

# Northern Messenger

VOLUME XXXII., No. 49.

MONTREAL AND NEW YORK, DECEMBER 3, 1897.

30 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid.

## Potlatch.

(‘Onward.’)

‘Among the Indians of the Pacific coast,’ says Dr. McLean, ‘there exists a festival known as “Potlatch,” It is a Chinook word, meaning “to give,” from the fact that the chief object is to make a distribution of gifts to friends. A chief desiring honor, or an Indian wishing to obtain a good name for himself, will call the people of his own and other tribes to enjoy the abundant provision made for them. Many of the adult members of the tribes will spend years of hard toil, live in poverty, denying themselves the necessaries of life, that they may be able to save a sum sufficient to hold a Potlatch.

‘At these festivals a single Indian has been known to distribute, in money and various kinds of articles to the amount of fifteen hundred dollars. At the beginning of the Potlatch, the names of the persons to



AN INDIAN POTLATCH.

Indians. The industrious and thrifty alone can hold them because of their wealth; and the evil becomes a serious one, when such persons will labor for years that they may be honored with a Potlatch. The same thing, in principle, at least, is practiced among other tribes.’

The Rev. E. R. Young writes:

‘On one of my canoe trips, when looking after pagan bands in the remote Nelson River district, I had some singular experiences, and learned some important lessons about the craving of the pagan heart after God.

‘We had been journeying on for ten or twelve days when one night we camped on the shore of a lake-like river, While my men were busily employed in gathering wood and cooking supper, I wandered off and ascended to the top of a well-wooded hill which I saw in the distance. Very great, indeed, was my surprise, when I reached the top, to find myself in the presence of the most startling evidences of a degraded paganism.

The hill had once been densely covered with trees, but about every third one had been cut down, and the stumps, which had been left from four to ten feet high, had been carved into rude representations of the human form. Scattered around were the dog-ovens, which were nothing but holes dug in the ground and lined with stones, in which at certain seasons, as part of their religious ceremonies, some of their favorite dogs—white ones were always preferred—were roasted, and then devoured by the excited crowd. Here and there were the tents of the old conjurers and the medicine men, who, combining some knowledge of disease and medicine, with a great deal of superstitious abominations, held despotic sway over the people.

The power of these old conjurers over the deluded Indians was very great. They were generally lazy old fellows, but succeeded, nevertheless, in getting the best that was going, as they held other Indians in such terror of their power, that gifts in the shape of fish and game were constantly flowing in on them. They have the secret art among themselves of concocting some poi-

sons so deadly that a little put in the food of a person who has excited their displeasure, will cause death almost as soon as a dose of strychnine. They have other poisons which, while not immediately causing



INDIAN CONJURER'S MASK.

death to the unfortunate victims, yet so affect and disfigure them that, until death releases them, their sufferings are intense and their appearance frightful. Often they wear a hideous mask like that shown in our cut.

## ‘A Multitude Converted.’

The Rev. Titus Coan arrived at Hilo in 1835. He found several schools, a church of thirty-six members, and a few converts. As soon as he was able to preach the people listened eagerly. In 1837 the interest became general throughout all the islands, there was a great revival and thousands came to Hilo to hear the gospel. In 1838, on the first Sunday of July, 1,705 persons were baptised, and about 2,400 communicants sat down at the table of the Lord. During the three years ending April, 1840, 7,382 persons were received into the Church at Hilo.—‘Great Missionaries.’



THE REV. E. R. YOUNG, INDIAN METHODIST MISSIONARY.

receive the gifts are called aloud, and they come forward in a very indifferent manner to receive a blanket or a gun, but when nearing the end of the distribution there is a general scramble for the property to be given away.

‘The Canadian Government has very wisely prohibited these festivals, as they are the cause of retarding the progress of the