

LOOKING BACK OVER THE CENTURY.

BEGINNINGS IN WESTERN INDIA.

BY HELEN F. TURNER.



FEW years ago the very mention of the port of Bombay suggested all that is prosperous and stirring and lively, as one pictured the crowded harbor with its giant steamers, the perpetual arrival and departure of travellers, the lading and unlading of cargo, the busy trafficking of its merchants in this, the most enterprising city in India. Alas for the grim shadows of plague and of famine that have now overcast the whole presidency as well as the city of Bombay!

The Island on which the city stands became British ground more than 200 years ago. The Portuguese had discovered it in 1509, and gave it as a part of her dowry to their princess who married King Charles II. He soon granted it to the East India Company. The Mahratta rulers, Hindus, were then rising into power and overmastering the Moslems of Western India, and it was after long struggles with them that the British established their rule over what is now the Bombay Presidency. It is inhabited by people of many religions—Hindus in greatest numbers, next Mohammedans, but with most influence and wealth the Parsis, descendants of the fire worshippers of Persia, who were long ago driven from their land by persecution, and still practice the religion of their forefathers.

The political history, then, of Bombay goes far back, but the history of the missionary effort dates only from the beginning of the century, and the first C.M.S. missionary did not reach Bombay till 1820. The Rev. R. Kenny, a curate from Cheshire, went out in that year, and labored earnestly for six years; but the work was for a long time on a very small scale. A station was opened in the city of Nasik, held sacred by the Hindus, in 1832. In 1840 the Robert Money School was opened, for giving a good education to native youths. Thousands there received Christian training who have been scattered throughout the land, and pastors and teachers now ministering in Bombay are among the number. One famous man was a pupil at this school. He was a Parsi, but he became a leading Christian pastor—the Rev. Sorabji Kharsedji. In forty years only 500 converts had been gathered out from the stations of Bombay and of Nasik, Junir, Malegam, and Aurungabad, all towns within 100 miles of Bombay. Poona was occupied in 1882.

In the last forty years the Christians of the C.M.S., including Parsis, Hindus, and Mohammedans, have increased to 3,000. The experience of a missionary lately itinerating

outside Nasik suggests the sad thought how many more there might now be, if the laborers had not always been so few. He found a Hindu who said he and fifteen others were being instructed for baptism by a missionary, when he was called away from their village, and no one else had ever come to them. Most were dead, and the rest had grown indifferent. Can we wonder they thought the Message could not be very important, if the messengers were so slow to carry it?

Outside Nasik is a small but bright spot. It is the tiny village of Sharanpur. This village covers about forty acres, and 150 acres around are cultivated by the Christians who are its only inhabitants. In the midst of their homes stand church, school and orphanage, where many deserted famine orphans are sheltered and taught. Village store and workshops have been set up, and the Christians can support their families without mixing with the heathen. It is good to hear of one little spot in the great heathen district where idolatry is banished and whence prayer and praise ascend to the Lord of Love.

Near by is a refuge for lepers, where twice a week a very simple Gospel service is held, which they very gladly attend.

One opportunity for spreading the Good News is found in the great heathen festivals to which crowds of pilgrims make their way. One was lately held, called the Sinhvast, which occurs once in twelve years. All the sacred waters, they say, lie hidden in the Godavery River at this time, and one bath then equals the merit of 60,000 baths in the Ganges. Four men were led by the preaching to inquire about the way of Salvation and have been baptized.

If space fails to tell of work attempted by the few laborers in these six stations, what can we say of the work yet to be done?

But there are words of cheer about the field in Bombay. The Christians of the mission have been so patient, so brave, so trustful in the dark days of plague and famine that their light has shone brightly. "I have watched them closely," said a stranger lately, "distressed by want, harassed by the heathen, they have kept firm." They are showing, too, a greater wish than ever before to tell out to their fellow-countrymen that the Lord is King. And so we are praying and trusting that out of the darkness of Bombay's sorrows a brighter day may dawn.

AN interesting recruit to the missionary army, though at present not regularly enrolled, is the Hon. Montague Waldegrave, a younger son of Lord Radstock. He is proceeding to Peshawar, to work as a lay evangelist in connection with Dr. Arthur Lankester's new medical mission there.