

THE TOMB OF ITMAD-UD-DAULAH AT AGRA.

It seems now to be ascertained that in the early part of the 17th century Italian artists, principally, apparently from Florence, were introduced into India, and taught the Indians the art of inlaying marble with precious stones. No instance of this mode of decoration occurs, so far as I know, in the reign of Akbar; but in that of Shâh Jahân it became the leading characteristic of the style, and both his palaces and his tombs owe their principal distinction to the beauty of the mode in which this new invention was employed.

It has been doubted whether this new art was really a foreign introduction, or whether it had not been invented by the natives of India themselves. The question never, probably, would have arisen had one of the fundamental principles of architecture been better understood. When we, for instance, having no art of our own, copy a Grecian or Roman pillar, or an Italian mediæval arch in detail, we do so literally, without any attempt to adapt it to our uses or climate; but when a people having a style of their own wish to adopt any feature or process belonging to any other style, they do not copy but adapt it to their uses; and it is this distinction between adopting and adapting that makes all the difference. We would have allowed the Italians to introduce with their mosaics all the details of their Cinque-cento architecture. The Indians set them to reproduce, with their new material and processes, the patterns which the architects of Akbar had been in the habit of carving in stone or of inlaying in marble. Every form was adapted to the place where it was to be used. The style remained the same, so did all the details; the materials only were changed, and the patterns only so far as was necessary to adapt them to the smaller and more refined materials that were to be used.

As one of the first, the tomb of Itmad-ud-daulah was certainly one of the least successful specimens of its class. The patterns do not quite fit the places where they are put, and the spaces are not always those best suited for this style of decoration. Altogether I cannot help fancying that the Italians had more to do with the design of this building than was at all desirable, and they are to blame for its want of grace. But, on the other hand, the beautiful tracery of the pierced marble slabs of its windows, which resemble those of Salim Chishti's tomb at Fathpur Sîkrî, the beauty of its white marble walls, and the rich colour of its decorations, make up so beautiful a whole, that it is only on comparing it with the works of Shâh Jahân that we are justified in finding fault.

