

Christmas with the Fur Traders.

(Agnes C. Laot.)

For six, seven, eight months of the year the fur trader's world in Northern Canada is a white wilderness of snow, snow water-waved by winds that sweep from the pole, snow drifted into ramparts, round the fort stockades till the highest picket sinks beneath the white flood and the corner bastions are almost submerged, and the entrance to the central gate resembles the cutting of a railway tunnel, snow that billows to the unbroken reaches of the circling sky-line like a white sea. East, frost-mist hides the low horizon in clouds of smoke, for the sun which rises from the east in other climes rises from the south-east here, and until the spring equinox, bringing summer with a flood-tide of thaw, gray darkness hangs in the east like a fog. South the sun moves across the snowily level in a wheel of fire, for it has scarcely risen full-sphere above the sky-line before it sinks again, etching dirt and tip of half-buried brush in long, lonely, fading shadows. The West shimmers in long purplish grays for the moist Chinook winds come over the mountains, melting the snow. North is the cold steel of ice by day and at night, northern lights darting through the polar dark like burnished spears.

great jangling of bells announces the huskies (dog trains) scampering over the crusted snow-drifts. A babel of barks and curses follows, for the huskies celebrate their arrival by tugging themselves up in their harness and enjoying a free fight. Dogs unharnessed, in troop the trappers to the banquet hall, flinging packs of tightly-robed petries down promiscuously, to be sorted next day. Our Indian enters just as he has left the hunting-field, clad from head to heel in white caribou, with the antlers left on the capote as a decoy. His squaw has toggled out for the occasion in a comical medley of brass bracelets and finger-rings with a bear-claw necklace and ermine ruff, which no city connoisseur could possibly mistake for rabbit. If a daughter yet remain unappropriated she will display the gayest attire—red flannel galore, red shawl, red scarf, with perhaps an apron of white fox-skin and moccasins garnished in colored grasses. The beaver outfit even a vain young squaw. Whole fox-pink or other skins have been braided to the end of their hair and hang down in two plaits to the floor. Whitest of buckskin has been ornamented with brightest of beads, and over all hangs the grandest of blankets, if may be a muskox skin with the fangs, masks and scalp-locks, bringing back of the warrior in rude drawings on

line. In the large forts are libraries, whither resort the officers for the long winter nights. But over the feast wild hilarity reigns. A French-Canadian fiddler strikes up a tuneless jig that sets the Indians pounding the floor in figure-less dances with moccasined heels till mid-day glides into midnight and midnight to morning. One such mid-day feast in Red River settlement prolonged itself past four of the second morning. Against the walls sit old folks spinning yarns of the past. There is a print of Sir George Simpson behind one racoon-Laur's head. Ah, yes, the oldest guides all remember Sir George, though half a century has passed since his day. He was the governor who travelled with flags flying from every prow, and cannon firing when he left the forts, and men drawn up in procession like soldiers guarding an emperor when he entered the fur posts with couriers and all the flourish of royal state. And there is a crucifix high on the wall, left by Pere LaCombe, the last time the famous missionary to the red men of the far north passed this way, and every Indian calls up some kindness, some sacrifice by Father LaCombe. On the gunnack are old muskets and Indian masks and scalp-locks, bringing back the days when Russian traders in-



THE HOLY NIGHT

Christmas day is welcomed at the northern fur posts of the Hudson's Bay Company by a firing of cannon from the snow-muffled bastions. Before the stars have faded chapel services begin! Frequently, on either Christmas or New Year's day, a grand feast is given the tawny-skinned habitués of the fort, who come shuffling to the main messroom with no other announcement than the lifting of the latch, and bid themselves on the hospitality of a host that has never turned hungry. Indians from its doors. For reasons well known to wood-craftsmen, a sudden lull falls on winter hunting in December, and all the trappers within a week's journey from the fort, all the half-breed guides, who add to the instinct of native craft the reasoning of the white, all the Indian hunters ranging river course and mountain, have come by snowshoes and dog-train to spend festive days at the fort. A

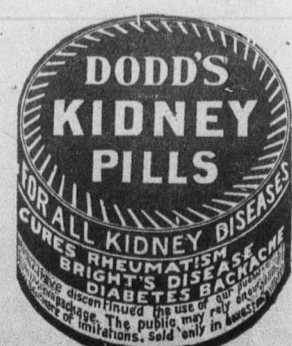
the smooth side. A few years ago it would not have been safe to give this treat inside the fort walls. Rations would have been served through loop-holes, and the feast held outside the gates, but so faithfully have the Indians become bound to the Hudson's Bay Company, there are not three forts in the fur territory where the Indians must be excluded. Of the feast, little need be said. Like the camel, the Indian lays up store for the morrow, judging from his capacity, for weeks of morrows. His benefactor no more dines with him, than a plantation master of the south would have dined with feasting slaves. Elsewhere a bell calls the company officers to breakfast at 7.30, dinner at 1, supper at 7. Officers dine first, white hunters and trappers second, that difference between master and servant being maintained, which is part of the company's almost military discipli-

stigated a massacre at this fort, and white traders flew at each other's throats as Nor'wester struggled with Hudson's Bay for supremacy in the fur trade. "Ah, oui, those white men, they were brave fighters, they did not know how to stop! Mais, sacre, they were fools, those white men, after all! Instead of hiding in ambush to catch the foe those white men measured off paces, stood up face to face and fired blank—oui—fired blank! Ugh! Of course, one fool he was kill' and the other fool most like he was wound'! Ugh! by Gar! What Indian would have so little sense?" Of hunting tales the Indian's store is exhausted. That enormous bear skin stretched to four pegs on the wall brings up Montagnais, the Noseless One, who still lives on Peace River, and slew the largest bear ever killed in the Rockies, returning to this very fort with one hand drag-

ging the enormous skin and the other holding the place which his nose no longer graced. "Montagnais? Ah, bien, messieur! Montagnais, he brave man! Venez beeg loup-garou! Montagnais, he ic' bien—bien!—so—I tole you 'bout beem," begins some French-Canadian trapper, with a strong tinge of Indian blood in his swarthy skin. "Bi-gosh! He brave man! I tole you 'bout dat happen! Montagnais, he go stumble t'rough snow—how you call dat? Hill, steep, steep! Ouh! by Gar—dat vas steep hill; de snow—she go slide—slide—lak' de gran' rapaed—see?" emphasizing the snow slides with illustrative gesture. "Blen, done! Mais, Montagnais, he stick gun-stock in snow stop beem fall—so—see? Tonner! Bigosh!—for sure she go off wan beeg bang! Sacre! She make so much noise she wake wan beeg ol' bear sleep

in snow! Montagnais, he tumble on hees back! Mais, messieur, de bear—diable! 'fore Montagnais wink hees eye de bear jump on top lak' wan beeg loup-garou! Montagnais, he brave man—he not scare—he say wan leetle prayer—wan ban' he cover his eyes!—'oder han'—sacré—dat grab hees knife out hees belt—sz—sz—sz—messieur—for sure he feel her breast—diable—for sure he fin' de place her heart beat—Tonner! Vite! He stuck dat knife in straight up hees wrist—into de heart dat bear! Dat beest'ing do—for sure de leetle prayer dat tole him best ting do! De bear she roll over—over dead's wan stone—c'est vrai! she no mor' jump top Montagnais, he roll over—leetle bit scare! Mais, hees nose! Ah—bigosh—de bear she got dat, dat all nose he ever haf no more! C'est vrai, in Messieur, bien!"

And with a finishing flourish the story-teller takes to himself all the credit for Montagnais' heroism.



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THE CORRECT STORE.

Christmas Observed in Ireland

Christmas in Ireland is a Christian country, in every city, town and village, preparations are made for the coming of the great day, the atmosphere of the year is for days before the happy excitement of the season is not lost when the day is over.

The young people string leaves together, mistletoe decorated with good Irish mothers, dark-eyed colleens, ingredients that make pudding which will be a dinner table Christmas. Homes of the well-to-do, a Christmas dinner is a family affair, boys are home from school, girls from convent, mother, brothers and sisters join in a happy family gathering.

In many parts of Ireland the Christmas Eve is celebrated. It has been present at one time or another, and simple devotion people. Immense numbers of people, especially in the north, are present at an early hour to see the

Christmas and

Joy and good cheer associated with Christmas thought of human sinfulness and shadow over the blessing of childhood is our inheritance for innocence.

None who think of Christmas fashion but go to the empty tomb of the viour, and the cross is on Easter day, albeit flowers.

Yet it is not according to the discipline of the Church to fast on Easter day, but denial still, and the rest of our human frailties, the beginning of the year, is opened with the prophecy of His second last judgment, and its tents. Coming with nance-cleansed to the