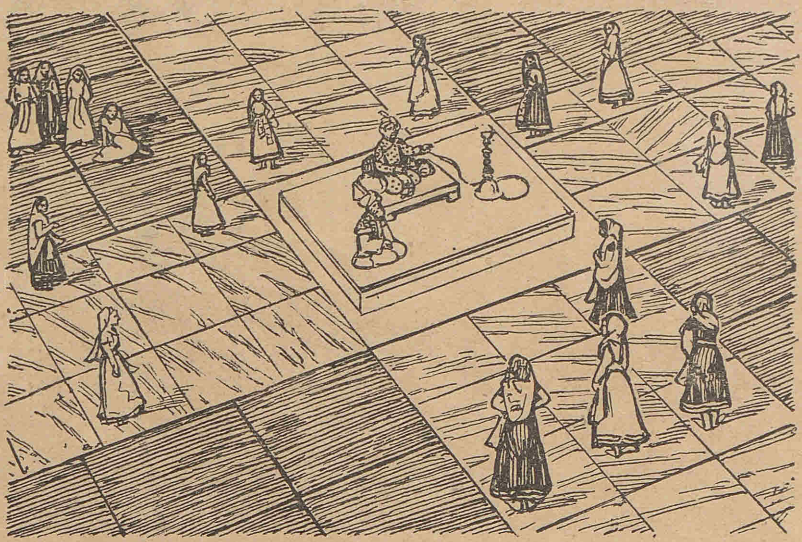
another gallery which is built round the walls of the hall. Scholars from all over India, and learned men from the East and from the West, used to sit in these galleries. Akbar, sitting on the central platform, used to join in their arguments. One can imagine the Great Moghul, clad in rich silks and sparkling with jewels, calmly listening



AKBAR AND THE SCHOLARS

to the learned men, and taking part in their discussions.

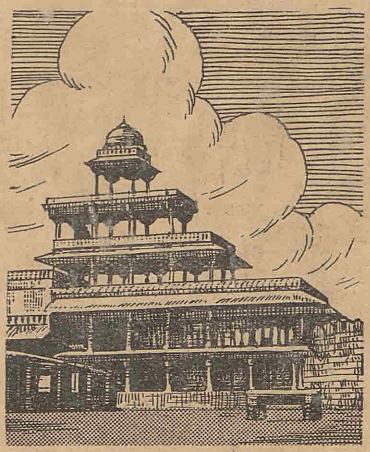
Another interesting sight is the Pachisi Court. Pachisi, as you may know, is an Indian game similar to chess. The pavement is laid out in coloured squares. The Emperor's throne was placed on a stone platform in the



A GAME OF PACHISI

centre. Young girls played the part of chessmen, and moved from square to square at the command of the Emperor and his opponent. With what interest must the onlookers have watched those contests of skill with human pieces!

A curious structure in Fatehpur Sikri is the Panch Mahal, a building consisting of five storeys. Each floor of the building is smaller than the one beneath it. The top floor is quite small. Some people think it was built by the Chinese workmen who were employed by Akbar.



PANCH MAHAL

7

Akbar had many clever friends and advisers. To Fatehpur Sikri came Tansen, the great musician with a lovely voice; Fyzee, who wrote beautiful poems; Abul Fazl, the historian, who was Akbar's dearest friend; and Birbal, a favourite minister, whose wit helped the Emperor to while away many a weary hour. Birbal's house still stands. It has many wonderful carvings.

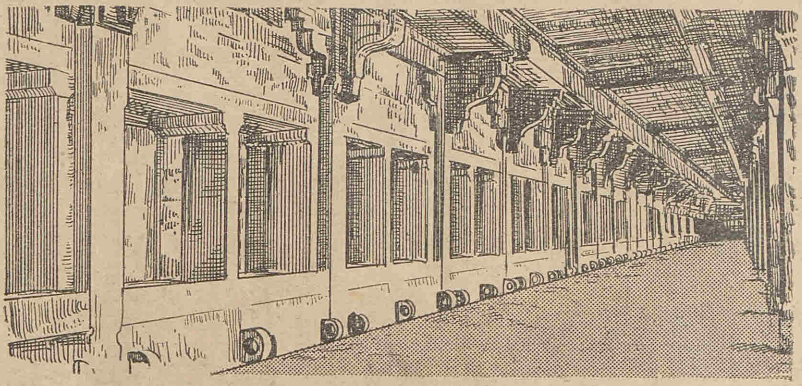


ABUL FAZL

An amusing story is told about

Birbal. One day he made a list of fools, and placed Akbar's name at its head. When Akbar saw the list he asked which Akbar it was whose name headed the list. "It is you, your Majesty," replied Birbal. On hearing this, Akbar grew very angry and wanted to know why Birbal had done such a thing. "O Emperor," said Birbal, "your Majesty advanced a great deal of money the other day to a certain horse-dealer, but he will never bring you any horses!" "Well, Birbal," said the Emperor, "if he *does* bring the horses, what will you do then?" "I will put *his* name at the head of the list in place of your Majesty's," replied Birbal.

We can wander about Fatehpur Sikri for hours and find something fresh at every turn. The stables are very large and could shelter hundreds of horses and camels. We can see



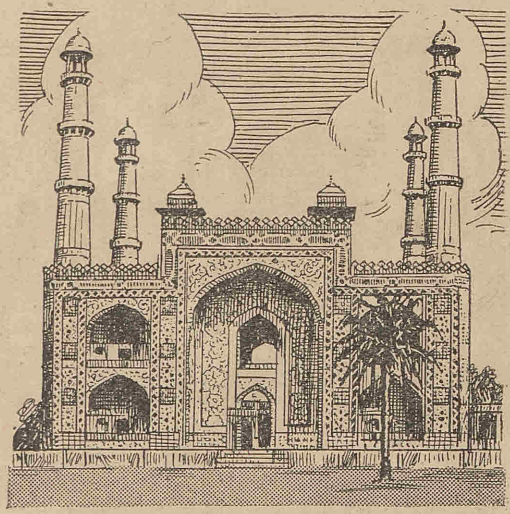
THE STABLES, FATEHPUR SIKRI

the stone rings to which the horses used to be tied.

Owing to the scarcity of water, Akbar abandoned the city twenty years after it had been built.

8

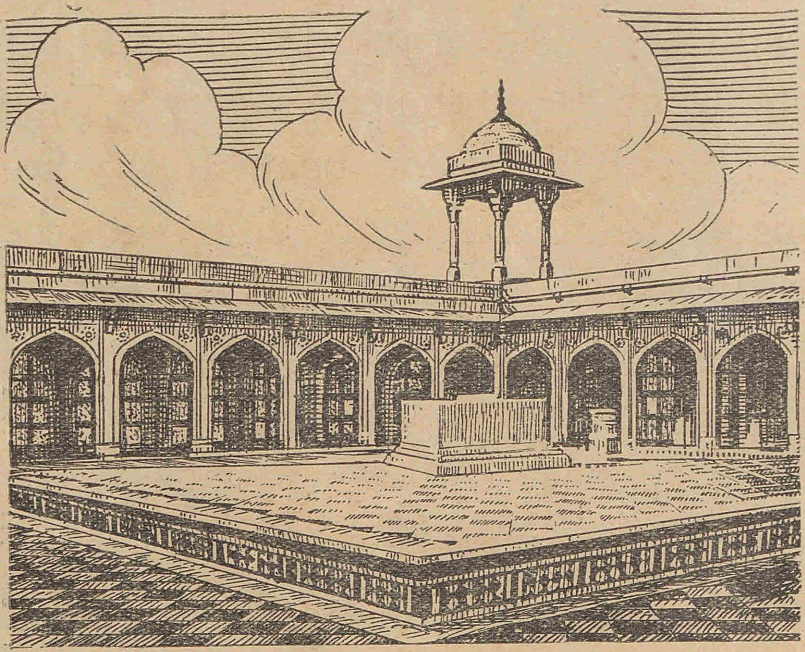
Akbar was one of the wisest kings of his time. He understood religions other than his own. He was a great philosopher and thinker, although it has been said that he could not sign his own name. He reigned for forty-nine years.



ENTRANCE TO AKBAR'S TOMB, SIKANDRA

At Sikandra, about five miles along the road to Muttra, stands

Akbar's tomb. It is surrounded by a large garden. The entrance to the garden is through a very fine gateway built of red sandstone, inlaid with white marble in various patterns. On the top of the gateway, at each



AKBAR'S TOMB

corner, is a white minaret. The tomb itself is 74 feet high, and consists of four storeys. It is said to have cost fifteen lakhs of rupees. It is indeed a fitting resting-place for the mortal remains of the great Akbar. The actual grave of Akbar is in a dark vault below the ground. A copy of the tomb is in the top storey of the building. It is of beautiful white marble, and on it are engraved the ninety-nine names of God.

9

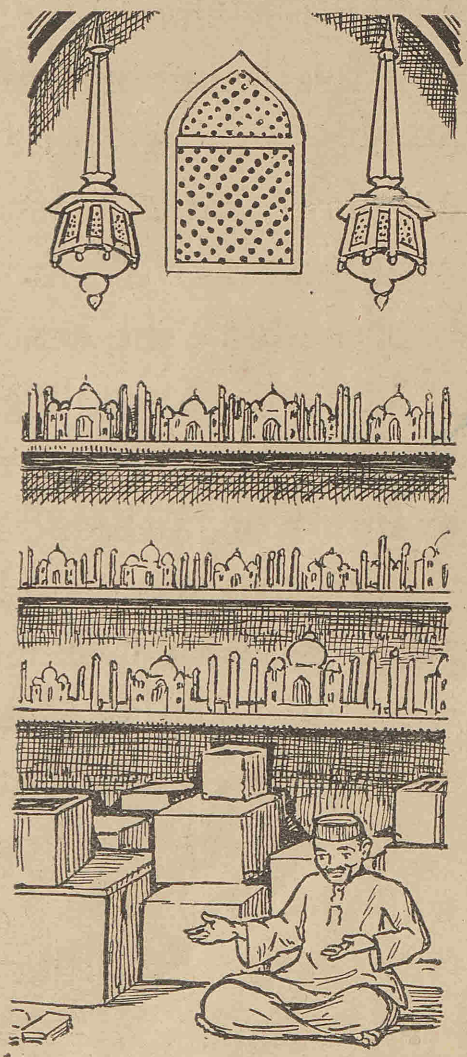
At Dayalbagh, about two miles from Agra, is a prosperous Colony of the members of the Radhasoami

Faith, founded in 1915 by the late Sahabji Maharaj Sir Anand Swarup. This self-supporting Colony has its own electric and water supply, municipality, bank, factories, hospitals, college and girls' school. Its dairy has been called "the best dairy in Asia." If you visit Dayalbagh, you are sure to be inspired by this very bright example of faith and industry.

On the west side of the city of Agra is Agra College. The College was opened in 1823, and forms a part of the Agra University.

The tomb of I'timad-ud-daula is well worth a visit. It was built by Nur Jahan for her father, Mirza Ghiyas Beg. He was known by the

name of I'timad-ud-daula, and was treasurer to the Emperor Jahangir. The walls of the tomb are of white marble, inlaid with very beautiful designs.

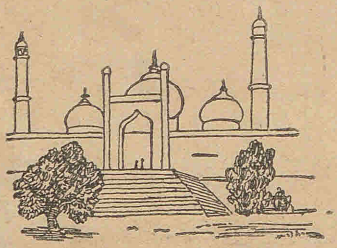


10

Agra is famous for its carpets, gold and silver embroidery, shoes, carved

marble and soapstone. There is also a large business done in sugar, tobacco, cotton, hides and stone. Beautiful models of the Taj Mahal find their way from Agra to all parts of the world.

When we leave Agra we may or may not have a model of the Taj in our luggage, but Agra and its Taj will certainly be deeply impressed on our minds. In days to come it will give us great pleasure to be able to tell our friends that we have seen the Taj.



KUMARUL ISLAM HIGH SCHOOL
Date
KUMARULAH

EXERCISES

1. Where is Agra ?
2. For what is it famous ?
3. Write an account of the Taj Mahal.
4. Who built Fatehpur Sikri ?
5. Give a description of the city.
6. Tell in your own words the story about Akbar and Birbal.
7. Give the names of the Moghul Emperors mentioned in this book.
8. Draw a picture of the Taj Mahal.

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