

THE MARATHIS.

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ONE of the most interesting peoples of heterogeneous India are the Marathis.

A low-caste Hindu tribe, originally quiet farmers of the mountainous part of the Deccan, southeast of Bombay. By the sixteenth century they were with difficulty kept within bounds by the two kings of the Deccan, and in the seventeenth century, during the reign of the Mohammedan, Shah Jehan, they rose in power under the brilliant leadership of Sevajee.

He was the son of a shrewd village chief, well trained in athletic achievements, but scorning learning and hating all things Moslem—like his people. He led roving bands of horsemen to plunder rich villages, taking food to supplement their own scanty harvests and treasure to store in their mountain fortresses. By the end of his life, in 1680, the Marathi Empire was well organized. It continued to be a power for about a century, causing the downfall of the Moguls and presenting an obstacle to the British in their desire for supremacy.

The heirs of Sevajee ruled after him, but soon their authority weakened and passed to the Brahmin Prime Minister, or Peishwa, a functionary created by Sevajee, who, in time, was looked up to as the head of the confederacy of ruling Marathi princes. The greatest of these Peishwas was Bajee Rao, prominent in the first half of the eighteenth century. He raised to office talented men, no matter what their origin, one even a slipper carrier. These men became the heads of the modern Marathi families, Holkar and Scindia being the best known.

The Marathis—not those who continued as kindly and moral tillers of the soil, but those who went to war, are described as brave, bold, daring and cruel, yet attacking only armed foes and, for their credit let it be said, following their founder's rule, that a "cow, a woman and a husbandman must never be molested."

Their early method of guerilla warfare, when they carried but one day's forage on the saddle and slept on the ground, with increasing wealth and followers gave way to luxurious camp appointments, trains of elephants and superbly caparisoned horses, and finally French commanders were hired to drill them.

Always acting for their own interests, they made alliances with any of their neighbors, British, Mogul or Seik, whose co-operation would help them expand their territory or add to

their wealth. The next expedition might see them fighting against these quondam friends. At the time of their greatest power, about 1750, they held sway from the Himalayas to the southern extremity of the peninsula. Kingdoms obtained exemption from being plundered by them by paying the "chout," which was one-fourth of the revenue.

In 1761 the Marathis joined the Mogul against the invading Afghans, and were most severely, even fatally, defeated, at the battle of Parrisput. Never again did they rise to their former strength. Internal dissensions among the ruling princes increased.

The British defeated them, in 1803, in the brilliant battle of Assaye, and by 1819 held all in allegiance. The last vestige of insurrection disappeared into the jungles in 1858 with Nana Sahib, adopted heir of Peishwa, when he fled thither after shocking the world by his cruelty at Cawnpore during the Sepoy Rebellion.

Synchronous with the waning of the Marathi political power is the rise of missionary work among them. First—William Carey, that consecrated missionary, translated a Marathi grammar in 1805, and a dictionary in 1810, and also translated the Bible into their language—a language described by Rev. Robert Hume as "one of the most cultivated in India." This opened the way for Baptist Missions and other English and Scotch societies—such as the Church Missionary Society of England, the Free Church of Scotland, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

In 1812 the first missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, Gordon Hall and Samuel Nott, and soon Samuel Newell, settled in this field and labored years without a convert. The people were mostly the Hindu Marathis, though there are some Parsees and Mohammedans. Henry Martyn's words apply to this lack of result. "If ever I see a Hindu a real believer in Jesus, I shall see something more nearly approaching the resurrection of a dead body than anything I have yet seen."

After forty-four years, two hundred and eighty-five conversions are reported, but in the next six years the number doubled. Now, in what is called the Marathi Mission, there are eight central stations in the larger towns, one hundred and forty-two out-stations, forty-six missionaries, five hundred and eighty-three native workers, fifty-eight churches, over fourteen thousand Christians and over nine thousand under Chris-