

A Missionary's Vuletide

THE Hudson Bay Co's supply brigade for the interior of British Columbia wound its sinuous course through the tortuous defiles of the upper Caribou range. These impressive mountain guardians to the great valley of the Northern Interior of British Columbia, an example of all that is grandly beautiful and menacing in natural scenery, reared their stately peaks far above the rocky gorge, at the bottom of which the brigade might be seen steadily pursuing its toilsome way. One could almost imagine them gazing with a smile of majestic contempt at the little band of men and horses, who, profaning the sacred calm of nature's own solitude with vulgar laughter and noisy trappings, dared to enter their mighty embrace.

The Hudson Bay Co. that powerful leviathan of the early fur trade, that directed the commercial, political, and judicial destinies of half a continent, from its comfortable office in London, was forced to rely entirely in those days before the railroad or steamboat, upon this yearly pack-horse brigade for its supplies of guns, blankets, glass beads, etc., the currency of primitive barter before the advent of the all-powerful dollar. This particular brigade started from Fort St. James the H. B. Co. post in the Northern Interior of British Columbia, or New Caledonia as it was then called, and with its cargo of valuable furs safely deposited in long flat bottomed canoes, proceeded to Vancouver by the Fraser river. On arriving at this depot, the furs being transhipped to the company's ocean steamships, the brigade attached themselves to a convoy of pack horses laden with the necessities of trade. This mode of travel was found necessary on the return journey, owing to the impossibility of paddling the heavy pack canoes against the swift current and raging whirlpool rapids of this, the most tumultuous of rivers.

Attached to the brigade on this return journey of which we speak, in addition to the whole aristocracy of the interior fur trade, in the persons of the Chief Factor

and his four assistant clerks, was a man of medium stature, dark complexion, and kindly dark brown eyes, which latter as he turned them suddenly upon you, shone with the holy light of an unbending resolution, in the search for and salvation of souls, the hall mark and stamp of the Christian missionary.

Father Demers had attached himself to the company's caravan from motives of safety and despatch. Two winters ago he had made converts of the Chilcotin Indians in the vicinity of Fort St. James. His pressing duties, however, calling him away ere he had time to implant the seed of Christianity in their souls firmly enough to insure a fruitful growth, he had promised to return the following year and celebrate with them the anniversary of the Saviour's birth.

In pursuance with the fulfilment of this promise, the heroic missionary was again braving the dangers and discomforts of the wild, and the terror of hostile savages on the way, to carry the message of "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men," to his red children in the far north.

The neighbors of the Chilcotins, the Beavers, unconverted to Christianity, were a race savage and relentless in warfare, unbelievably cruel in the deliberate tortures with which they treated their unfortunate captives. A defeat with great slaughter at the hands of the Chilcotins, in an encounter a few days previous, had rendered them savagely vindictive, and woe to the poor unfortunate who should fall into their hands, if he were in any way connected with the hated tribe.

Father Demers having separated from the brigade, found himself on the morning of Christmas Eve, travelling through the country of these people, in company with Kwah a faithful Chilcotin warrior, on whose mind the teachings of "The Black Gown," (a poetically expressive soubriquet applied by the Indians to the missionary) had made a sufficiently lasting impression to induce him to brave the almost certain death of being caught in an enemy's country, in order to meet the good father and guide him safely to the lodges of his people.

They were proceeding cautiously through a scrubby undergrowth overshadowed by giant Douglas fir, a

sight to be seen only in the primeval magnificence of British Columbia forest, when suddenly as if by preconcerted signal, the surrounding bushes became peopled by hostile Beavers, their bows bent and arrowheads pointing at the breasts of the unfortunate captives. Father Demers and Kwah recognizing the hopelessness of their position, shut off as they were from help in the very middle of the Beaver country, submitted to the inevitable and permitted themselves to be bound. They were then forced to walk in front of their captors, who from time to time prodded them with their lance-like spears of fishbone. Arriving at length at the Beaver village they were rebound hand and foot, and thrown into a wigwam there to await the beginning of these devilish proceedings, capable of emanating only from the mind of an uncivilized savage driven by that seven-pronged goad of Beelzebub, "Revenge."

The Christmas moon shed a pale light on the little clearing to the right of the Beaver village, the ground selected as the scene of the cruel torture about to take place. The bonds about the feet of the prisoners being loosed, Father Demers was forced to walk to the centre of the small clearing. At this point the Indians had planted in the ground a short upright stake, to which they proceeded to tie the missionary, while Kwah was forced to stand quietly by in the grasp of two powerful warriors, he being reserved for another time. The Chief then stepping back a few paces, prepared to launch the deadly tomahawk at the head of the captive. After whirling the hatchet several times around his head he was about to release it, when the radiance of a star having fallen on the countenance of the captive his head was enveloped in a divine halo. The Indian let fly the tomahawk but in some unaccountable manner the light dazzled him to such an extent, that his aim was deflected, with the result that the missile in its flight passed far above the head of the missionary. The savages were filled with wonder and imagining him a deity, hastened to release him, and fell at his feet in grovelling adoration. The good father recognizing a Heaven-sent opportunity, proceeded to implant in their minds the seed of Christian belief. He told them of how on this very

day many moons ago, the divine Saviour of the world assumed human nature, to save them from the wiles of the evil spirit. This story took deep root in the savage mind, and they hastened to prepare a Christmas feast in the honor of their new found Lord. As a token of his Christmas spirit at the festal board, the chief solemnly joined his hands with Kwah over the bow, an Indian sign of perpetual peace and brother love.

O. C. T.

A Northern Winter Night.

I gaze upon the sleeping world
Clothed in a mystic light,
The glory and the splendor of
A Northern Winter Night.

Through white-clad hills the river winds
Sinuous, sluggish and slow,
Its wave, tongues licking listlessly
The shore soft sheathed with snow.

Dim in the valley a fir grove lies,
Transformed by the northland's night,
From the haunts of sensuous summer shades
To a palace huge and white.

Upward slope the pastures ;
The grotesque fences stand
Fashioned to things of beauty
By the winter's master hand.

Silent and solemn the silvery moon
Sheds her softening radiance down
On the snow and ice, which sparkle
Like jewels in a prince's crown.

In the northern sky the auroral lights,
As the night begins to wane,
Gleam ; a heavenly fire
On the world's great window-pane.

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