

A CHIEF'S VIEW OF THE DEVIL.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE last number of *The Open Court* contained a letter from the Rev. J. J. Emmengahbowk (The-Man-Who-Stands-Before-His-People), a native clergyman of great distinction among the Ojibways, an Indian tribe that has been distinguished in its history for moral earnestness and friendliness toward the whites. We need not say that our correspondent speaks the language of his people, and his knowledge of English has been acquired, not in early childhood, but in school and by his intercourse with government officials and other English-speaking people.

His letter appealed to the editor for several reasons, and the attention which it attracted in several circles proved that its publication was justified. It might have appeared advisable to correct the mistakes in the letter, but our readers will agree with us that it was a document, and on that account it was important to leave it in the exact shape in which it was received. We felt confident that our readers would not misunderstand or misjudge our motives, and we appreciated at the same time the nobility of our correspondent's character, who defined the idea of evil in terms of which a modern philosopher or a clergyman of white congregations need not be ashamed. The editor purposely abstained from making any comments on the letter, and it is a great satisfaction to him that the *Chicago Evening Post* published an editorial communication by Mr. Justin W. McEachren which brings out the significant points of the Rev. Emmengahbowk's letter to such an extent that we take pleasure in republishing it :

"There is both humor and food for reflexion in the copy of a letter appearing in the miscellaneous department of the current *Open Court*. This quaint communication comes from the White Earth Indian reservation, and is from the pen of

Rev. J. J. Emmengahbowk (the Man-Who-Stands-Before-His-People). It has to do with Dr. Paul Carus's *History of the Devil*, published not long ago, and makes a request with which the good doctor doubtless has complied before this.

"To the simple mind of this Ojibway chief it is difficult to understand how a man 'can make a picture of an object unless he saw it.' Dr. Carus presents an absorbing study, a remarkable and scholarly work, embellished with illustrations of his satanic majesty from the earliest Egyptian frescoes, from pagan idols, old black-letter tomes, quaint early Christian sculpture, down to the model pictures of Doré and Schneider. To the ordinary scholar this is instructive and suggestive; but to the Indian it is actual. How could any person print such pictures of the devil unless he had seen him, had 'talked with him as a friend'? No wonder the pagan Ojibway chiefs are interested. They have their conceptions of the 'evil spirit,' just as they have of a Supreme Being—Gitche-Manito. They can understand the pictures which go with Dr. Carus's text. Would 'the gentleman be so generous to give his book to the inquisitive chief'?

"This Emmengahbowk is a remarkable character. Of the people before whom he stands Dr. W. Thornton Parker says: 'Their religious character is one of their most conspicuous traits, and we are bound to acknowledge and respect them for it. A people devout and with a strong and genuine belief in the "Great Spirit," in the "Mighty Creator," in the "loving attentive Father,"—a people devoted to their country, to their nation, to their homes (humble though they be), to their families, and whose love for their children is beautiful beyond description,—such a people demonstrate beyond a doubt that their religion is practical, genuine and worthy of recognition. These people are an inspiration to the palefaces who have met them.'

"And when Dr. Parker asked Emmengahbowk, the beloved Indian priest of the Episcopal mission at White Earth, Minn., what actuated him in risking his life to save paleface woman and children from capture and death, he answered: 'They have been kind to me, and I could not bear to have them harmed: and it was my duty as a Christian.'

"Truly, such a conception of manliness and duty should be an 'inspiration to palefaces.'

"It will be noticed from Emmengahbowk's ingenuous letter that he does not share the pagan chief's views on the 'History of the Devil.' To him the evil allures by some promised good. The devil to this priest, no matter how he may be pictured, is dangerous because appearing in an attractive guise. But to the inquisitive pagans he is a personality as various as their imaginations. While they would like to see the devil in proper person, they are almost equally curious to know something about a man who can 'make pictures of the devil,' who has talked with him as a friend. Emmengahbowk's faith and Christian enlightenment prompt him to say he never has seen the evil one nor dreamed of him, nor imagined his appearance; but to his questioners, still held by the fancies and nature interpretations of primeval times, 'sometimes he comes with all the beautiful form like any human being, sometimes in the form of a mountain, and other times in the form of a beautiful green leaf, of course with all their enticing bait, or other word allure.'

"And just here is where Emmengahbowk's quaint missive becomes instructive. The Indian's conception of the devil is safer than that of the early fathers of the Church. To these children of the forest the most trying temptations to evil are baited with promise of good. To the early Christians—and not a few modern ones—evil was painted in the most repellent of colors; the devil was a repulsive monster; sin was something abhorrent. Not so with the Indian's idea. They picture

the evil spirit as something which allures. They must look closely at what seems most attractive to them because it may conceal the cloven hoof. To them evil is dangerous because often pleasing, and they expect to combat the devil through their fancies of the beautiful—'the mountain' and the 'beautiful green leaf' rather than in such pictures as those of the Egyptian frescoes, pagan idols, or even the drawings of Doré. Surely this is safer—not to dwell upon results—than the one-time popular conception of forked tail and cloven hoof seen through a lurid sheen of fire and brimstone."