

## CHRISTMAS IN HEATHEN LANDS.

BY LUCY W. WATERBURY.\*

It is supposed that many of our beautiful Christmas customs have come down to us from our heathen ancestors. We know that the Yule log was burned in honor of the god Thor, at the feast of the winter solstice, and while some would trace the decoration of our churches to the passage in Isaiah: "The glory of Lebanon shall come into thee; the fir tree and the pine tree and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary," it is more probable, as Dean Stanley tells us, that the custom is borrowed from the heathen, who suspended green boughs and holly about their houses that the fairies and spirits of the wood might find shelter in them. Even the idea of our Christmas tree is said to be taken from the legendary "Eternal Tree," which had its roots on earth and its top in heaven.

If Christmas be no more than a time of feasting and heathen observances, it may well rank with the numerous festivals in honor of heathen gods, but while there is no doubt that in some cases it is merely this, yet we believe that to the hearts of most people in Christian lands there come with the chimes of Christmas day some faint echo of the song of the angels; some memory of the story which the Bible has told, which poets have sung, and mothers have taught. As there can be no true Christmas for us except as the spirit of the Christ is manifested, so there can be Christmas in heathen lands only where His star has risen and where He is born in the hearts of men.

"Who is Jesus and what is Christmas?" wrote a puzzled Japanese father to the teacher of a mission school. The answer to this question is reaching thousands of homes through the boys and girls in these Christian schools.

## CHRISTMAS IN INDIA.



In India Christmas is known as "*burra din*," the great day. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that English rule in India makes it a universal holiday, but the time is surely coming when Christ's rule in India will make it in reality "the great day."

The request that I write on this subject brings vividly to mind one delightful Christmas spent among the Telugus in the city of Madras.

It was in the cool season, and the graceful palms, the evergreens of the tropics, were fresh and bright after the long rains. The vivid red of hibiscus and poinsettia, with the scarlet and orange of the flowering trees, made parks and compounds gay. The scent of jasmine and orange blossoms was an agreeable change from the ordinary Indian street odors. It seemed decidedly more like Fourth of July than like our ideal Christmas, for we had not a flake of snow nor a hint of frost; no sort of conveniences for Santa Claus, as there is not a respectable chimney in Madras, not even on the Chepauk palace, and the children know nothing of stockings; not a fir tree, nor a sprig of holly gladdens the eyes; no delicious odors of mince pies and plum puddings greet us; we pass no markets with plump white turkeys, and crimson cranberries, but pick our way through filthy streets, thronged with neglected children who never dreamed of Santa Claus, never heard of Christmas,

and do not know the story of the Christ child.

And yet, in this very city, there came under my window at dawn of Christmas day the sound of singing, sweet and low, a Christmas carol, composed by one of our Christian boys, a dreamy young poet, and sung by a choir of school children. They had crept up softly and surprised us. Of course we applauded, and then came a shower of gilded limes and tiny bouquets of roses, and a happy shout, "Merry Kismis." After *chota hazaar* (early breakfast) we held levee on the veranda for all our Christians, who came in gorgeous attire, several mothers carrying wee babies, clad in simple coats of oil, and clutching in their brown, dimpled hands images made of pith, gay peacocks and parrots adorned with colored paper and tinsel, their presents for the missionary family. The older girls brought trays of delicious fruits; oranges, custards, apples, and guavas, with flowers arranged about small sticks in stiff pyramids, and sprinkled profusely with rose water. For days the Christian children had been preparing for the festival, chiefly by making dozens of small calico bags—red and purple, green and yellow. These were for the "poor children" from our heathen schools. Such a happy little company of tailors they were, sitting cross-legged on the veranda, boys and girls sewing busily, laughing, chattering, and whispering secrets, or breaking occasionally into song.

## GIFTS FROM ABROAD.

Excitement ran high over the box from America. There were such treasures as small wooden pencil cases, brass thimbles, workbags, each with a spool of cotton and a paper of needles; red and blue flannel caps for the boys, with remnants of calico for jackets for the girls; two or three scrapbooks, a pair of scissors, and a few dolls. We could produce no sleds, nor skates, nor watches; no chest of tools, nor sets of books, nor games; nothing that would appeal to the cultivated taste of an American boy. There were no writing desks nor rings, no French dolls nor stick pins for the girls, but, notwithstanding these lacks, there was genuine Christmas cheer.

The older boys brought in the tree and set it up in the chapel, and the "committee" decorated it with paper chains and tinsel, and hung on each twig a little bag, adding oranges and ruddy pomegranates to heighten the beauty of their tree, which I must confess, appeared to our western eyes a trifle scrubby. Still the general effect was quite Christmasy, and we were all too happy and excited to be critical.

Long before the time announced the verandas were crowded with little brown children, trembling with eagerness and torn with curiosity to see the tree. Finally the bell rang, and the line of school children marched in, the boys wearing red *panchas* and white coats, and the girls attired in new calico skirts and jackets. Their faces shone with joy, and their hair with cocoanut oil, and as they marched they sang their carols right merrily. The little heathen joined the procession, making up with extra noise what they missed in words and tune. All were seated on the floor, packed so closely they could hardly move. Mothers crowded the doors, and peeped in the windows with exclamations and grunts of delight.

A class of girls repeated the story, "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea." How beautiful it was in the soft, liquid Telugu of these eastern maidens, the story of the young mother and little child receiving the first Christmas offerings of gold, frankincense, and myrrh! The boys told of shepherds in "the same country abiding in the fields, keeping watch by nights over their flocks," and the heavenly host seemed not far away as all repeated, down to the smallest heathen, "For unto us is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

Then the presents were distributed, the gifts from the box, and the bags filled with puppoo, a kind of parched grain, some queer oily sweetmeats, and a bit of jaggery, the black palm sugar. Eager faces mani-

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