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= OUR WORK =

HOW THE GOSPEL CAME TO FORT SIMPSON.

BY MRS. THOMAS CROSBY, VICTORIA, B.C.

HEATHENISM, with its superstition and witchcraft, had a strong hold of the people. Food and drink were thrown on the fire as an offering to the unknown divinity, while the ascending smoke bore the prayers of the poor blind worshippers. Certain mountains, and rocky, dangerous points, where the waves raged, and tossed the frail canoes were looked upon as the abode of spirits which had to be propitiated by offerings of food.

Superstition held the people as slaves, while witchcraft kept them in continual terror. A few hairs, or scrap of a garment that had been worn next the person, falling into the hands of a witch, might become the charm that would bring illness and death to the victim. The hideous medicine rattle hurried many a one to death; conjuring flourished; the dog-eaters tore the flesh from living dogs, while others made a pretence (only a pretence) of eating the flesh of dead human bodies. When trade with the whites began to be carried on, strong drink became a new factor in the heathen orgies. At times the whole tribe would be in a drunken debauch. To obtain liquor was sometimes difficult in face of the stringent liquor law. No effort was too great to get it. So it came that in the latter part of the summer of 1873 a large canoe set out from Fort Simpson for Victoria, a distance of some six hundred miles, to procure a supply of liquor for the winter feasting. A young chief and his wife were among the party. The mother of this chief

was living in Victoria. The daughter of the most powerful chief of the nation, when she was quite a young girl, was required, according to custom, to become the head wife of a chief (whose head wife had recently died), an old decrepit man, with several other wives of lower rank. This was so repulsive to her that she ran away and soon became the wife of a white man. After various vicissitudes she was settled in Victoria and being of strong personality and kindly spirit, was a woman of influence.

A few earnest Christians of Victoria, among them Mrs. A. E. Russ and the now sainted "Father" McKay, touched by the destitution of the Indians who found their way from various places to the city, many of them for immoral purposes, hired a room that had been used as a barroom, and began an Indian Sunday School and gathered the poor people in to hear the story of the cross. Soon a revival followed. Mr. Crosby and Mr. Tate visited Victoria occasionally and helped on this work as they

had opportunity. One after another was converted, and soon the Tsimpshean chieftess, "Mrs. Deeks," as she was called (Deeks being her Indian name), came to the meeting, was amazed and touched, and was soon rejoicing in the Saviour. Now her heart went out to her friends in the north, and she prayed earnestly that in some way they might be brought to the light. Just at this time her son and his wife arrived by canoe in quest of liquor. She induced them to attend the services, and soon they were both converted. Her brother, also a chief, at Fort Simpson, for whom she had prayed most earnestly, came down by steamer, impressed that he must go to see his sister; and he, too, was converted. Other Tsimpsheans were converted, and now there was quite a little band of Christian Indians. They wanted no liquor now. They had something so different to take to their people. Reaching home, they at once began to preach Jesus; and soon the entire people, numbering some eight hundred, agreed to send an appeal to

Mr. Pollard for a Missionary. Mr. Crosby, who was then in Eastern Canada, after twelve years' work among the Indians of Vancouver and the Frazer River, was appointed to Fort Simpson.

In February of 1874, Mr. Pollard visited Fort Simpson, found the young chief, Alfred Doudoward and his wife holding services, and nearly the whole village eager for the "new way." He baptized a few and encouraged them to go on, promising a missionary as soon as possible. Mr. Tate was sent as a supply for three months, until Mr. Crosby should return to the country.

In the latter part of June, 1874, Mr. Crosby arrived. The journey from Victoria was made in the Hudson's Bay Company's steamer *Otter*, a small vessel which went north as far as Wrangel in Alaska. The steamer was not to call at Fort Simpson till her return from the farther north, so the missionaries were put off in a canoe in the channel, with two or three Indians, to make their way to the village some eight or ten miles distant.

It was a lovely June morning, calm and radiant on sea and shore.

Soon we met a canoe from the village, whose occupants, learning in answer to their enquiries, that the new missionaries had arrived, begged that we would delay an hour while they should return to the village with the news and make ready to receive us. So we pulled in to a lovely bit of beach on an island, and sat down to wait awhile, at our feet the blue waters, and opposite us, behind the mainland shore, the rugged line of mountains that was to grow so familiar through the years to come. Reaching the village, we found old and young on the beach to welcome us, all in their best attire and with a hearty, joyous greeting. We had at once the entrance to every house and access to every individual. A day school taught by the missionary, assisted by Chief Doudoward and his wife, who both understood English somewhat, was attended by both children and adults. Mr. Tate, who had been supplying, now went away. Our work began

in earnest. I took the school while Mr. Crosby was kept busy preparing for building, giving out medicine, counselling with the people, etc.

An old Indian house 50 x 60 feet, fitted with rude benches made of slabs and a little reading desk, served for both school and services. So many came to school that we were obliged to take the children one half of the day and the grown-up people the other half, while three times on a Sunday and two evenings in the week the place was crowded with eager, delighted, half amazed listeners and worshippers. With a natural gift for singing they quickly learned many of our hymns, and made the place ring again. Indians of distant tribes visiting the place heard the Gospel story with astonishment; and carrying the news home, opened the way for missionary work in many places. This was only the beginning of a long conflict between Gospel truth and error and sin, yet a great change was evident. The law of God, as laid down in His Word, was acknow-

ledged as the rule of faith and practice—to love one another and live in peace was the first duty, and forgiveness of injuries began to take the place of ancient rivalries and jealousies.

In the old time, before the reign of English law, when one of a chief's family died one or more slaves were put to death to attend him in the spirit land, now all were recognized as brothers, and the old superstitious dread of death gave place to glad anticipation of the rest and glory of heaven.

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