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The Colonial Church Chronicle

May 1854

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Correspondence, Documents, &c.

VANCOUVER AND QUEEN CHARLOTTE'S ISLAND.

[The writer of the following letter, having at a late meeting of the S.P.G. made a statement on the interesting subject to which it refers, was asked to put the substance of it in writing; and we have much pleasure in complying with a request which has been made to us for its insertion.]

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,—I regret very much that I have been prevented from forwarding sooner to you the information you desired, and thought might prove useful to you in promoting “the establishment of a Mission on Vancouver’s Island, whose operations should ultimately extend to the other British possessions.” I hope, however, the information which this letter may convey will prove available on another occasion in aiding you to carry out this benevolent design.

In the arrangement of the remarks which I am about to make, I shall first state what I have learned by my own observation, and from the testimony of others well acquainted with and long resident in these territories, relative to their natural productions and local advantages, which I believe to be so great as must inevitably and shortly attract thither a great influx of trade and colonization, and (if these be not accompanied with and leavened by Christian knowledge and principle) will prove destructive to the native Indian population, as they have done to their brethren on the east side of the Rocky Mountains and to the tribes of New Holland. Secondly, I shall state some particulars of the present religious, moral, and social condition of these people, and the prospect which it presents as a field for carrying on successful missionary efforts; and, lastly, I shall venture to make a few suggestions as to the mode in which these may be; in my opinion, most efficiently directed.

The island of Vancouver lies between 48° and 49° of north latitude and 123° and 129° of west longitude; its length may be estimated at 290 miles, and its average breadth at 55. This must be considered as only an approximation to its actual extent, as no complete and accurate survey has been made, either of it or of the other possessions of the Crown on these coasts. Of these it is the largest and by far the most important to England, because of its agricultural and mineral wealth, of its proximity to China and the East, and its consequent advantages as an emporium for trade, of its position at the termination of the United States boundary line, and of the projected railway across the continent of America:—a project which, however remote its execution may appear to some, American enterprise, by the aid of borrowed British capital, will eventually and quickly accomplish through their own territories, should England continue to be insensible to the superior facilities afforded by hers for such an undertaking, and to the incalculable advantages which would result therefrom to herself and to her North American colonies.

In this island is found the only safe harbour between the 49° of north latitude and San Francisco; and there have lately been discovered most extensive fields of coal, not inferior in quality to the best Newcastle, and these are now partially worked by the Hudson's Bay Company by Indian labour, and sold at a large profit in California; and doubtless, if the enterprise be carried on vigorously from this source, the coast of the Pacific and all the steamers which trade on that ocean will ultimately be supplied, since the distance of transit is so much shorter, and the expense of carriage will be so much less than from England. Granite, limestone, and slate of the finest description, as well as lead and copper of the purest quality, are found. Not less bountifully has this beautiful island been endowed with agricultural wealth; it now produces, with a more grateful return, all the farm products of Great Britain, and as the climate is as genial as some parts of France in which the vine thrives, there is reason to expect that it would flourish here, and likewise many fruits and vegetables which have not yet been introduced. A great portion of the land in the southern part of the island consists of extensive prairie plains, covered with the most luxuriant grass and beautiful wild flowers, and dotted with oak, cedar, fir and maple trees of the finest sort, reminding one of our English parks; it is neither overgrown with brushwood, nor so thickly interspersed with large trees as to prevent the immediate upturning of the soil by the plough. This description of ground, I have been informed, pervades the island pretty generally, and great portions of the mainland. The view from Cedar Mount, at the back of Fort Victoria, is one of the most commanding and beautiful that can be found anywhere, not yielding, as I think, in these respects to the far-famed harbour of Rio Janeiro. The impression made on my mind and that of my companions, when, on a beautiful day in summer we for the first time ascended the summit of this mountain, can never be forgotten by us as long as memory lasts. To seaward we beheld the Cascade Mountains, with their summits covered with perpetual snow, and glistening in the sun, rising to an average height of 7,000 feet, and washed at their base by the peaceful waters of the straits of San Juan de Fuca; whilst to the right lay, in perfect calmness, the noble harbour of Esquimalt, embosomed in hills, and covered with timber to its water's edge, in which the *Thetis* lay at anchor, forming another beautiful feature in the scene; at our feet clusters of the most verdantly wooded islands (through whose tall trees the smoke of the Indian fires, as they roasted their salmon, gracefully ascended) were scattered, and over the surrounding waters light and exquisitely made canoes glided. Turning our backs on this view, we saw an extensive tract of the finest meadow land, varied with avenues of the largest trees, such as could not be surpassed in beauty or size by any in our own country, and with two or three inland lakes, covered with water-fowl. One thing only seemed to be wanting to render the scene perfect; namely, the presence of neat English-like cottages, and a church with its spire, standing forth amidst nature's loveliness, to testify that the eternal

power and goodness of nature's God, which were partially manifested by these his works, were fully revealed within its sacred walls; and this suggested the saddening reflection, that these regions have never yet heard "the sound of the church-going bell," and that the native inhabitants of them have not learned to worship, in spirit and in truth, the Author and Giver of all these good gifts, and of that infinitely more valuable one, "life and immortality brought to light" by the Gospel of His Son.

In the northern extremity of the island, at Fort Rupert, the trees attain an immense size; naval officers have declared that the spars made from them are of the finest description; they have been already tried in the Royal Navy, and, I believe, so highly approved of, that the supplying the dockyards from this source is under the consideration of the Admiralty. Fish of the greatest variety and best description, and to an inexhaustible extent, abounds in the waters of these coasts, especially sturgeon and salmon; the curing and sale of this latter to the people of the Sandwich Islands is a rich source of profit; the whale, both bone and sperm, are also killed.

The Princess Royal Island and Queen Charlotte's Island are very little known, as they have scarcely ever been visited by any other than the Company's traders. Her Majesty's ship *Thetis* was the first vessel of war that ever visited the last-mentioned island: she arrived there in June 1852, to protect the newly-discovered gold veins from the rapacity of adventurers. I then saw pieces of that metal pure, apparently cut or scooped out with a chisel from a larger mass, varying in weight from one ounce to twenty-two, bartered by the Indians with the Hudson's Bay Company's traders. When tested at San Francisco, it was found to be purer than Californian gold, and the quartz also more productive. There can be little doubt that if British capital be allowed free action, its outlay here will yield a large profit, and the island be much benefited thereby. Several of the agents of British mining and quartz-crushing companies at San Francisco expressed a desire to transfer the capital and machinery which they had been induced to bring there with them by delusive representations, to Queen Charlotte's Island.

In having dwelt thus long on the natural resources of these regions, I feel that I may appear more intent on bringing them to your notice as regards these advantages, than on effecting that which is my more immediate object, the establishment of a Mission to endeavour to rescue the natives from their state of heathenism and barbarism, by diffusing among them the knowledge of Him who came to be "the Light" of the world, which is the sweet and most fruitful source from whence all the blessings of civilization and the development by man of all natural qualities flow. But I have entered thus minutely into these points because I feel convinced that commerce and civilization are, when carried on under Christian principle, its two most powerful temporal auxiliaries, as well as beneficial results, and that commerce alone must soon develop, and is already developing the resources of these countries. There is already a rapidly

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increasing trade with San Francisco, the tide of emigration from the United States has already overrun its proper limits, and is urgent to pass beyond them; unprincipled adventurers from the gold diggings of California, and other parts of the world, allured by their riches, are swarming to these coasts, whose only claim to be called "pioneers of civilization" is, that they introduce all its low vices amongst the natives, and clear them off the surface of the land by the bowie knife, the revolver, and the "fire water." It is to counteract these evil agencies, already in active operation, and which I have endeavoured to show must increase, that I invoke the aid of this Society.

The amount of the British Canadian and half-breed population at Vancouver's Island, may, including the miners lately sent out to work the coal mines, amount to 500, dependents, for the most part, of the Hudson's Bay Company; in the other forts along the Sound, there may be 100 more souls. The Rev. J. Staines has resided as chaplain at Fort Victoria, receiving 100*l.* per annum from the Company as such, besides the income granted to him in remuneration for the instruction of the children of their chief factors; and in the early part of 1853, a teacher for a school for the poorer classes was sent out. This will, perhaps, be considered hardly sufficient provision for the religious care and instruction of the white population, considering how widely it is scattered, but there are besides on the islands and mainland somewhere about eighty thousand native Indians.

The Jesuits, with that indefatigable zeal which characterises them, have had missionaries in these countries for some years past; they first arrived at Fort Vancouver, in the river Columbia, in 1838, and found American Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries established there; from thence they visited different tribes in the interior and on the coast; and in 1852, a Bishop, a Canadian and British subject, with a staff of Belgian priests, arrived at Fort Victoria, and was then in treaty for the purchase of some ground near it, for the purpose of building a cathedral, &c. The success of this mission, however numerically great it may be reported to be, is virtually nominal; for I have been informed by persons whose testimony, if at all partial, may be more justly suspected of inclining to its favour than otherwise, that the Indians first came to the Jesuits in crowds, attracted by the novelty of the ceremonial, so calculated to catch the fancies of savages and infants, the ringing of bells, and possibly by the additional inducement of some trifling presents; but, that as soon as the novelty wore off, or the presents were discontinued, they withdrew, retaining no more valuable proof of conversion, than the paltry copper medal which was given them, to sling round their necks as a token of their having been baptized. I am convinced their profession of Christianity is thus merely nominal, because, in my intercourse with them, I never conversed with, or heard of one who had the most general knowledge of its doctrines, or any idea whatever of revealed religion. This is substantially admitted by one of the Jesuits themselves, who, when describing the hundreds whom, without having previously prepared or even seen them, he baptized on one day, on the occasion of

his first visit to Vancouver's Island, thus writes in a letter of the 15th February, 1844, to his superior. "Vous voyez Monsieur par cette relation, que les sauvages de Baie de Duget, montrent assez de zèle pour la religion. Cependant ils ne comprennent guère l'étendue de ce mot; s'il ne s'agissait que de savoir quelques prières et de chanter des cantiques pour être Chrétien, il n'y en aurait pas un qui ne voulût de le devenir: mais il est un point capital qui les retient—c'est la réforme de mœurs. Aussitôt que l'on touche cette corde, leur ardeur se change en indifférence." It is clear then, that the field for protestant missionary effort, bringing with it the change from barbarism to civilization, with all its comforts, as the result of the reception of those Scriptures which are "able to make wise unto salvation," is unoccupied to all intents and purposes.

The fact that these people are not idolaters, is a great encouragement to undertake missionary labours amongst them: they believe in two invisible spirits, the one benevolent, the other malevolent; the latter they reverence, or, more properly speaking, fear, more than the former; they do not, however, offer sacrifices to either of them, and they are so little influenced by the belief in their existence, that they can scarcely be said to have any religion. Corresponding to these two deities, they fable that there are two places to which departed spirits go, one of rewards, the other of punishments; the excellences of the former consist in the enjoyment of the pleasures of the chase, as the pains of the latter do in a deprivation of them. The similarity of these views with those of the Indians of Canada and the United States, clearly indicate their common origin. Their belief in the immortality of the soul may be inferred from the fact, that to the roots of the trees, in the topmost branches of which they place their dead, incased in coffins, the lower ones being cut off in order to prevent desecration, they fasten canoes, with the hunting and fishing gear of the deceased, so that, should they at any time desire food, they may have the means to provide themselves with it.

The "medicine man," who unites the character of juggler with that of quack, is one of the most important of the tribe; he is chosen annually with great ceremony and much howling. At certain seasons he retires into the woods for several days, and then issues forth under the influence of a simulated frenzy, biting whomsoever he meets, and the persons thus bitten consider themselves highly favoured; but should any one be so unfortunate as to see him during his seclusion, he, the spectator, is inevitably put to death, or to avoid this fate generally commits suicide. Should any of his patients die under the treatment of the medicine-man, his life is in danger, as death is supposed to result, not so much from want of skill or efficacy in his charms, as from the absence of a wish to cure; for this cause, I have been told, medical men are deterred from giving the sick natives the benefit of their attendance.

Wars are of frequent occurrence, generally arising from the desire of enslaving captives. One occurred when I was at Queen Charlotte's Island, the cause of which I did not ascertain. It was a most striking

picture to see the old women, with their grey hairs flowing down their backs, their shrivelled arms moving with the most violent gestures, loudly haranguing the men of the tribes, who listened with the greatest respect and attention, and urging them to battle. It is a remarkable fact, that among some of the northern tribes the females have greater influence and power than the men. They are possessed of numerous slaves; of their surpassing cruelty to whom, I regret to add, I have heard the most harrowing accounts. On the death of a chief, or any important occasion, several of these slaves are killed, not as a sacrifice, but from wanton and capricious cruelty; and when a war has arisen from the wilful or accidental death of one member of a tribe by an individual of another tribe, it is concluded generally by the execution of a slave, whose blood, together with some gifts to the friends of the deceased, make atonement for his death.

There is reason to believe that, although not habitually given to cannibalism, yet that they occasionally indulge this propensity; whether urged to it by hunger, or resorting to it as an usage of war, is doubtful. Of this there is no question, that they are "kunophagists," if not "antirophagists;"¹ for at certain feasts they tie a dog to a stake, dance round, and eat him alive, shouting loudly at the same time. They are, moreover, addicted to the other vices usual among savages,—idleness, deceit, theft, filth, polygamy, and great improvidence; yet even in these respects they are superior to most other uncivilized nations, and manifest an encouraging readiness to lay them aside when properly instructed. Many of the tribes, too, display a marked superiority in their moral and social habits, as well as in their physical appearance over others; and all, when kindly treated, are said to be faithful and docile, exhibiting considerable ingenuity and powers of imitation. The Indians of Queen Charlotte's Island are, physically and mentally regarded, as fine a race of men as can be met with; their complexion is as fair as that of the English, their address most prepossessing and bold, free from that timidity or embarrassment which seem to imply a sense of inferiority. When they came on board the *Thetis*, they made inquiries to find out the use of everything which they saw: some helped the men to haul on the ropes, others listened to the band with evident signs of intense admiration; others offered for sale flutes, made out of stone or of slate, and pipes of the same materials with most curious devices carved on them, displaying a degree of skill truly astonishing, when one considers the rude implements, a rusty nail or broken blade of a pen-knife, with which they were wrought out. One of our lieutenants showed to a native a daguerreotype likeness of his father, which the latter immediately undertook to copy on ivory: for this purpose a whale's-tooth was given to him, with which he returned in a few days, having carved out of it a bust, which, from its resemblance to the original, excited general admiration; from the frontispiece-portrait of Shakspeare or any other author, they will also grave out a

¹ Dog-eaters, if not Man-eaters.

bust. I might add many other proofs of the skill and ingenuity of this people, and of their commercial enterprise. On account of this latter characteristic, they may truly be styled the "Anglo-Saxons" of this coast; this spirit leads them to make constant trading voyages to Sittra in their canoes, undaunted by the heavy and very dangerous sea for such light vessels, and the comparatively great length of the voyage. The chiefs have not much power except in war; and, although birth is respected, yet any one, however plebeian he may be, may be chosen a chief, should he acquire by trade or otherwise sufficient amount of money or blankets, which are equivalent in the native's estimation to Bank of England currency paper in ours, to give him superior influence. Several of the chiefs told me that they were themselves too old to learn, but that they wished their children to be instructed in our religion and knowledge. I have heard those who had known both people declare, that this was superior to that of New Zealand; and I feel persuaded, that if similar efforts be made to christianize and civilize them, the results will be equally if not more happy.

The difference, as I mentioned before, in the physical appearance, as well as in the social habits of the various tribes, is considerable; those to the northward are more fierce, more enterprising and clean than those to the southward; they are also of a fairer complexion, and more robust frame. All migrate more or less in the pursuit of game or fish, or in the prosecution of trade, with the spirit of which they seem to be thoroughly imbued. The number of different dialects or languages is very great, amounting to twenty-five or thirty, and what seems very remarkable is, that there exists no affinity between those of even contiguous tribes. This fact I state on the authority of one of the H. B. C. factors, who has lived and mixed more with those people than probably any man living. The Jesuits have, I believe, attempted to reduce some of them to a written form. It is this great variety of languages, and the necessity for having a common one, in order to carry on trade, that probably has given rise to a "patois" generally spoken and understood, the knowledge of which might be easily acquired, and would much facilitate missionary labours.

In carrying out a scheme of Missionary operations, I would suggest that the pecuniary aid of the Hudson's Bay Company be first sought; and surely the claims on their liberality are so strong, that we have just cause to expect a satisfactory response to such an appeal.

The second form in which the Company's aid should be solicited is, that of influence: theirs is at present so paramount amongst the natives that it would most essentially promote or retard Missionary success, according as it may be exerted favourably or unfavourably; from them a free passage might be obtained (which otherwise would cost, by going round the Horn, about 25*l.*) for the Missionaries, and at their several establishments they might at first advantageously be permitted to reside.

In addition to that most essential requisite, "an earnest devotion to their work of preaching and teaching," the persons sent out should

have a knowledge of some trade and of gardening, that so they might most effectually win over their hearers to attention to their religious instruction, by promoting their temporal comforts, and by manifesting in their households the superiority of those Christian principles which produced these happy results, to their own, which kept them in a state of misery and discomfort.

Another suggestion which I would most earnestly press, is the expediency, in order to attain success, of taking as many of the native children as possible into schools, and keeping them there separate from their parents and friends. To this separation I feel confident these latter would consent when the object in view was explained to them, and when influenced by the further inducement of a few trifling presents. The education of these children should comprise industrial in addition to religious and literary instruction. Hence arises another powerful argument for insisting that those who may be sent out should be masters of some trade. I am not ignorant, however, how difficult it is to meet with men thus qualified.

With respect to the expense of living, by which of course the cost of at first supporting a Mission there must be estimated, I beg to state that all the necessaries of life are as cheap in these places, as far as I can learn, as in England, or perhaps rather cheaper. A salmon of from 12 to 20lbs. weight could, when I was there, be purchased for a few fish-hooks or an empty bottle; potatoes, (the planting of which has been lately introduced among the natives by the Hudson's Bay Company, and now forms a considerable article of their trade,) of the finest description, venison, and game, were to be purchased at similarly low prices. Should the Mission be properly managed, combining Christianity and colonization as its objects, it would in a few years not merely prove self-supporting, but amply remunerative and able to extend widely its operations.

The Rev. J. Staines will be happy to give much aid and information. The means of communication are now much more frequent and rapid than they were a few years since. A letter reaches San Francisco about thirty-three days after its departure from England; from thence it is forwarded by mail steamers constantly plying to the Columbia River, where it arrives in (say) four days. From this place it used to be, about twelve months since, forwarded by a canoe hired for that sole purpose by the Company, to Fort Victoria, so that the letter reached in about six weeks from the time of its being posted in England.

Now, probably, there is a steamer plying directly from San Francisco to Fort Victoria; and besides this, there are regular and almost daily arrivals and departures from these places of vessels, trading in cattle, timber, ice, potatoes, and cranberries, &c.

I am aware that the scheme of operations necessary to carry out effectually this work may appear extensive, but I am also strongly impressed with the belief that, if the stringent claims of these our fellow-subjects, so long neglected and suffered to remain without an effort to rescue them from spiritual darkness and social degradation on the part of the Protestants of Great Britain, were brought before

the public under the sanction of such a society as the *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel*, many of those who are ever "ready to every good work" would not only give "silver and gold" but even themselves to this work, and be found willing to go over and help them.

Your faithful and obedient Servant,

R. C. P. BAYLEE.

13th March, 1854.

The Rev. the Secretary to the

Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.
