

A DAY WITH "A. L. O. E."

FEW people are perhaps aware that the popular authoress who is known by her initials simply as "A Lady of England" is not only still living, but actively engaged in mission work in a populous city in Northern India. A visit to her, and a morning spent with her in her customary round of visits to those whom she hopes to raise out of superstition and idolatry, is a refreshing and interesting break in the somewhat monotonous events of ordinary Anglo-Indian society. And it is not a visit as difficult to accomplish in these days of quick railway communication as it was fourteen years ago, when "A. L. O. E.," otherwise simply Miss Tucker, first came out to India, and decided to make the city of Batala the centre of her labors and the home of her declining years; for Batala is now in direct communication by rail with Lahore, the capital of the Punjab, and is about an hour's journey further north than Amritsar, the famous center of Sikh influence, the city of the Golden Temple of world-wide fame.

In the days when Miss Tucker first knew it, it was reached by *dak gharri* or *doli*, both of which conveyances will be familiar to readers of the authoress's stories of Indian life and adventure. The railway, however, although it has brought more trade to Batala, and made it, therefore, more populous and wealthy, has not altered it much with regard to European residents; for in former days, as now, the only English people in Batala are the missionaries, some eight or ten, who form a little centre of influence in the city and villages around.

Miss Tucker's home is about three-quarters of a mile from the city, close under the shadow of the Karing High School for native Christian boys, in whom she takes the greatest and most loving interest. Her cottage, a neatly arranged little building, with furniture and decoration simple and tasteful, as befits the charming old lady who inhabits it, has been christened by her "Gruft auf Tag," as therein she intends to spend the "sunset" of her life. This little home, in which she sleeps, lives and writes all that she now gives to the world, adjoins a larger house inhabited by other lady missionaries, and in this Miss Tucker takes her meals, as well as spends her leisure hours, though of these she has but few, as, in spite of her age, which she proudly tells one is only two years less than Her Majesty's, she is more or less hard at work from morning till night. Every morning, except Sunday, after a most frugal breakfast, Miss Tucker starts on her round of visits, "to deliver her message." This means that she will generally manage to visit and address little gatherings of women and children in some seven or eight *zenanas*, no inconsiderable and easy work even to anyone of robust strength and to the fragile little old lady who has spent fourteen years in India, without once recruiting her health in England, it is no small strain, although she herself would be the last to acknowledge the fact. The word "*zenana*," to many English ears, no doubt implies a magnificent and secluded set of apartments in which high-class Hindoos and Mahomedans alike keep their women folk "*purdah*," or screened from the vulgar gaze of strange male eyes. There are such *zenanas*, it is true, but they are rarely found outside palaces, whereas, every house, even the poorest citizens, possesses its *zenana*, or, in plain English, its apartments for women, whether those women are *purdah* or not. It is chiefly to the homes of the non-*purdah* class, and, in fact, to a very humble class, that Miss Tucker directs her footsteps, when she sallies forth about nine o'clock in the morning to walk to the city, followed by a small *doli* carried by two *kahars* or bearers. The *doli* is a very primitive conveyance, built somewhat on the model of a very diminutive Chinese palanquin, the

base measuring some 3 feet by 2 feet, and the roof and sides being covered by a strong padded cretonne. Lengthwise through the top of the *doli* passes a long bamboo pole which rests on the shoulders of the *kahars* when the *doli* is being carried from place to place. If we take a peep into Miss Tucker's *doli*, we shall see that the only furniture consists of two small pillows to rest against, and one or two bags containing hymn books, translations into Urdu or Gurmukhi of various parables or the Sermon on the Mount, and pictures wherewith to illustrate the lessons to be given. But Miss Tucker, true to the principle so often elucidated in her books, that no life can be a useful one unless it is first a healthy one, conscientiously takes her morning walk of about three-quarters of a mile, well guarded from the heat of the sun's rays by a thickly wadded white umbrella, before she thinks of having recourse to her *doli*. It is only when the city walls are reached that she gets in, and is then rapidly borne through the narrow, tortuous streets to the first on her morning's visiting list. On the morning about to be described the first house is that of a *bheestie*, or water carrier, and, although *bheesties* as a class give less trouble, and do their work better than any other of the numerous ministrants to daily human wants in India, still this particular *bheestie's* *zenana* is not one which is prepared to receive Miss Tucker's teachings with unquestioning submission. The usual question as to whether the women folk have leisure or not to receive her is answered in the affirmative before entering even on the threshold of their home, and forthwith Miss Tucker is ushered into a tiny room some 10 feet by 5 feet, and invited to sit down on the only apology for furniture, a charpoy or native bed made of string and bamboo. Her audience consists at first solely of two, who squat at her feet to listen to her. A picture illustrative of some scene in the life of Christ is shown and explained, and their attention is gained for a few minutes. By this time the news has spread to the *zenanas* close at hand, and a few other women stroll up to look in and listen. Amongst these is one who is evidently prepared for argument, and at the first opportunity she proclaims in a coarse, loud voice that Mahomet is the only true prophet, and that it is no use any *Mem Sahib* coming to try to make them believe the contrary. She is answered by encouraging looks and words from the crowd around, and Miss Tucker is obliged to alter her tactics. Her gentle voice in protest is lost in the vociferous tones of her opponent, and so, after various mild attempts to secure a hearing and continue the lesson she had intended giving, she puts aside the picture and begins a *bhagdon*—that is, Scriptural truths in short verses—which are sung to the monotonous tunes which alone appear acceptable to the native mind. The singing stops the hubbub for a few minutes, but as soon as it is over the argument is on the point of being begun, and so Miss Tucker, with kindly words and salaams, retires, hoping that at some future day she will have a less rebellious audience.

The second house visited—that of a young married woman who until recently had been the head teacher in a Mussulman girls' school—is in every way a contrast to the first. In this the audience are neither ignorant nor aggressive, but follow with delight all the new pictures shown or the fresh information expounded. They are evidently well acquainted with all the events of Christ's life, and so Miss Tucker leaves them one or two short parables translated into Urdu which they may read and keep. At the next house there is not such an intelligent though certainly a very willing audience, who like to hear Miss Tucker sing and talk to them, though perhaps they have no very strong feelings for either their own or the Christian religion.