Christmas in Camp

By BERNICE STEED

No glittering shop windows, gayly festooned with tinsel, heralded our Christmas. In the villages around about us, the usual covering of dust lay upon all the articles in the little box-like shops which snuggled close to the side of the even more dusty roads. The flies swarmed thick round the piles of sweets spread out in the bazaar. Pariah dogs, covered with sores, growled at us as we passed through the narrow streets. Nothing, absolutely nothing, around us told that the greatest day of all the year was fast approaching. Everything in the villages seemed just as it had been every day through the year and every day through the past centuries.

But how could it be otherwise? The dust of idolatry, caste and

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Gladness

The afternoon was warm and stuffy—the kind of weather one does not like to be in. The glaring sun had scorching heat. Even to breathe seemed like work. I sat down to write and the weather got into my letter. But after exhausting this old topic, which so often we use for filler when trying to get started in conversation, I wrote on and after a while was finishing my letter when I awoke to the fact that the air was now in swift motion. The sky had grown dark and the rumbling of thunder announced the nearness of a storm. Soon it arrived. It was a typical rain-storm of the tropics. At first the moisture was only a mist but this quickly became a down-pour of warm rain. The wind blew all the depression that had been in the air away and there rushed in upon us wave after wave of the most delightful coolness. Now, it was like an elixir of life to breathe.

The roar of the wind was music to the trees and shrubbery. They waved their arms and clapped their hands and danced with such grace and glee as only beautiful trees in a storm are able to show. And while they sang for joy, millions of clear liquid diamonds dropped from the sky upon them, bathing all their leaves to perfect cleanness, then rolled to the earth and made little rivers of gladness which hurried away on errands of goodness. All the sultriness had fled away. The birds sang, children laughed and shouted; joy was everywhere. A magic wand had waved above us.

The Hand that waved that wand is the unchanging Hand which bestows every good and perfect gift that comes to man. What He does in His creation around us He longs to do in His creation within us, for men are more to Him than trees and birds. Listen while He speaks—“For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring.” “Ho, everyone that is thirsty, come ye to the waters.” “If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink.” “The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.” “The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose . . . for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.” “For as the rain cometh down . . . from heaven. . . . So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth. . . . For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.” “And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”
vileness had settled upon the hearts of men, totally obscuring Him Who had come to be the Light of the World. Many have never heard the Name that was spoken by angel voice to the virgin mother so long ago. Zenana walls still form Satan’s bulwarks against the proclamation of the Good News.

Light has penetrated the darkness in the little town of Gavan-gaon and entered a few of the humblest homes. It was close by this village that Miss Derr and I pitched our camp.

The friendly boughs of beautiful nimbus trees sheltered our tents from the tropical sun. This same grove is also the assembling place of all the village cattle and goats. Here they wait until noon time when they are taken to the jungles for pasture. When tempted to shrink from such surroundings we are reminded that the first earthly abode of our Lord was among the cattle. He bore it for us; can we not bear it for Him?

In preparation for Christmas our camp was made as clean as possible. Everything was swept outside, even the tops of the tents. The dirt floor was given the usual village treatment to keep down the dust as much as possible. The mats upon which we seated our guests were taken to the river to be washed. Food was prepared in advance as far as possible, to leave Christmas Day free for other things.

The midnight stillness of Christmas Eve was broken by sweet carols sung by our Bible-woman’s daughters, who were with us for the holidays. How welcome was this sound after hearing night after night only the beating of the drums at some heathen shrine as we closed our eyes in sleep, and the shrill rasping song of our neighbour at her grinding in the early hours of the morning. There is no music so sweet as that of praise to the living God.

There was a rustling sound and we looked out to find that
strings of brightly coloured tissue-paper pendants decorated the camp. These had been prepared entirely unbeknown to us. These thoughtful acts warmed our hearts.

In the early hours of the morning children and grown-ups gathered in the grove to await the arrival of the car that should bring our guests for the day. We were soon ready for service. The arching boughs overhead formed our cathedral and the blue of the sky, seen in patches through the leaves, was more beautiful than the stained glass windows of Europe's most ornate cathedral. The Hindus far outnumbered the Christians and we were glad to have them hear about the reason for our joy. The congregation sat upon the ground, and some leaned against the trunks of trees. As in Bethlehem when the shepherds worshipped the Babe, our words of praise were punctuated by the lowing of cattle, but Immanuel was with us, so surroundings mattered not. It brought great joy to our hearts as we remembered that these Marathi songs of praise were forming part of the great harmony of songs from all nations, in many tongues, that was ascending to God that glad day.

There were perhaps no more attentive listeners in the company than a class of school boys, mostly Hindus, who had been coming to our tent three mornings a week for Bible-study ever since the establishment of our camp. When the Christian children gave their contributions to the programme the Hindu boys, with as much pride as any, recited a long passage of Scripture. As God's servant was giving the message it was evident from their prompt responses that the hours spent in teaching these boys had not been spent in vain. Picture cards were distributed at the close of the service. These were so popular that our camp was stormed for some days afterwards with requests for cards for some boys that had been off to the jungle and had thus missed getting them.

After service, Indians and missionaries sat on the floor and ate of the good curry and rice dinner that had been prepared for us. A service in the afternoon was also well attended and again the message of life was given forth. As the sun sank low upon our Christmas Day we were reminded that our friends in America were just beginning theirs. Thus as the sun moved westward the globe was encircled with His praise.

In the midst of all the joy there is an ever-reverberating note of sadness in our hearts because so many about us have not learned to know our Saviour. We covet your prayers that the Light of the World may penetrate the darkness of every village of India.
Nestled among some low hills half way between Chandur and Amraoti is the little forest village of Chirodi. Approaching it from the highway all one sees at first is a large mass of white earth ruins which at one time served as a fort for protection from marauding bands of robbers. Going nearer, one sees huts or hovels that house the present population.

Chirodi is inhabited almost entirely by Banjaris, a brave tribe who usually settle within jungle areas. The Banjari people have on the whole had very little gospel influence. They too need Christ.

We thank God that we have a resident gospel light in Chirodi. Some years ago a heathen lad heard of the Saviour in a village meeting similar to the one in the illustration. His heart was hungry and he soon decided that he needed Christ in his life. Some months later he, his wife and his oldest brother were baptized. On being baptized this young man gave up his Hindu name and took the name of Silas. Since his conversion, Silas has grown wonderfully in the Lord. He thoroughly believes in the power of prayer and he has proved God many times. Whenever a member of his family is fever-stricken, he calls for the missionary or Indian pastor to pray, and God gives deliverance.

We praise God for this testimony in Chirodi. He has a Banjari friend called Ramu who is a very brave young man. Some months ago Ramu was tying a goat in the jungle as bait for a panther which a doctor from Amraoti hoped to shoot. While he was tying the goat the panther sprang out of a nearby thicket. Ramu threw his spear, true to the mark, and when the panther made a second attack, he finished it off with a second spear that he always carries
with him. When I asked Ramu about this experience, he modestly
told me that he had, all told, killed five panthers with his spear. We
covet men of such bravery for our Lord's service.

Will you not pray with us that Ramu, too, may learn to love
and honour the Lord Jesus Christ?

Promoted

On September 15th, Miss Jeanne L. Rollier, one of God's
brave, true handmaidens, was taken by His wish to be with Christ. Miss Rollier was for some years one of our Alliance missionaries in
India. She afterwards served in our French-Indo-China field and as
teacher of French (her mother tongue, in which she was an adept),
in the Missionary Training Institute at Nyack. In recent years a
great sufferer, she lived in Christ-given triumph above it all, and to
the end was more than conqueror through His grace. Her crowning
day is just ahead.

Miss Cora Bjoland left India for furlough more than two years
ago. Her heart was still with India and His work here and she
longed to return. But her heavenly Father had better things in store
for her and recently took His child home to live with Himself. She
was a whole-hearted worker in the vineyard of the Lord and in the
day of His triumph will be a sharer in His glory, along with all who
love His appearing.

Our Annual Convention

The annual convention of our missionaries in Akola, October
28th—November 4th, was much blessed of the Lord. We believe
that the characteristic note of this conference was a deep heart-cry for
a heaven-sent revival in all our hearts and the hearts of our Indian
people. This God-given longing for a great outpouring of the Holy
Spirit will surely mean something definite in days to come. He who
makes hungry will feed us and the longing for a mighty working of
the Holy Ghost in India can come only from God Himself.

News and Notes

The special prayer conferences held for our Mission workers in
the rainy season were followed by similar gatherings for our Indian
pastors in the month of October. In these gatherings, as in the earlier
ones, the Lord blessed His servants as they discussed and prayed over
methods of work and other problems and responsibilities of His
under-shepherds.
We are pleased to announce that Mr. Lauren R. Carner passed his second examination in Marathi, early in October. He will now be numbered among the "senior" missionaries and begin in real earnest the actual work of a district-missionary.

We take this opportunity of giving thanks to our heavenly Father for restoring to health a number of our missionaries and of our Indian evangelists who had been ill, some of them seriously ill.

Pray for Mrs. O. H. Lapp and for Miss Julia Derr, both of whom have suffered much in recent months, that the healing touch of our Lord Jesus may be given them.

This number of the BULLETIN will reach our friends in Europe and America not long before Christmas. The missionaries wish and pray for each and all of you a most blessed holiday season. Let us live and pray for the kingdom of peace and goodwill which the return of our Lord will bring forever to our sad old world.

Our missionaries are now in the year's harvest-season. The crops are being gathered by the Indian farmers and the Lord's husbandmen are out in the districts, seeking for the golden grain for God's garner. Help in the harvest by praying for the labourers.

All unintentionally the name of Mervyn Lloyd Alfred Gustafson was omitted from our news items in the last number of the BULLETIN. This little gentleman arrived on June 27th and has won his way to the hearts of all who have met him. He is the youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Gustafson.
On Sunday, November 1st, Orvil Edwin arrived at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Olan G. Schlatter to gladden their hearts. The Lord bless and keep these little ones who are the objects of His special love and care.

Mr. and Mrs. A. I. Garrison, with Margaret and John; Mrs. L. J. Cutler and Miss Faith Cutler; and Miss Harriet Beardslee have returned from furlough. As they enter upon their new terms in India we wish them the best and most fruitful service they have yet seen.