

CHAPTER IX.

PLASSEY; AND HOW AN EMPIRE WAS WON.

1. INDIA, the great peninsula stretching from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, is nearly half as large as Europe, and contains a population of 150,000,000. Myth and tradition claim for this people a very great antiquity, and there are many evidences that in arts, government, and literature, India is at least coeval with China and Egypt, the three constituting the most ancient civilizations of the world. While Western Europe was still the abode of barbarians, and while even Greece had scarcely felt the impulse which aroused her to intellectual life, the fabrics of India had reached a marvelous degree of fineness and beauty; and the monarchs of the West counted it a great privilege to be clothed in the "purple and fine linen" of the Orient.

EARLY HISTORY.

2. The early history of India seems a confused tangle of strifes and contentions between different nations and races for the possession of this region, inexpressibly rich in all that makes a land desirable for the occupation of man, and of wars between local rulers striving for dominion. In the midst of this confusion, however, there seems to be good evidence that the early civilization made its

first appearance in the valleys of the Upper Indus; that all invasions, until recent times, were from the fierce tribes of the table-lands to the northwest; that the industrious people of the valleys were driven from their homes by successive incursions of barbarians, extending through many centuries; that each horde, becoming partially civilized, was in turn driven forward; and that the migrations were continuous from the north to the south. Thus it happens that at present the population of India consists of at least thirty distinct nationalities, and that the aboriginal possessors of the Vale of Cashmere have been driven forward, until now they are found only upon the summits of the Neilgherry Mountains, in the extreme southern part of the peninsula.

THE MOGUL EMPIRE.

3. The Brahminical religion has prevailed in India from the earliest period. The first literary productions of the people are the Vedas, the sacred books of the Brahmins. This religion is tolerant and inclusive. Its pantheon recognizes so many gods that each barbarous tribe from the North found their own deity represented, so that their crude religious notions readily merged in the more complicated system of the people they had conquered. The great Buddhistic reform spent its force, and, although triumphant in other lands, it left but little impress in India where it originated. The whole people believed the Brahminical creed and practiced the Brahminical precepts. It was a religion that included the purest abstractions and the grossest form of idolatry. While absorbing all other creeds, it never sought to make converts to its own.

4. The later incursions from the northwest were es-

entially different from their predecessors. The tribes of the table-lands had been converted to the fanatical and proselyting faith of Mohammed. About the middle of the sixteenth century, a Mongol tribe, strong and stalwart from late successful wars, and full of the fierce zeal of recent converts to Moslemism, appeared at the northern gate of India, and in a short time overspread the country and established the Mogul Empire, with its capital at Delhi. The stern conquerors never rested until they had firmly established their authority over the whole country.

5. The first great Sultan, Baber, had a genius for government. He was firm and temperate in his administration, and he protected the common people from the worst rapacity of their former rulers. Out of the chaos of native rule he evoked something like civilized order, and he established the Mogul Empire upon the foundation of a higher form of justice than had ever before been practiced in the East. After a reign of fifty years, this great monarch died in 1605, two years before the adventurous John Smith set foot upon the territory of Virginia.

6. For another hundred years, the Mogul Emperors, descendants of Baber, held firm possession of India, and in that time the country reached the height of its power in wealth and influence. Temples and palaces, in richness and beauty surpassing the most gorgeous dreams of western-bred people, arose on every side. Arts flourished as never before, and the commerce of India overland to the West was so great that large cities sprung up along its track, solely supported by the trading caravans. The gold from all the nations toward the setting sun was drained to pay for Indian fabrics, and India became the richest country of the world.

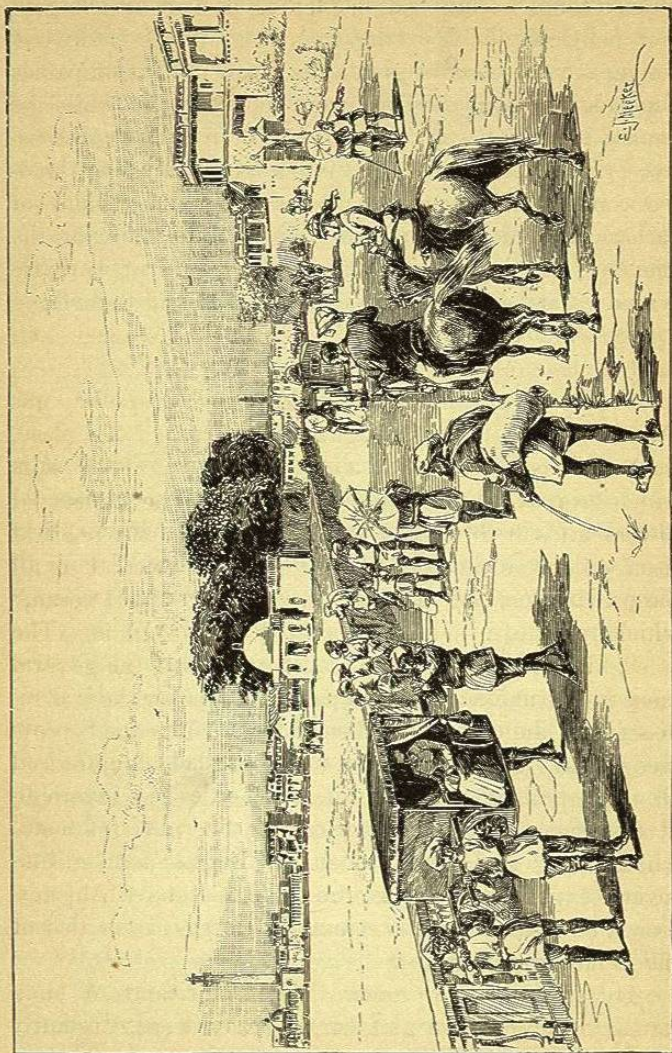
7. In the beginning of the eighteenth century the

Mogul Empire began to decline. Weak and effeminate monarchs occupied the throne of Baber and Shah Jehan. The governors of great provinces, while ruling under the name of the Mogul, became really independent, and in turn sub-provinces revolted and set up an independent rule. From 1700 to 1750, the whole country was ablaze with civil war. Rapacious chieftains plundered the people, the arts declined, industry of all kinds languished, and the country upon which Nature had lavished her richest blessings seemed to be surrendered hopelessly to oppression and misrule.

EUROPEAN SETTLEMENTS IN INDIA.

8. During the last century of the Mogul rule, and the following half century of anarchy, a new element entered into the affairs of India, which was destined to effect great and revolutionary changes. Following the wake of Vasco da Gama, the maritime powers of Western Europe all entered into a trade with India by the way of the Cape of Good Hope. The long caravan route through Central Asia was abandoned, and ships of the sea took the place of ships of the desert. Lisbon, Amsterdam, and London absorbed the trade which had made Bagdad, Aleppo, and Bassorah opulent, and these renowned cities of Haroun al-Rashid speedily declined in wealth, power, and influence. The Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English entered into eager competition to secure the trade of India by the new route, and, to facilitate commercial operations, stations called factories were established along the coast. By the consent of the native princes, these factories and a small territory adjacent were under the exclusive civil control of the people occupying them.

9. For a hundred and fifty years these factories re-



Street Scene in Calcutta.

mained mere trading stations, taking no part in the general political affairs of the country. While trade was active, and the profits great, the East India Companies who controlled the factories were content; and, while the annual tribute or rent was paid with regularity, the native princes had a strong motive for protecting the trading companies in their operations. But the display of barbaric splendor excited the cupidity of many of the agents of the companies, and the atrocities of barbaric tyranny aroused the indignation of others, and there came a time when interference in native affairs seemed both natural and proper.

10. The time of the new departure in policy was about the middle of the eighteenth century; the place, the southeast coast; and the occasion, the civil wars which grew out of disputed succession. The student of history finds it difficult to understand fully the political situation at the time. One of the most powerful of all the provinces of the Mogul Empire was "The Deccan," which extended its sway over all of Southern India. The ruler, known as the "Nizam," administered the government in the name of the Mogul, but in reality he was independent, and a true Eastern despot. The chief province of the Deccan was "The Carnatic," which embraced all the territory along the eastern coast. The sovereign of this region, called the "Nabob," while paying a nominal tribute to the Nizam, was really independent, raising revenue, waging wars, and forming alliances without reference to either the government of the Deccan or that of the Mogul Empire.

11. To add to the general confusion, bands of Mah-rattas, in numbers forming large armies, were constantly roaming through the country, and levying contributions on both the governments and the people. This peculiar

race was at first a mere band of robbers, which descended from the western mountains of India, but by repeated conquests, and by accessions from the wild and turbulent classes of all parts of the country, they had become a great power, and ruled in many fertile provinces. "In becoming sovereigns, they did not cease to be freebooters. Every region which was not subject to their rule was wasted by their incursions. Whenever their kettle-drums were heard, the peasant threw his bag of rice on his shoulder, hid his small savings in his girdle, and fled with his wife and children to the mountains or the jungles, to the milder neighborhood of the hyena and the tiger."

DUPLEIX AND FRENCH POLICY.

12. At this time the two principal factories on the east coast of India were the British station at Fort St. George, now Madras, and the French station at Pondicherry, eighty miles farther south. The first man who seems to have entertained definite notions about building up a European sovereignty upon the ruins of the Mogul Empire was Dupleix, the French Governor at Pondicherry. His long residence in the East had given him a knowledge of Indian affairs that few Europeans possessed. "His restless, capacious, and inventive mind," says Macaulay, "had formed this scheme at a time when the oldest servants of the English Company were busied only about invoices and bills of lading. Nor had he only proposed for himself the end. He had also a just and distinct view of the means by which it was to be attained.

13. "He clearly saw that the greatest force which the princes of India could bring into the field would be no match for the small body of men trained in the discipline and guided by the tactics of the West. He saw,

also, that the natives of India might, under European commanders, be formed into armies such as Saxe or Frederick would be proud to command. He was perfectly aware that the most easy and convenient way in which a European adventurer could exercise sovereignty in India was to govern the motions, and speak through the mouth, of some glittering puppet dignified by the title of Nabob or Nizam. The arts, both of war and policy, which a few years later were employed with such signal success by the English, were first understood and practiced by this ingenious and aspiring Frenchman."

14. In 1748 the Nizam of the Deccan died. Two claimants for the throne appeared in the persons of Nazir Jung, son of the old Nizam, and Mirzapha Jung, a grandson. About the same time an adventurer, Chunda Sahib, set up a claim for the throne of the Carnatic against Anaverdy Khan, the reigning prince. Here was the opportunity for Dupleix to carry his long-cherished plans into execution. He espoused the cause of Chunda Sahib in the Carnatic, and sent four hundred French soldiers to his assistance. A battle was fought and Anaverdy Khan was killed. His son Mohammed Ali fled with a scanty remnant of his army to Trichinopoly, and nearly all the Carnatic submitted to the conqueror.

15. Next Dupleix lent his French soldiers to Mirzapha Jung, who in a short time became master of the Deccan. The new sovereigns showered wealth and favors upon the successful Frenchman. He was declared governor of a territory in India as large as all France, with a population of 50,000,000 people. He was placed in command of the largest military force of the country. He was presented with a million dollars in money and many valuable jewels. Neither the Nizam nor the Nabob concluded any affairs of moment without his advice

and consent. He was, in fact, invested with sovereign powers, and French influence in Southern India was paramount and seemingly firmly established.

16. The triumph of the French arms carried consternation to the British factory at St. George. Unless the victorious career of Dupleix could be stayed, not only would British influence be destroyed, but the very existence of their trading posts would soon be at an end. At this time the government of St. George was feeble. The military officers in command were without experience. Everything betokened speedy and irretrievable ruin. In this emergency the valor and genius of an obscure English youth suddenly turned the tide of fortune.

ROBERT CLIVE AND THE SIEGE OF ARCOT.

17. Robert Clive had gone to India in the service of the company as commissary to the soldiers stationed at Fort St. George. His duties were those of a clerk. He was now twenty-five years old, but had had no experience in military affairs. Like Dupleix, however, he seemed to comprehend the political situation of the country, and when the emergency came that called forth his powers, he was found to possess both military genius and profound statesmanship. He represented to the officers of the post that if Trichinopoly, now besieged by Chunda Sahib and his French allies, should surrender, Mohammed Ali would perish, and French influence would become supreme. As the distance of Trichinopoly from Fort St. George was so great as to preclude the possibility of marching directly to the assistance of their ally, he advocated the bold project of making a diversion by a sudden attack upon Arcot, the capital of the Carnatic, and the favorite residence of the Nabob. His plans were ap-

proved, and he was appointed commander to carry them into execution.

18. "The young captain," says Macaulay, "was put at the head of two hundred English soldiers and three hundred sepoy, armed and disciplined after the English fashion. The weather was stormy, but Clive pushed on through thunder, lightning, and rain, to the gates of Arcot. The garrison in a panic evacuated the fort and the English entered it without a blow. Clive immediately began to collect provisions, to throw up works, and make preparations for sustaining a siege. The garrison, which had fled at his approach, had now recovered from its dismay, and, re-enforced to the number of three thousand men, it encamped close to the town. At dead of night Clive marched out of the fort, attacked the camp by surprise, slew great numbers, dispersed the rest, and returned to his quarters without having lost a single man.

19. "The news of the fall of Arcot soon reached Chunda Sahib, as he was besieging Trichinopoly. An army under the command of his son Rajah Sahib, numbering ten thousand native troops and one hundred and fifty Frenchmen, was immediately dispatched to Arcot, and proceeded to invest the fort, which seemed quite incapable of sustaining a siege. The walls were ruinous and the ditches dry. The garrison, reduced by casualties, now consisted of one hundred and fifty English soldiers and two hundred sepoy. The stock of provisions was scanty, and the commander was a youth of five and twenty, who had been bred a book-keeper.

20. "During fifty days the siege went on. During fifty days the young captain maintained the defense with a firmness, vigilance, and ability which would have done honor to the oldest marshal in Europe. The garrison

began to feel the pressure of hunger. At this juncture the sepoy came to Clive, not to complain of their scanty fare, but to propose that all the grain should be given to the Europeans, who required more nourishment than the natives of Asia. The thin gruel, they said, which was strained away from the rice, would suffice for themselves. The devotion of Clive's little band equaled that of the Tenth Legion of Cæsar, or of the Old Guard of Napoleon.

21. "Clive looked for succor from two sources. An attempt made by the government at Madras to relieve the place failed, but there was still hope from another quarter. A body of six thousand Mahrattas, under a chief named Morari Row, had been hired to assist Mohammed Ali; but as the French power seemed irresistible, this force had hitherto remained inactive on the frontiers of the Carnatic. The fame of the defense of Arcot roused them from their torpor. Rajah Sahib learned that the Mahrattas were in motion. It was necessary for him to be expeditious. He first offered large bribes to Clive, and vowed that if his proposals were not accepted he would instantly storm the fort and put every man to the sword. Clive told him in reply that his father was a usurper and that his army was a rabble, and that he would do well to think twice before he sent such poltroons into a breach defended by English soldiers.

22. "Rajah Sahib determined to storm the fort. The day was well suited to a bold military enterprise. It was the great Mohammedan festival which is sacred to the memory of Hosein the son of Ali. The history of Islam contains nothing more touching than the event which gave rise to that solemnity. The mournful legend relates how the chief of the Fatimites, when all his brave followers had perished round him, drank his last draught of water

and uttered his latest prayer; how the assassins carried his head in triumph, smote the lifeless lips with his staff, and how a few old men recollected with tears that they had seen those lips pressed to the lips of the prophet of God.

23. "After the lapse of near twelve centuries, the recurrence of this solemn season excites the fiercest and saddest emotions in the bosoms of the devout Moslems of India. They work themselves up to such agonies of rage and lamentation that some, it is said, have given up the ghost from the mere effect of mental excitement. They believe that whoever, during this festival, falls in arms against the infidels, atones by his death for all the sins of life, and passes at once to the Garden of the Houris. It was at this time that Rajah Sahib determined to assault Arcot. Stimulating drugs were employed to aid the effect of religious zeal, and the besiegers, drunk with enthusiasm, drunk with bang, rushed furiously to the attack.

24. "Clive had received secret intelligence of the design, had made his arrangements, and, exhausted by fatigue, had thrown himself on his bed. He was awakened by the alarm, and was instantly at his post. The enemy advanced, driving before them elephants whose foreheads were armed with iron plates. It was expected that the gates would yield to the shock of these living battering-rams. But the huge beasts no sooner felt the English musket-balls than they turned round and rushed furiously away, trampling on the multitude which had urged them forward. A raft was launched on the water which filled one part of the ditch. Clive, perceiving that his gunners at that post did not understand their business, took the management of a piece of artillery himself, and cleared the raft in a few minutes.

25. "Where the moat was dry the assailants mounted

with great boldness; but they were received with a fire so heavy and so well directed that it soon quelled the courage even of fanaticism and intoxication. The rear ranks of the English kept the front ranks supplied with a constant succession of loaded muskets, and every shot told on the living mass below. After three desperate onsets, the besiegers retired behind the ditch.

26. "The struggle lasted about an hour. Four hundred of the assailants fell. The garrison lost only five or six men. The besieged passed an anxious night, looking for a renewal of the attack. But when day broke the enemy were no more to be seen. They had retired, leaving the English several guns and a large quantity of ammunition.

27. "Clive immediately began offensive operations. Re-enforced by seven hundred English troops and sepoy from Madras, and effecting a junction with the auxiliary Mahratta force, he soon overran all the Northern Carnatic. He gained a complete victory over Rajah Sahib's army of five thousand natives and three hundred Frenchmen. At this time Major Lawrence arrived from England and assumed the command. An expedition marched to the assistance of Mohammed Ali at Trichinopoly. The besiegers were defeated, and Chunda Sahib was put to death by the Mahrattas, into whose hands he fell.

28. "The English were now masters of the Carnatic, and the French influence was broken. Steadily the English power was extended over the Deccan and all Southern India. Dupleix struggled against his fate in vain, no French armament came to his assistance. His company condemned his policy and furnished him with no aid. But still he persisted, bribed, intrigued, promised, lavished his private fortune, and everywhere tried to raise new enemies to the government at Madras, but

all to no purpose. At length, when his last hope for empire died out, broken in fortune and spirits, he returned to his native country to die obscure and neglected.

29. "Clive went back to England for a brief space, but after a year or two he returned to India as governor of Madras. His first service after his return was to rout out a nest of pirates which had for a long time maintained a stronghold upon the coast. He then turned his attention to reform in the company's business, and to strengthening British influence with the natives in all directions. Before two months had expired he received intelligence which called forth all the energies of his bold and active mind.

THE STORY OF THE BLACK HOLE.

30. "Of the large provinces into which the Mogul Empire was divided the wealthiest was Bengal. No part of India possessed such natural advantages, both for agriculture and commerce. The Ganges, rushing through a hundred channels to the sea, has formed a vast plain of rich mold which, even under the tropical sky, rivals the verdure of an English April. The rice-fields yield an increase such as is elsewhere unknown. Spices, sugar, vegetable oils are produced with marvelous exuberance. The rivers afford an inexhaustible supply of fish. The desolate islands along the sea-coast, overgrown with noxious vegetation and swarming with deer and tigers, supply the cultivated districts with salt. The great stream which fertilizes the soil is at the same time the chief highway of Eastern commerce. On its banks, and on those of its tributary waters, are the wealthiest marts, the most splendid capitals, and the most sacred shrines of India. In numbers its inhabitants exceed 60,000,000;