

Along the Line.

BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Letter from REV. J. C. SPENCER, dated KISH-PI-AX,
SKEENA RIVER, April 2nd 1889.

WE take pleasure in sending you a few notes concerning our work in this far-off place. We do this more readily because the people along this river have held more or less of the public attention for the last year. The call was sounded loud and long for some one to help spread the Gospel among these poor people, but all to no purpose, for word came that no one could be sent, although the people had asked many times for a white missionary. Those who understand the Indian race, how rapidly they are disappearing, and how many of the young people are being led astray, were disappointed and depressed on account of the decision of the Mission Board in Toronto.

It is true the Indians have a little light, but in many cases it only bewilders them more and more. When they see the unkind feeling existing between white men and missionaries, and especially between missionaries of the different societies, a question arises difficult to be understood by the tutored, much more so by the untutored, mind. Every summer, many of the inland people go out to salt water to work in the canneries, where many of them, owing to their own proneness to evil, and their ignorance of the gilded baits placed before them, are led astray by the demoralizing influence prevailing almost everywhere up and down the coast.

Brother Pierce and myself left Fort Simpson, Oct. 24th, 1888, on board the *Glad Tidings*, which left us at Aberdeen.

Aberdeen is at the mouth of the Skeena, and this left what is commonly called one hundred and eighty miles of river to ascend in a canoe propelled in smooth by paddles and in swift water by poles or a tow-line. Water was low, weather was getting cold, and navigation, difficult at the most favorable season, was much more so now. As we proceeded on our way, all nature gradually assumed a more serious aspect, while the fast falling leaves and frost-bitten vegetation told us the climate was changing to a colder, though in some respects a more pleasant one.

As we passed through the Coast and Cascade ranges, the many mountains groaned as the chilling fall breezes swept along their thickly-timbered sides, and frowned down upon us as intruders on the solemn solitude. The variety of scenery is almost unsurpassed, from the beautiful bench land covered with grass and pea vines, to the bold and barren bluffs and rocks raising their rugged brows far above the restless and ever-changing clouds, and in many places terminating in eternal snow. As we passed one village after another, the tall totem-poles pointed out the height of folly and superstition of these people, while the carvings upon them all, in a sitting posture, were to us vivid indicators of the gross darkness in which the Indian race has so long been sitting.

There is much on all sides to enlist the attention of an observing person—the sweeping curves of the

river, the ancient and irregular villages on its banks, with graves around and among their houses, the sad and doleful wail as it arises from those graves, poured out by the friends of the departed who have passed away without the joyful hope of a glorious resurrection; the tattered and neglected appearance of the children, who shun the approach of strangers, especially white men; the uncouth and uncultivated men and women who come out to look at all passers-by; the great numbers of dogs to be seen in every village; these with many other sights and sounds so strike the new-comer as to produce feelings far more easily felt than described.

On our way up, we passed Kitzegucla, the scene of Brother Pierce's labors. The number of small houses erected or in course of erection, as compared with the old heathen houses and changed appearance of the people, show that a great change is being brought about. Sixteen miles farther up is the village of Hazelton, or what is usually called Forks of Skeena. This is the site of the Hudson's Bay Post, and a mission now under the ministrations of Rev. Mr. Field, sent out by the Church Missionary Society.

Mr. Field's experience in both Asia and Africa has well prepared him for his difficult task.

About three miles from here is the village of Hugwil-get, a tribe in many respects very different from any or all on this river, especially in language. It is an abandoned Roman Catholic mission, consequently not the same as dealing with heathen people. Brother Edgar is laboring among them, and we hope his efforts will be abundantly blessed, although the work so far has not been so encouraging as we would like.

Passing on from Hazelton, three miles above is a large canyon; here the river was frozen over, and we were obliged to land, unload our supplies, and bid farewell to the kind friends who had accompanied us, they returning to their homes, while we pushed on to our mission still farther up.

At the time of our arrival, the village was a scene of great activity, people coming in from all directions with wood on their backs, others going to and fro with articles of merchandise preparing for the evening potlatch, which, with its accompaniments, is the curse of all these tribes, because it impoverishes and degrades everybody.

The sun had just taken its last glance at what struck us as a strange sight, and the western sky blushed as the stately mountains, capped with snow, reflected the genial rays of the parting king of day. Soon as the evening shades prevailed, the moon took up the wondrous tale, and when night fully set in, sounds of singing, shouting, music and dancing, floated out upon the cold, still air. Mingled with these were the doleful wail of the widowed mother at the grave of her loved one, the gleeful shout of the children in their evening sport, and the solemn whoop of the owl in the neighboring wood, these sounds mingled with the sullen roar of the river, and the strange sights presented to the eye, caused impressions never to be forgotten. Here we are now in a heathen village with the most glaring evidences of superstition and ignorance on all sides, even to the pile of blackened wood which shows where the last body had been burned according to the tribal custom.