

MISSION FIELD.

On the West Coast of Vancouver Island.

Notes of a Missionary Trip

BY M. SWARTOUT.

Oct. 21st.—In camp by the great Alberni Canal. A good blazing fire of drift-wood, a log for a seat, and a knee for a table—thus we write.

We left Alberni to-day, at about 2 p.m., for Ucluelot, Clacquaht and Ahousaht. A strong head-wind made progress slow and we only covered some five miles before evening drew on and we decided to have supper and wait for the wind to fall.

During the meal the conversation turned upon the new law for putting a stop to the potlatches, and my Indian—Kay-hai-ce-tin, by the whites called Charley Hayricks,—an intelligent fellow, told me that some of his people sarcastically proposed to stop potlatching of their own account if the white men would stop drinking whiskey! He drew a comparison between the whiskey habit and the custom of giving "potlatches," and remarked that it was the whiskey that was killing the Indian—not the potlatch. One of the Alberni chiefs, last Saturday, spoke to me in the same strain. "Don't come to me," he said, in a tone of withering scorn, "about whiskey. Indians don't make whiskey, Indians make dry salmon. Burn the whiskey houses if you want us to stop drinking."

As to the recent "Potlatch Prohibition Law," there is a great deal of discussion among the Indians. The old men, in especial, are very bitter at the interference with their customs. They have "cast their bread upon the waters" in former days and now, in C.'s age, look for the return from the potlatches given by younger men. One old man counted up some twenty or thirty dollars he annually received through the potlatches—and he did not suppose the great queen would compensate him to that extent if she prohibited the give-away feasts. Instead of being "only an Indian" had he been a white liquor dealer, he might have some hope of success in protesting against the "Prohibition"—and, at least, claim compensation.

It looked something like rain to-night so we have constructed a "house," instead of sleeping out—as I have before now done at this very place. And such a cozy house too! I found an old canoe among the driftwood on the shore. We carried it over to the fire, thoroughly dried it, and made our bed in it—spreading a sail over it. There it is now, behind a large log, as nice a sleeping place as one would wish.

Oct. 22.—The day began threateningly. With the earliest dawn we left our comfortable quarter—and away down the canal. Canal! a huge canal! Fiord, a better name—a long arm of the sea stretching inland in a mighty effort to cut this great island in twain. Down we go. Almost every foot of the way is full of legendary interest, full also of an interest to us that is not legendary. At that house, yonder, we found shelter one night, after an exhausting day's labor, and ensuing fainting spell. Here, we ran for shelter, in a fair wind,—fair but too strong for safety. There we were caught, just before daylight, in a squall, which gave us an anxious hour ere the light of morning enabled us to discern our surroundings—on so on. Down we go around Copper Mountain, past China Creek, up which are the famous gold mines; past the Nahmint River, near whose head waters roam the lordly wapito; past the new gold claim on the Coleman ranch; leaving Hawcluck, leasht Inlet, at whose head lies the squalid village of the Hawclucklessalits—down to Barclay Sound, where we catch the first glimpse of the wide Pacific in the distance. We pass the time in exchanging thoughts—my Indian giving a detailed description of the "mutiny" on the schooner *C. D. Rand*, last year, in which he was a principal; and describing also the character of his late father who, it would seem, was one of the ideal "noble red men," worshipping according to the light given him, the One Great Spirit, and living a holy life.

The sun sinks in a bank of distant cloud through which its strong red rays force themselves mellowing the sea with their dying effort, and at dark we find ourselves at Klayhoa, whose proximity is indicated by the smell of dog-fish oil! The scent of dog-fish in the air, dog-fish on the beach—piles of it—or its offal, as I found to my sorrow upon coming into contact with one heap after dark—oh what a perfume! How can I ever sleep there? But I consoled myself with the thought that it would not be so strong inside the house. House! Yes, in this case, a real house with a gable roof, and almost as good as a small cow-shed upon a respectable farm—the best house in the place (we are always given the best). The ordinary Indian house is a very crude flat-roofed (or nearly so) split-cedar boarded, floorless, smoke-dried affair and bears a strong family resemblance to the physiognomy of the old, wrinkled, sore-eyed faces of the ancients, and to their dried fish,

which is their principal article of diet. A collection of such houses—perhaps three or four, perhaps a dozen—always located upon the beach, or very near to the water—constitutes the old-fashioned *Siwash rancherie*. Here may be seen the aborigine in his native glory. Old men with a cloth wound, turban-like, about their heads—a shirt and a blanket making up the rest of their costume—reclining lazily outside; or, as in the early morning, squatting upon the beach watching intently for the first glimpse of the morning sun, devout attention to which ensures long life; old women cleaning fish, preparatory to drying, or boiling dog-fish oil according to season; stark naked children playing about; dogs snarling and fighting; decaying fish and fish offal polluting the atmosphere, and filth everywhere—this is a sight met with everywhere on this coast.

Some of the young men have begun to build modernized houses, and on the principal rancheries some very good buildings are being put up, so that a few years will doubtless witness a great change in the appearance of the *Siwash rancherie*.

At Klayhoa we met old friends who gave us a house, and a mat to spread our blankets upon, and also cooked our supper on their fire, and helped us to eat it as well; a meal, I may say, I partook of very sparingly. After supper we got the few people at present staying here, together, read the Old Book to them, had prayer, and then, after a lunch of saltless salmon, provided by our host, to sleep.

Oct. 23.—With the smell of dog-fish oil and offal clinging to us, and a hurriedly drawn cup of tea in our tin, we leave the friendly shelter of the ranch, leaving too, not all, but a part, of the small colony of camp-followers connected with such shelters, and away for Ucluelot. Passing through the central group of islands, extending some five miles along our route, we emerge into the "Western Passage," a wide channel exposed to the storms and swells of the Pacific. To-day we have a fair wind and speed along pleasantly. There in the distance, as I write, is an Indian schooner making its way to Ucluelot. Two canoes are also in sight. We are outsailing the schooner, but gradually the canoes and ourselves draw together, and in company we enter the harbor. Ah, this is like home again. In fact this is the nearest approach to home we have on earth, temporarily deserted it is true, but looked upon as home. And we love the place, not because of its beautifully paved streets, for streets it has not; nor because it has many fine houses, churches, schools, or even white inhabitants, for these are all yet in the future, nor a few scattered settlers' houses. But we love it because there is nature in all its beauty—the great sea, the pathless forests, the pure fresh air; because here we have perfect freedom from the trammels of conventionalism; and because it is home.

Yonder is the familiar form of brother Russell, by his house on the rancherie waiting to bid us welcome. A warm welcome it was and a good warm meal too. Then followed a visit to my temporarily deserted house, a visit to the Indians, a visit to the store, returning at night alone to prepare food and medicine (yes we are doctors as well as missionaries, out here—and I might add we are also school teachers, carpenters and general advisers) for a trip up the coast on the morrow, and, at near midnight, to sleep.

Oct. 24.—Breakfasted with Mr. Russell, and together with him and his good wife, who are interested in this trip to their probable future home, we pulled out of the harbor, hoisted sail and found ourselves on the broad Pacific, not an arm of it, but the great, rolling, treacherous, yet withal glorious ocean, whose waves at the same breath wash the shores of Orient and Occident, Arctic and Antarctic regions, with scarcely an isle or a rock to break the monotony of their ceaseless heaving. North-West our course. Our boat flew over the waters with the fresh wind; quickly we leave the rocky promontory outside Ucluelot Inlet and pass the rugged shore which for miles stretched away from Ucluelot, then the great "Long Beach" comes in sight, where the wreckage of thousands of miles is brought by the ocean currents. The wind dropping slightly, we raise a second sail, and thus reinforced, maintain our speed. At first we are all in good humor, but soon there were signs of a change. First Mrs. R. began to turn pale; then it became convenient for her to lie down—and later to get up—quickly—and a certain spasmodic attempt to see what was going on in the depths beneath told the tale of a strife within. The rest of us made merry, of course. What else could we do? Soon Mr. R. showed signs of weakening, and, although he said he was not sick, a very quick movement and it was all over, and the fishes were fed, but I forbear. Glad to say I never get seasick, so I laughed again.

But now we have a change of weather. The long threatened rain has come. Everything is made as comfortable as possible, and on we fly. We pass Long Beach and wend our way through rocky islets in a wilderness of waters, rocks and foam. Here we