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James Fergusson Edited by James Burgess and Richard Phené Spiers

Excerpt

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HISTORY
OF
INDIAN ARCHITECTURE.

VOL. I.

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HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION.

IT is in vain, perhaps, to expect that the literature or the Arts of any other people can be so interesting to even the best educated Europeans as those of their own country. Until it is forced on their attention, few are aware how much education does to concentrate attention within a very narrow field of observation. We become familiar in the nursery with the names of the heroes of Greek and Roman history. In every school their history and their arts are taught, memorials of their greatness meet us at every turn through life, and their thoughts and aspirations become, as it were, part of ourselves. So, too, with the Middle Ages: their religion is our religion; their architecture our architecture; and their history fades so insensibly into our own, that we can draw no line of demarcation that would separate us from them. How different is the state of feeling, when from this familiar home we turn to such a country as India! Its geography is hardly taught in schools, and seldom mastered perfectly; its history is a puzzle;¹ its literature a mythic dream; its arts a quaint perplexity. But, above all, the names of its heroes and great men are so unfamiliar that, except a few of those who go to India, scarcely any ever become so acquainted with them, that they call up any memories which are either pleasing or worth dwelling upon.

Were it not for this, there is probably no country—out of Europe at least—that would so well repay attention as India: none, where all the problems of natural science or of art are presented to us in so distinct and so pleasing a form. Nowhere does nature show herself in such grand and such luxurious

¹ The last thirty years have added greatly to the number and quality of the text-books on Indian history, and

the general reader has no longer a valid excuse for ignorance of it.

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features, and nowhere does humanity exist in more varied and more pleasing conditions. Side by side with the intellectual Brâhman caste, and the chivalrous Râjput, are found the wild Bhîl and the naked Gond, not antagonistic and warring one against the other, as elsewhere, but living now as they have done for thousands of years, each content with his own lot, and prepared to follow, without repining, in the footsteps of his forefathers.

It cannot, of course, be for one moment contended that India ever reached the intellectual supremacy of Greece, or the moral greatness of Rome; but, though on a lower step of the ladder, her arts are more original and more varied, and her forms of civilisation present an ever-changing variety, such as are nowhere else to be found. What, however, really renders India so interesting as an object of study is that it is now a living entity. Greece and Rome are dead and have passed away, and we are living so completely in the midst of modern Europe, that we cannot get outside to contemplate it as a whole. But India is a complete cosmos in itself; bounded on the north by the Himâlayas, on the south by the sea, on the east by jungles inhabited by rude tribes, and only on the west having one door of communication, across the Indus, open to the outer world. Across that stream, nation after nation have poured their myriads into her coveted domain, but no reflex waves ever mixed her people with those beyond her boundaries.

In consequence of all this, every problem of anthropology or ethnography can be studied here more easily than anywhere else; every art has its living representative, and often of the most pleasing form; every science has its illustration, and many on a scale not easily matched elsewhere. But, notwithstanding all this, in nine cases out of ten, India and Indian matters fail to interest, because they are to most people new and unfamiliar. The rudiments have not been mastered when young, and, when grown up, few men have the leisure or the inclination to set to work to learn the forms of a new world, demanding both care and study; and till this is attained, it can hardly be hoped that the arts and the architecture of India will interest many European readers to the same extent as those styles treated of in the volumes on ancient and mediæval architecture.¹

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, it may still be possible to present the subject of Indian architecture in such a form as to be interesting, even if not attractive. To do this, however,

¹ 'History of Architecture in all Countries from the Earliest Times.' By vols. i. and ii., 3rd ed. (1893). Edited by R. Phené Spiers, F.S.A. the late Jas. Fergusson, C.I.E., D.C.L.,

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the narrative form must be followed as far as is compatible with such a subject. All technical and unfamiliar names must be avoided wherever it is possible to do so, and the whole accompanied with a sufficient number of illustrations to enable its forms to be mastered without difficulty. Even if this is attended to, no one volume can tell the whole of so varied and so complex a history. Without preliminary or subsequent study it can hardly be expected that so new and so vast a subject can be grasped; but one volume may contain a complete outline of the whole, and enable any one who wishes for more information to know where to look for it, or how to appreciate it when found.

Whether successful or not, it seems well worth while that an attempt should be made to interest the public in Indian architectural art; first, because the artist and architect will certainly acquire broader and more varied views of their art by its study than they can acquire from any other source. More than this, any one who masters the subject sufficiently to be able to understand their art in its best and highest forms, will rise from the study with a kindlier feeling towards the nations of India, and a higher — certainly a corrector — appreciation of their social status than could be obtained from their literature, or from anything that now exists in their anomalous social and political position.

Notwithstanding all this, many may be inclined to ask, Is it worth while to master all the geographical and historical details necessary to unravel so tangled a web as this, and then try to become so familiar with their ever-varying forms as not only to be able to discriminate between the different styles, but also to follow them through all their ceaseless changes?

My impression is that this question may fairly be answered in the affirmative. No one has a right to say that he understands the history of architecture who leaves out of his view the works of an immense portion of the human race, which has always shown itself so capable of artistic development. But, more than this, architecture in India is still a living art, practised on the principles which caused its wonderful development in Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries; and there, consequently, and there alone, the student of architecture has a chance of seeing the real principles of the art in action. In Europe, at the present day, architecture is practised in a manner so anomalous and abnormal that few, if any, have hitherto been able to shake off the influence of a false system, and to see that the art of ornamental building can be based on principles of common sense; and that, when so practised, the result not only is, but must be, satisfactory. Those who

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have an opportunity of seeing what perfect buildings the uneducated natives of India produce, will easily understand how success may be achieved, while those who observe what failures the best educated and most talented architects in Europe frequently perpetrate, may, by a study of Indian models, easily see why this must inevitably be the result. It is only in India that the two systems can be seen practised side by side—the educated and intellectual European failing because his principles are wrong, the feeble and uneducated native as inevitably succeeding because his principles are right. The Indian builders *think* only of what they are doing, and how they can best produce the effect they desire. In the European system it is considered more essential that a building, especially in its details, should be a correct *copy* of something else, than good in itself or appropriate to its purpose: hence the difference in the result.

In one other respect India affords a singularly favourable field to the student of architecture. In no other country of the same extent are there so many distinct nationalities, each retaining its old belief and its old feelings, and impressing these on its art. There is consequently no country where the outlines of ethnology as applied to art can be so easily perceived, or their application to the elucidation of the various problems so pre-eminently important. The mode in which the art has been practised in Europe for the last three centuries has been very confusing. In India it is clear and intelligible. No one can look at the subject without seeing its importance, and no one can study the art as practised there without recognising what the principles of the science really are.

In addition, however, to these scientific advantages, it will undoubtedly be conceded by those who are familiar with the subject that for certain qualities the Indian buildings are unrivalled. They display an exuberance of fancy, a lavishness of labour, and an elaboration of detail to be found nowhere else. They may contain nothing so sublime as the hall at Karnak, nothing so intellectual as the Parthenon, nor so constructively grand as a mediæval cathedral; but for certain other qualities—not perhaps of the highest kind, yet very important in architectural art—the Indian buildings stand alone. They consequently fill up a great gap in our knowledge of the subject, which without them would remain a void.

HISTORY.

One of the greatest difficulties that exist—perhaps the greatest—in exciting an interest in Indian antiquities arises

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from the fact, that India has no history properly so called, before the Muhammadan invasion in the 13th century. Had India been a great united kingdom, like China, with a long line of dynasties and well-recorded dates attached to them, the task would have been comparatively easy; but nothing of the sort ever existed within her boundaries. On the contrary, so far as our knowledge extends, India has always been occupied by three or four different races of mankind, who have never amalgamated so as to become one people, and each of these races has been again subdivided into numerous tribes or small nationalities nearly, sometimes wholly, independent of each other—and, what is worse than all, not one of them ever kept a chronicle or preserved a series of dates commencing from any well-known era.¹

The absence of any historical record is the more striking, because India possesses a written literature equal to, if not surpassing in variety and extent, that possessed by any other nation, before the adoption and use of printing. The Vedas themselves, with their Upanishads and Brâhmanas, and the commentaries on them, form a literature in themselves of vast extent, and some parts of which are as old, possibly older, than any written works that are now known to exist; and the Purânas, though comparatively modern, make up a body of doctrine mixed with mythology and tradition such as few nations can boast of. Besides this, however, are the two great epics, surpassing in extent, if not in merit, those of any ancient nation, and a drama of great beauty, written at periods extending through a long series of years. In addition to these we have treatises on law, on grammar, on astronomy, on metaphysics and mathematics, on almost every branch of mental science—a literature extending in fact to many thousand works, but in all this not one book that can be called historical. No man in ancient India, so far as is known, ever thought of recording the events of his own life, or of repeating the previous experience of others, and it was not till shortly before the Christian Era that they thought of establishing eras from which to date deeds or events.

All this is the more curious because in Ceylon we have, in the 'Dîpawansa,' 'Mahâwansa,' and other books of a like nature,

¹ The following brief résumé of the principal events in the ancient history of India has no pretensions to being a complete or exhaustive view of the subject. It is intended only as such a popular sketch as shall enable the general reader to grasp the main features of the story to such an extent as may enable him to understand what follows. In

order to make it readable, all references and all proofs of disputed facts have been here avoided. They will be found in the body of the work, where they are more appropriate. But without some such introductory notice of the political history and ethnography, the artistic history would be nearly, if not wholly unintelligible.

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a consecutive history of that island, with dates which, with certain corrections, may be depended upon within certain limits of error, for periods extending from about B.C. 250 to the present time. At the other extremity of India, we have also in the 'Rājataranginī' of Kashmīr, a work of the 12th century, which Professor Wilson characterised as "the only Sanskrit composition yet discovered to which the title of History can with any propriety be applied."¹ It hardly helps us, however, to any ancient historical data, its early chronology being only traditional and confused; but from the beginning of the 9th Christian century, its materials are of great value.²

In India Proper, however, we have no such guides as even these, but for written history are almost wholly dependent on the Purānas. They furnish us with a list of kings' names, with the length of their reigns, so apparently truthful that they may, within certain limits, be of use. They are only, however, of one range of dynasties—probably also sometimes contemporary—and extend only from the accession of Chandragupta—the Sandrokottos of the Greeks—about B.C. 320, to the decline of the Andhra dynasty, about the beginning of the 3rd century A.D. It seems possible we may yet find sufficient confirmation of these lists as far back as the 6th century B.C., so as to include the period marked by the life and labours of Sākyamuni—the last Buddha—in our chronology, with tolerable certainty. All chronology before that period is as yet merely conjectural. From the period of the Gupta dynasty in the 4th century onwards, when the Purānas began to be put into their present form, in consequence of the revival of the Brahmanical religion, instead of recording contemporary events, they purposely confused them so as to maintain their pretended prophetic character, and prevent the detection of the falsehood of their claim to an antiquity equal to that of the Vedas.

For Indian history after the 5th century we are consequently left mainly to inscriptions on monuments or on copper-plates, to coins, and to the works of foreigners for the necessary information with which the natives of the country itself have neglected to supply us. Inscriptions fortunately are more abundant in India than, perhaps, in any other country, and nearly all of them contain historical information; and, thanks to the great advances made in epigraphy during the last thirty-five years, we are now able to piece together a tolerably accurate historical

¹ 'Asiatic Researches,' vol. xv. p. 1.

² Kalhana's 'Rājataranginī' has been very carefully translated and edited with

a valuable commentary and notes by Dr. A. M. Stein, 2 vols. (London, 1900).

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outline of the course of events from the 3rd century B.C.¹ This is more especially the case for the Dekhan and the north of India ; in the Tamil country so much has not yet been done, but this is more because there have been fewer labourers in the field than from want of materials. There are literally thousands of inscriptions in the south which have not been copied, and of those that have been collected only a portion have yet been translated ; but they are such as to give us assurance that, when the requisite amount of labour is bestowed upon them, we shall be able to fix the chronology of the kings of the south with a degree of certainty sufficient for all ordinary purposes.²

It is a far more difficult task to ascertain whether we shall ever recover the History of India before the time of the advent of Buddha. Here we certainly will find no coins or inscriptions to guide us, and no buildings to illustrate the arts, or to mark the position of cities, while all ethnographic traces have become so blurred, if not obliterated, that they serve us little as guides through the labyrinth. Yet on the other hand there is so much literature—such as it is—bearing on the subject, that we cannot but hope that, when a sufficient amount of learning is brought to bear upon it, the leading features of the history of even that period may be recovered. In order, however, to render it available, it will not require industry so much as a severe spirit of criticism to winnow the few grains of useful truth out of the mass of worthless chaff this literature contains. But it does not seem too much to expect even this, from the severely critical spirit of the age. Meanwhile, the main facts of the case seem to be nearly as follows, in so far as it is necessary to state them, in order to make what follows intelligible.

ARYANS.

At some very remote period in the world's history the *Āryas* or *Aryans*³—a people speaking an early form of Sanskrit—

¹ The chronological results have been systematically arranged in that useful handbook.—Duff's *Chronology of India* (London, 1899).

² Almost the only person who had done anything in this direction till forty years ago was the late Sir Walter Elliot. Since 1872 the labours of Drs. Fleet, Bühler, Kielhorn, R. G. Bhandarkar and others have thrown a flood of light on the history of southern as well as northern India ; and within the last twenty years Dr. Hultzsch's work among the Tamil inscriptions of Madras has yielded very

important chronological and historical information for the south of the peninsula. The Mysore Government has also issued the great '*Epigraphia Carnatica*,' under the direction of Mr. Lewis Rice.

³ We have the word in the '*Aria*' and '*Ariana*' of the Greek writers, applied to the country lying to the north-east of Persia adjoining Baktriana. The early Zoroastrians called their country '*Airy-ana-vaejō*'—the *Aryā* home, and in the Behistun inscriptions it is styled '*Ariya*.' See Lassen, '*Indische Alterthumskunde*,' Bd. i. Ss. 5ff.

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entered India across the Upper Indus, coming from Central Asia. They were a fair complexioned people as compared with the Aborigines, and for a long time they remained settled in the Panjâb, or on the banks of the Sarasvatî, then a more important stream than now, the main body, however, still remaining to the westward of the Indus. If, however, we may trust our chronology, we find them settled 1500 to 2000 years before the Christian Era, in Ayodhyâ and then in the plenitude of their power. Naturally we look for some light on their early history in the two great Indian epics—the Râmâyana recording the exploits of Râma, King of Ayodhyâ, of the Solar race, and in much later times regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu; and the Mahâbhârata celebrating the contest between the Kurus and Pândus, of the Lunar family. Both are steeped in Brâhman doctrines, almost certainly inserted in later ages among the original legends. It thus becomes very difficult to separate what belongs to the original spirit and aim of the works from the interpolated materials. The Râmâyana is so largely allegorical and cast in the form it has reached us so long after the period to which it refers that it is doubtful whether we can draw any inference with safety from its contents, except that it relates to the spread of Aryan civilisation—which had probably then occupied most of the country north of the Vindhyan range—into southern India, and as far as Ceylon.¹ From a very early period the Aryans had, doubtless, become mixed with aboriginal races, and could not be regarded as pure at this period. But whether they formed settlements in the Dekhan or not, it was opened up to them, and by slow degrees imbibed that amount of Brahmanism which eventually pervaded the south. By B.C. 700, or thereabouts, they had begun to be tolerably well acquainted with the whole of the peninsula.

The events that form the theme of the western epic—the Mahâbhârata—may have occurred almost as early as, or even several centuries later than the times of Râma. It opens up an entirely new view of Indian social life. If the heroes of that poem were Aryans at all, they were of a much less pure type than those who composed the songs of the Vedas, or are depicted in the verses of the Râmâyana. Their polyandry, their drinking bouts, their gambling tastes, and love of fighting, mark them as a very different race from the peaceful shepherd immigrants of the earlier age, and point much more distinctly towards a Tartar, trans-Himâlayan origin, than to the cradle of

¹ For some account of the probable spread of the Aryas southwards, see of the Dekhan,' in *Bombay Gazetteer* (1895), vol. i. pt. ii. pp. 132ff.
Dr. R. G. Bhândârkar's 'Early History