

Northern Messenger

Mr W Branscombe 1828 10/2

KILLAMS MILLS NB

VOLUME XXXVI., No. 36

MONTREAL, SEPTEMBER 6, 1901.

30 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid.

Among the Indians of British Columbia

(“The Christian.”)

Among the most striking narratives told at the Ecumenical Missionary Conference, held in New York last year, was that by Bishop Ridley, of the transformation which has taken place in thirty-five years among the Indians of British Columbia through the preaching of the Gospel. At the beginning of that period, he said, “there was not a Christian from the tidal waters, hundreds of miles to where the rivers rise in the midst of the mountains. Now there is not a tribe or a community without its church and school and band of Christians.”

The diocese of Caledonia lies to the western portion of British North America, stretching from Alaska southward along the seaboard. Scattered over the area are about 35,000 Indians, a number of the tribes rising above all the others on the continent with respect to intellectual and material progress. When Bishop Ridley first knew the country all was different; but dangers which were faced in Christian confidence gave place before the preaching of the Gospel. On one occasion a man stepped forward from a crowd of 150, deliberately spat in Bishop Ridley's face, then knocked him down and kicked him. That very Indian afterwards took the missionary by the feet and begged his pardon, and died a triumphant Christian after witnessing a good confession.

The leader of the boldest band of pirates on that coast himself related afterwards how on one occasion he and his followers were overcome by the silent gaze of a small congregation of Christians. On a Saturday evening the heathen went in, ordered them to cease praying, tore up the Bibles, destroyed the building with axes and crow-bars, and as the tower presented unexpected difficulties set fire to it. One of the younger Christians asked, ‘Shall we not fight for the house of God?’ to which a more experienced member replied, ‘No, Jesus never fought, he died; we will die rather than fight.’ Then began a change in the tribe. At his baptism one of the men said, ‘From that night onward I dreaded the Spirit of God. Out on the ocean or where the snow peaks looked over the seas, there the spirit of God followed me, and I was afraid, and when I hunted among those peaks, the Spirit of God hunted me, and I was afraid.’ Another man who was one day holding the end of a tape measure in the laying out of the best site in the town for a church, said, ‘Bishop, do you know that hand set fire to the church, and until I heard the native preacher say that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin, I never had peace in my heart.’

Bishop Ridley counts it among the greatest privileges of his life that two of the five translations of the Word of God for these Indian tribes are his handiwork. A thoughtful man said to him, ‘Before you gave us the Book you threw links before us, and we picked them up, but they did not fasten us anywhere. You have given us now the chain, and it is a golden chain, binding us all together and all to God.’

The influence of contact with irreligious Europeans and Americans is most deplorable. Drunkenness spreads rapidly, and all too readily the example of loose living is copied. ‘Licence to the Indians is more deadly than bondage, and the whites sink with them from our standard, more hopelessly low.’ The utter heartlessness of these traders is well brought out in an incident related by Bishop Ridley, in a letter published recently in the ‘Church Missionary Gleaner’:—

‘I was much struck with the complaint of a trader, who said the magistrate was becoming stricter of late. In one year he inflicted fines on drunken Indians amounting to £300. “But who supplied the liquor?” I asked. “The white man.” The presence of the missionary has been a stimulus to the magistrate. “He takes the Indian's money from us,” moaned the man. “You plied your trade,” I said, “until the Indian would hunt just long enough to be able to buy drink, and then trade away his women to eke out his income to live on. You kill the goose to get at the egg quickly, and now sell less than ever legitimately, to your own



BISHOP RIDLEY.

loss.” Nothing is sadder than to see these, our fellow-countrymen, unconsciously act as if thoughts of God and about their souls never come to them. Christless and reckless!’

The Bishop's pen-portraits of some of the converts include interesting and vivid touches. A group of Indians demurred to going to meet him, on account of the amount of Sabbath travelling involved, and their scruples were only removed by pointing out that Monday night also be set apart that week. On the arrival of the party, the bishop says:—

‘I proceeded to examine the catechumens, tired as they were; first an old medicine-man, then his much more attractive old wife. He was a man of few words, but of deep thought. She treated him with much respect. Her face was a finer one than could have been expected among these people, and a contrast to the deeply-lined visage of the man.

‘Next came a widow of about forty-five years of age, whom Mr. Palgrave regards as a saintly heroine. For years she slaved for

a husband with an injured spine and an idiot son. The father died a Christian, and even the idiot showed more intelligence in religious thought than in any other thing.

‘The most interesting was a younger woman who had been doctored some years ago when she was very ill. She is a pleasant and intelligent woman, and has shown as much aptitude in teaching others as in learning. She acted as interpreter with uncommon grace and ability. Like an Oriental she sat cross-legged before the person examined, and the lifting up of her eyes to heaven—such lustrous eyes—when interpreting a prayer, was a sight that reminded me of the Magdalene at the cross, one of Schaffer's lovely pictures in the Dresden Gallery. When Christ revealed to her his love, it filled her with devotion, lighting up her face with the beautiful glow that drew forth praise for the grace that works such wonders. Like most of the elderly people, the behaviour of the chief Nanook was dignified in contrast with that of the young men, who think the rude whites are the pink of perfection, and imitate them. He is a man of medium height, and, though over sixty years of age, is straight as an arrow. He lives a nomadic life. So did Abraham, noblest type of gentleman. Though his shadow never darkened porch or academy, yet no Alcibiades could behave with more grace than my vis-a-vis. He has nothing to learn as to deportment, tone, or gesture.

‘My hour's interview with him was a singular pleasure and entertainment. He spoke to me as if he credited me with power to understand him, and not to the interpreter—yet he paused for her as gracefully as he spoke. He could not grin if he tried, or smirk, but smiled as graciously as a peer of the realm when trying to conciliate and engage the superior talents of a useful commoner.

‘After this came, in the vernacular, a service of prayer and praise in the cabin. I could not understand it, yet I enjoyed and shared in it. It was a solemnizing thing to watch this company of about thirty souls worshipping in their tongue our glorious God. His light, apart from Nature's, had not reached them three years ago. They stand facing the same way, chanting the Te Deum and other canticles; they sing ‘Nearer, my God, to Thee,’ and ‘Gentle Jesus, look on me,’ both so slowly and solemnly that a new meaning supervened, adding more than ever a heavenly force and spirit to human productions. After the others had filed out, Ayediga (the interpreter) waited a brief space to thank me for saving her body from the grave (alluding to my medicine), and then sending God's men to teach her things to save her soul.

‘“He taught me much before I was baptized; tell him to teach me much more now that I am within his family, that I may know how to please him. I want to know more of God's Son, Jesu Chreest. When I know what is right I shall not do the wrong. Now I am not afraid to die. God's Son makes all safe and sure.”’

We quote the following poem from ‘Not Myth but Miracle,’ in which Dr. Ridley has preserved a metrical description of a gathering of Indians, when the chief was appealed to to suppress the lately-planted Christian faith. The lines are given as a paraphrase