



Christmas in an Indian Village

BY REV. J. A. JACKSON, M.D.

IF you imagine that the Indian in his remote village, shut off to a very large extent from contact with civilization, is therefore a gloomy sort of individual, you have misjudged the man. You have been looking at him solely from what appears on the surface, and we are ready to grant from facial appearances he does not give much promise of bubbling mirth, but the face is not always a complete index of the man. Behind the stolid face and solemn eye we find a large fund of good-natured humor and a relish for real wit.

But the season when this feature is most manifest is Christmas. If you were to spend Christmas Eve in almost any one of our Indian mission stations, and traverse it from end to end, you would imagine you had been brought face to face with a new style of "Midway." While there would be an absence of the ear-splitting megaphone, you would find many features not discoverable in any other part of the world. Every house in the long row becomes a centre of attraction, each unique in its own particular line. The whole length of the village is one glare of illumination, by reason of thousands of burning candles standing behind each pane of glass, which from a distance gives a splendid effect.

But the illumination is not only for its effect in the distance, but to reveal the several exhibitions to be found going on in the windows of the various houses. Here is one imitating a Chinese opium den, "Hop Sing's Sweet Repose." Two Indians are dressed in Chinese costume, with remarkably long pig-tails. They are lying on a platform built in the window seat so that passers by may see the happy expression produced by the poisonous drug. Of course, they are not actually smoking opium, but the caricature is so perfect in every detail that one cannot help being amused at the way in which the Indian can take off the Chinaman, and how observant he must have been when the Celestial snoked himself into sweet repose.

The next house presented as startling a surprise as the former. The Indian had evidently been at his wit's end to give a striking display, and in his extremity discovered a new idea. He had about the best class of hens and ducks to be found anywhere in the village, and these he proposed to display in his front window. He built a tier of perches and arranged his poultry in order. The ducks, by order of gravity, were placed on a board at the bottom of the pyramid; then came the much-prized Minorcas, and on the next tier the jet black Spanish, and crowning all, as the apex of the pyramid, came the two ponderous roosters, sitting as solemn sentinels on duty.

In the lower part of the village an exhibition was going on of Indian life and customs prior to the advent of the missionary in their midst. The simplest minded persons were selected

for the dramatic performance, as considerable color work had to be done around the face to adjust the war paint. The man selected as representative chief was "Limping Joe," whose appearance at any time was not prepossessing, as he was blind in one eye, with a twist in the other, and his right leg did not agree with his left. In fact, he seemed to be generally out of gear. Even his senses did not all co-operate at the same moment, a misfortune which the Indians took advantage of when they selected him as high chief for the festive occasion. His cheeks were daubed with a brilliant red, also the tip of his nose, and over his eyebrows. He was attired in the costume of the ancient chiefs, with feathers and martial trappings, which gave him a very ferocious appearance. Joe seemed delighted at the honor conferred, which gave him a distinction never before enjoyed. Others were attired in less striking costumes, and even the women seemed to relish the artificial red cheeks, as it was the only way they could ever hope to get them.

We asked them why they had given this exhibition, and they replied it was to show us what they and their forefathers were before the missionary was sent to teach them a better way. We could not help being forcibly reminded of that appropriate passage, "Old things are passed away and behold all things have become new!"

Other homes had their own peculiar features of attraction, but time and space prohibit further description of this feature of Christmas festivities.

Let us now look at the interior decorations of the Indian church, which is the most conspicuous piece of architecture in the village. The walls reveal a rich profusion of appropriate mottoes, set in mountain evergreens, with all sorts of fantastic arrangements. The platform is overarched with a motto which has done service in other days, which conveys the old-time greeting, "A Merry Christmas." To the side of the platform stands the attractive feature which all the Indian children look towards with longing eyes—the Christmas tree, laden with toys of all descriptions to be distributed by a real-looking "Grandfather Christmas," adorned with all the regalia of that wonderful man of mystery.

But the chief feature of the evening, at least to the grown people, is the Christmas entertainment, which is conducted entirely by Indian talent. Persons who have never had the privilege of attending an Indian concert before will certainly lose every melancholy feeling by the time the last actor has played his part and the band played its parting fantasia. The band is the most conspicuous thing in the whole affair, as every member of the instrumental fraternity wears a brilliant red coat with white braided trimmings. But I must modify my statement somewhat, and say that the white trimmings have lost their purity and the red its brilliance, so that it is not just as imposing as it used to be, by means of its faded aspect. However, when contrasted with the host of black shavels conspicuous in the audience, you could easily make out that they were intended for red and white uniforms.



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