

THE INDIANS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

HE following extracts from Bishop Ridley's recent letters to the C.M.S. (England) will be read with interest:

No missionary can be dull among these Zimshian Indians, unless, failing in his duty, he keeps them at arm's length. Where they give their confidence they give no rest. They have an alertness of mind and purpose which forbids stagnation. This is my seventeenth year among them, and yet I rarely pass a day without hearing something of interest or being presented with some strange problem to puzzle over.

At home, great orators are rare whose lips drop wisdom; the rest of us tremble with self-consciousness when forced to hem and haw. Out here, all adult Indians, like the fearless wild flowers everywhere, blossom out at a moment's notice in ready and florid speech with becoming modesty. I do not deny the inconvenience of this fine gift when the listener's time is precious, or his breakfast interrupted through its exercise. For instance, this very morning twenty-six Kitkatlas (counting, like them, the small boy as nobody) were just about to embark in their canoe, when, as an afterthought, the chief, Sheuksh, sent up a few of his leading men to ask some questions and obtain a written introduction to a distant band of Indians they were about to visit—as I shall relate.

The breakfast begun must wait. We are not here to eat, but to work. Having satisfied my untimely visitors, I returned to chilled coffee and porridge, to finish it while discussing with my Indian churchwarden, who had just then come in, how to go on with the church-roof repairs now that two of the sheets of zinc had sunk in deep water between the ship and the wharf. On the entrance of the bride of the week he withdrew. Three Kitikshans from the Skeena river awaited her departure to ask for my sanction to a new branch of the diocesan Church Army. Every detail must be gone over. To urge brevity increases prolixity. This is the way they proceeded, after a respectful preface: "Chief, the work of God is no light thing. All parts are weighty. Small things are parts of large things. Little things differ not from large in things of God. God makes no difference. If otherwise thou wilt explain. In our ignorance so we think, but thou art older and wiser than we. What thou sayest we will do. Now, listen, chief." Of course, I listen.

Among other greater things such questions as these were put: "When praying in the street must we kneel when it is muddy?" "Look out for the clean spots," was the reply. "We will never look on strong drink, but must we give up tobacco?" "I do not smoke; you are

free men. Drunkards do not enter heaven. Nothing is said about smokers. I cannot afford it." "Now, chief, we ask no trivial questions. When we are ready to burst with emotion may we find relief in crying out in church 'Amen,' or 'Alleluia'?" This I saw to be Salvationist infection, and asked, "Do you know the meaning of those words?" "No." "Then don't say words without meaning. God looks for sense from men and noise from dogs. Say aloud the responses for relief." "May women preach in a loud voice on the streets?" "Yes, if they speak wisely." "Then why not in church?" "Beause St. Paul says, 'No.'" "Suppose men on the street laugh at us?" "Pay no heed." "Suppose they make a row in our house-meeting?" "Turn them out." "May we appoint men to do this?" "Yes, the strong and good-tempered ones."

In travelling on the Skeena river I stop at every village. In the Christian villages one meets troops of healthy, well-clad children, who fearlessly meet our gaze. The dwellings are either new or in good repair, and full of modern furniture, the gardens fenced in, the roads not mere tracks. One sees signs of comfort, cleanliness, and ambition; one hears the school-bell and whirr of the sewing machine, and after the day's work is done music right and left, unless drowned by the volume of sound from the public hall, where the band practises each week-day evening all the winter through almost.

The heathen are dirty, ragged, dispirited, and jealous of the Christians. To avoid treading in filth one must walk on the crooked trails with circumspection. The children stand at a distance, huddled together. I have seen two, even in the biting blast of winter, wrapped in a single piece of blanket, their only covering. The houses are rotting, propped up, and patched. Squalid within and dismal without, they truly show the moral and physical condition of their ignorant and superstitious inhabitants. These cling with a passionate resolve to the *yaok*, or potlatch. "That is our mountain," say they, "our only joy, dearer than life. To prison and death we will go rather than yield." Yet this is their ruin. It is impossible to heighten the contrast between the Christless and the Christian people of the same tribes. Great is our present reward in seeing the elevating, as well as saving, effects of a pure Gospel.

A few years ago I appointed the Rev. F. Stephenson, a brother of Mr. E. Stephenson, to Giatwangak, thirty miles below Hazelton. The agrarian trouble soon sprang up, and the Indians tried to exclude all whites from their territory. Mr. Stephenson was turned out of his hut and ordered away. He lived for some time under the trees, and broke back into his own house as soon as the guard over him was