

PEEP INTO A
SCHOOL.



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BOOK

INTRODUCTION

BY THE AUTHOR

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A PEEP INTO A SCHOOL-ROOM.



WHICH would cause the most surprise—for a number of little Arab boys to see a nice English school-room, with the children

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clean and well-dressed, learning their useful lessons, or for some English children to take a peep into one of the noisy schools of the olive-coloured children of the East? When an Arab or a Turk hears of the care and pains given to teach the young in England, he looks on the account as one of his eastern tales—as nothing better than a fable. He cannot make out why such care should be shown to children.

Suppose we peep into an Arab school in a village near Damascus. I need not point it out to you among those low-roofed houses, for the noise that already reaches us tells plainly what is going on within. Those openings in the old mud wall let in the hot winds

of summer and the cold winds of winter. But let us step in, and see if the inside presents a better picture. At the door is a pile of old, odd-looking shoes, or slippers, which are put off by the scholars as they enter; they then sit bare-legged on the rough floor. The teacher now rises, and directs us to be seated on a mat. The noise has stopped a little, and eyes which should be on their books are gazing on our English dress. But the teacher wishes to show himself before the visitors, and begins to deal heavy blows on the young heads and shoulders around him. Good and bad share alike. The idlers now make up in noise for what they have lost in time: those reading aloud read louder,

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and those who have no book to read bawl with all their might, to imitate the others. There are no classes. No two boys have the same lesson; few the same book; many only part of a book; and some none at all. The scholar repeats, perhaps, the same lesson day after day. He can read a lesson in his own book; but give him the same lesson on the opposite page in another book, and he cannot make out a line.

See the master as he looks through his spectacles on the page a boy is reading, while his hand is thrusting at random among the scholars a cane which reaches half across the room. The idle watch the strange turns of the long cane, and shun the

stroke ; while the poor boy so intent on his book that he did not see it, gets a blow for his pains. There are some of the scholars learning to write, but they have neither copy books, pens, nor ink ; they mark the letters with their fingers on sand spread on the floor. If they do not make less noise, they will be thrown on their backs, and the soles of their feet beaten with a large stick.

But let us look into the next room. See those three girls huddled up in a corner, their faces and hands unwashed, their hair all loose and uncombed. The eldest holds in one hand the strange letters written for her on a board, while her other hand

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gathers up the rents of her ragged dress. It is not often that you see girls in an Arab school. What has brought these three to this place? Perhaps a mother, who feels her own dark state, has sent them. Or it may be a strong desire of the girls themselves, before they are driven out to work. Poor things! The master would think it time thrown away to take pains with them. They are left to do the best they can for themselves. No pleasant look, or kind word to cheer them, but frowns meet them on every side. They feel they are looked on with scorn and hatred. They will soon grow tired, and give up all attempts at learning. Still let us hope that their presence in this school is the dawn of bet-

ter days for the poor girls of Arabia and Turkey.

What a contrast to this scene is an English Sunday school! See the children coming up the green lanes and over the fields, or from the streets of the city, on their way to be taught. We hope they meet their teachers with happy hearts, and with clean faces and tidy dresses. There is no long cane to shake over their heads; no large stick to beat the soles of their feet. The same kind care is shown for the girls as the boys. They have little books with pictures, written for their use by those who love them. And then they have that book which makes the great difference between their condition and that of children in heathen and other

lands. Without the Bible their state would be as dark and sad as that of the young Arabs. Blessed indeed are they if they believe in the Saviour it reveals, who loved them, and gave himself for them—who died on the cross that they might live in heaven. Are the young readers Sabbath school children? Let them, then, with all their hearts praise God for their mercies and privileges in a Christian land. Or if they are not, may they know how to value the mercies of their homes and of the house of God.

While taught to read the word of truth,
May they that word receive;
And when they hear of Jesus' name,
In that blest name believe.

GOD ORDERS ALL THINGS.

I THANK the Lord for all his grace,
To me so freely shown;
At all times and in every place,
His goodness let me own.

It was not chance that placed me here,
Where I am train'd and taught
My Maker's name to know and fear,
And love him as I ought.

The Lord in wisdom order'd where
And when my birth should be;
And ever since, with tender care,
He has watch'd over me.

He gives me all things; day by day,
Fresh mercies does he send;
And, if I sin them not away,
He will be still my Friend.