

THE FOREIGN MAIL BOX.

A VISIT TO A STRANGE HILL TRIBE—THE TODAS.

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HAVE decided to tell you about a trip I made to the Toda huts in July, in company with Rev. A. S. and Mrs. Wallis of the American Baptist Mission—new missionaries, too. The Todas, you must know, are to India what the Moundbuilders are to North America, except for the fact that the Todas are still with us, while this cannot be said of the Moundbuilders.

These interesting people, however, are fast becoming extinct. There are not more than 700 of them now in all the hills. They call themselves the "Lords of the Hills," and receive, I believe, a land tax from the other hill tribes—the Budagas, Tamils, etc. The Government also gives a grant for each child born.

Historians, geologists, naturalists and other students of nature and human nature fail to agree as to the origin of this tribe. Some think they are of Dravidian race, others of Roman descent, still others that they are Aryans; and it has even been said that they may be one of the lost ten tribes of Israel.

Whatever their origin, they are a striking race, quite distinct in appearance from the other hill tribes. Their features are European in contour, with decidedly Roman noses. The men and women alike have abundant glossy black hair, which the former wear in a bushy mop, and the latter in rather corkscrew ringlets.

The dress of the men is a coarse cotton cloth, with scarlet or blue border, wound around the body and worn in a way that resembles the Roman toga. The women's dress is of the same material, but worn much as other Indian women wear the quakha.

They are a pastoral tribe and live together in small villages called "Munda." Their houses are very singular indeed, and were planned long before the so-called "fresh-air fiends" and "sunshine cranks" made their debut. They are hemispherical in shape, resembling somewhat a cylinder lying on its side. The roof is thatched with wild grass or straw, and the ends of the houses are boarded in with rough boards. In front of each house is a little platform of hard mud which one's imagination could scarcely dignify by the name of verandah.

The most interesting thing, to me at least, about a Toda hut, is the entrance, which is near the ground, and is a square opening, not more than from two to two and a half feet in dimension. It is surprising to see how gracefully the women make the entrance and exit to and from their homes. The framework of these wonderful pieces of architecture is made of bamboo poles.

Now for our trip. We crossed the beautiful Government Gardens in Ootacamund and started to climb the hills behind them. These hills, I might mention, are more easy to skate down than to walk down, especially in the rainy season, when they make an excellent red clay toboggan slide. The last part of the climb brought us into a little grove, in which, as I stood and gazed around me, it brought to my mind the stories I had read of the ancient Druids and the dark forest glades. There stood the gnarled old trees, with their moss-covered trunks and luxuriant hanging vines—and orchids, too. The ground was carpeted with