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ST. DUNSTAN'S IN INDIA

With the Blinded Soldiers
of this War

(By Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Clutha
McKenzie)

FROM the blinded Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Clutha McKenzie, of New Zealand, now stationed in India at the new St. Dunstan's for blinded soldiers of this war in that country, comes the following graphic article, descriptive of a social and musical evening in that part of the Empire.

"IT was not a formal affair, just a family affair," writes Sir Clutha, "with 20 blinded soldiers, the sole audience being the Colonel Sahib and his Mem-sahib, and the Adjutant Sahib and his Memsahib, with the men sitting cross-legged on the matting floor of the recreation room before a bright fire in the open hearth, for Indian nights can be chill.

"The music masterji (maestro) announces the opening chorus. It commences with a Western tonic sol-fa scale, up and down, and then goes into a minor dirge-like chant. The masterji, with a 'harmony' (a kind of piano-accordion), Devigavas and Fakira, with djollok, accompany as well as sing. The last-mentioned instruments are drums, skins stretched tightly over cylinders of wood, played with bare hands. Much of the music is pleasant when one gets used to it—plaintive at times, like the music of the Highlands—and sometimes recalling a cat-fight on the tiles.

"We applaud, and we all warm up. Memraj Ram then gives a solo accompanying himself. He has lost his right hand, but uses the forearm to work the bellows, whilst he plays the keys of his instrument with the three good fingers of his left hand. Naik Bichindas does a little tom-tomming in the background. Memraj hasn't a good ear, so Masterji occasionally joins in the solo to bring the singer back to the track. It is a good effort for a maimed man, We call 'Shahbash! Shahbash!'

"Yankat, a Mahratta, follows with a song from the distant western ghats, singing with feeling. Krischinsagar, due to his wounds is, like Memraj, also a three-fingered, left-handed artist, and addresses sacred Rama in song.

"There is a change of tempo. Indira Bahadur, from Everest's snowy flanks, takes his turn. He is only a boy, with tiny girl-like hands. He ties on anklets of little silver bells. The 'harmony' and drums strike up a brisk Nepali rhythm, and Indira, bells a-tinkling merrily, does his stuff in a clear space in the middle of the room, while we keep time by clapping.

"Then we all call for Margo Bundo. We call in half a dozen languages that he must do something. A Dravidian, from the far south, he speaks only Tamil, and, poor chap, he might be deaf and dumb, for none of us can speak his tongue. Nevertheless, he gets the idea.

(continued on next page)