

HISTORICAL SKETCHES.

NO. 13—DIOCESE OF MACKENZIE RIVER.

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(Continued.)



HE account given by Mr. Bompas of the character and habits of the Eskimo of the Mackenzie is not altogether favorable to that people, this, however, is but natural. He credits them with being kind and hospitable, civil and obliging, skilful and clever in handicraft. They are, however, liable to fits of passion and sulkiness, are lazy and sleepy, and, worst of all, addicted to lying, stealing and even stabbing. These remarks, it must be borne in mind, were made of a people long steeped in the ignorance and iniquity of heathenism, to whom the author of them was almost, if not the first, messenger of the Gospel of Light and Salvation, well nigh two decades ago. That the character of the Eskimo, like that of most other heathen nations, is capable of great improvement is abundantly shewn by the splendid results which have followed the work of the Moravian missionaries amongst the same people in Northern Labrador and Greenland. The writer is fully assured that the Eskimos of the Mackenzie River are a totally different people today from what they were when first visited by Mr. Bompas, owing, of course, to the subsequent evangelical labors of that noble missionary himself, and those of others, no less noble, who were from time to time associated with him, first as priest, afterward as bishop. He tells us, too, that the religion of these people consisted principally in the practice of dances, songs and conjuring, to which was added a system of charms and spells. They know of an evil spirit named Ath, which seems to symbolize cold and death, and which they seek to appease by their charms and spells. Their only idea of a good spirit is connected with the sun as a source of warmth and life. If they have an idea of heaven, it is of a perpetual spring; and the name they give to the ministers who bring them tidings of the world above is 'Children of the Sun.' I have not found that they have any idea of a future life. They possess, however, a tradition of the creation, and of the descent of mankind from a single pair."

After bidding farewell to these people in 1872, Mr. Bompas immediately turned his attention to the Indians of the remote Co-yukon territory, amongst whom he carried on an itinerating mission with great success, the Gospel being joyfully received by the natives.

Thus did the faithful servant of Christ toil on, in the words of the Prince of missionaries, "in journeyings oft, in labors more abundant," until early in 1874, when, having given full proof of his ministry, as well as of his fitness for the holy office of the episcopate, he was summoned to England to be consecrated bishop of the newly formed diocese

of Athabasca, which embraced all those widely separated districts traversed by Mr. Bompas in the early part of his missionary career. Consecrated on the 3rd of May in the same year, Bishop Bompas lost no time in returning to his much loved labors. He was accompanied by Mr. A. J. Shaw, who, being ordained at Winnipeg en route, was appointed to the mission of Fort Vermilion on the Peace River. His lordship secured another valuable helper in the person of an amiable and devoted wife, who immediately accompanied her husband to the lonely and isolated scene of his fruitful labors. A halo of romance surrounds this marriage, which we give on the authority of a Canadian clergyman. It is said that the bishop was engaged to this lady before leaving England, and because she was, for some reason, averse to the union, Mr. Bompas went out as missionary to "the coldest region he could find." On his return to England to be consecrated bishop, he again met her. The old love, which the frost and cold had failed to cool, returned; it was now reciprocated, and a wedding was the happy result. This lady, for whom the writer once had the happiness to perform a slight office, has lived with the bishop ever since, in the ice and snow of the North.

Bishop Bompas held his first confirmation for the Indian converts on the 22nd of November in this year, and, upon the following Advent Sunday, advanced Mr. Reeve to the priesthood. At the same time the Rev. Mr. Macdonald wrote that the Indians of the remote Yukon district were eagerly looking for the return of Mr. Bompas. In the following year the newly appointed bishop took a most important step in ordaining Mr. A. Garrioch, one of the native lay agents, since which time he has done good work in the diocese.

On the 25th January, 1876, Archdeacon McDonald writing from Fort Macpherson, Peel River, within the Arctic circle, gave the cheering report that "the Gospel spreads rapidly among the Tukudh Indians—160 adults and 154 children were baptised in 1875; communicants increased—18 voluntary leaders conducted daily morning and evening prayers and diligently instructed their countrymen;" adding that there were visible amongst them "a profound reverence for God, a growing humility and strenuous endeavour after a conformity to the Divine Will." This year, too, saw the formal organization of the then Diocese of Athabasca by the establishment of a Diocesan Synod, whose first meeting was held at Fort Simpson, on September 4th, 1876. There were present besides the bishop, Archdeacon MacDonald, the Rev. W. D. Reeve, and four or five European and native laymen. The fourth clergyman of this immense diocese, Rev. A. Garrioch, was hundreds of miles away at the time.

Bishop Bompas, writing in August, 1877, reported that in the previous thirteen months he had traversed the extreme breadth of the diocese, from the Yukon in the north-west to the borders of Rupert's Land in the south-east, a distance of at