

*Our First Christmas
Among
The Tsimpseans.*

WRITTEN ESPECIALLY FOR THE
RECORDER BY
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OLD CHIEF'S HOUSE, OLD HARBOR.

In the midst of the rush of church and mission-house building, Christmas came upon us. Preparations for the celebration, the practising of Christmas carols and the placing of Christmas decorations, had been going on for weeks.

We had been teaching them that Christmas was to be a time of peace-making, of love and of joy; and they got the idea, partly from the influence of the mission at Metlakatla, that all the quarrels and misunderstandings, and even their financial obligations, were all to be settled before the day came, which was to commemorate the birth of Our Lord the Saviour. On this account we were busy with great councilings, and the settling of disputes of all kinds, night after night, often until midnight.

Christmas eve came, and the air resounded with the songs of the carol singers as they went from place to place throughout the town, singing the sweetly beautiful old time melodies which the missionary's wife had taught them.

As a preparation for the occasion every path through the place, among the large heathen lodges (there was only one shingled house outside the fort, besides the new little mission house just completed), was lined on both sides with evergreens, and along the rough bridge from the main shore to the island. Every imaginable kind of lamp or lantern was brought into use for the general illumination, and in many of the houses a dish with a little oil and a rag in it added its share to the brightness. Large fires were burning all night, and perfect order and quiet throughout the entire village was demanded by the council while the singers went their rounds.

The old people sat around the great fires, waiting patiently until the singers came and they said "we were listening for the songs of the angels."

As the early morn came on, the old nurse went out from the mission house, where the first little white babe had been born but two days before, and returning, brought into the room with her the noble old chieftess. The missionary, fearing the results, had warned his wife not to permit them to come in to see the little one. But the persuasive appeal of the nurse on behalf of "Su-dalth," the great chief woman, prevailed, and she was admitted into the room and put up her hands in astonishment before the mother and the wonderful baby.

By this time there was great excitement throughout the village, people were moving from house to house shaking hands with everyone, expressing their good will, and wishing one another a happy Christmas.

No sooner had the old lady returned with the news that she had seen the little white child, when a string of human beings started up the hill to bring their greetings to the missionary and his wife, and satisfy their curiosity. As one in such high rank had been allowed to enter the room, it was impossible to prevent the others without showing partiality, and so one by one they were permitted to stream in one door and out of the other, shaking hands with the mother and seeing the baby. As you may guess, it was something of an ordeal, but fortunately neither mother or babe seemed to suffer.

Immediately after this eleven o'clock service was announced, and all the villagers repaired to Chief Skow-gwate's house on the island. This large building, similar to the one shown in our cut, was crowded. Four windows were placed in it for light, two in front and two at the back, something of a variation from the old time arrangement; the roof was covered with bark, and an immense crest pole stood at the door, repre-

senting the clan of the chief. We had a delightful service, the singing being led by Mrs. Morrison, wife of Chief Factor Morrison at the Fort, and her brother.

The afternoon was spent in feasting, little family gatherings where reconciled friends met. These occurred among the more Christian part of the community. One man told me he had attended fourteen parties, it certainly spoke volumes for his ability to store away provisions.

In the evening a magic lantern exhibition of scripture views was presented to the intense delight of hundreds of people.

Next day, still keeping up the festivities, the whole village was invited to a feast in Chief Suk-say-uk's house, the missionary among the number.

After they had partaken freely of the food speeches were made by the chiefs and leading people, telling how joyful and happy they were that they had seen that day. At the close of the speech-making, they began to clap their hands and cheer merrily, when the missionary, not having yet learned their language, asked what it meant, and they replied, that they had been looking through the records of their people for a suitable name for the missionary's daughter, and as he was now to be connected with La-ge-uk's (the King of the nation) tribe, the name of his little daughter was to be A-she-genk, and they cheered again.

On again making enquiry as to the meaning of this name, he was told that it meant "leg of the sun or moon," or freely interpreted "Sunbeam." This we added to her English name Jessie, and as such she has always been known "Jessie" to us, and "Sunbeam" to them. Jessie Sunbeam. However, many happy Christmas times may come and go, there will none be more brightly pleasant to our memory than our first Christmas at Fort Simpson.