

# The British Columbia Indian Situation

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## INTERVIEW

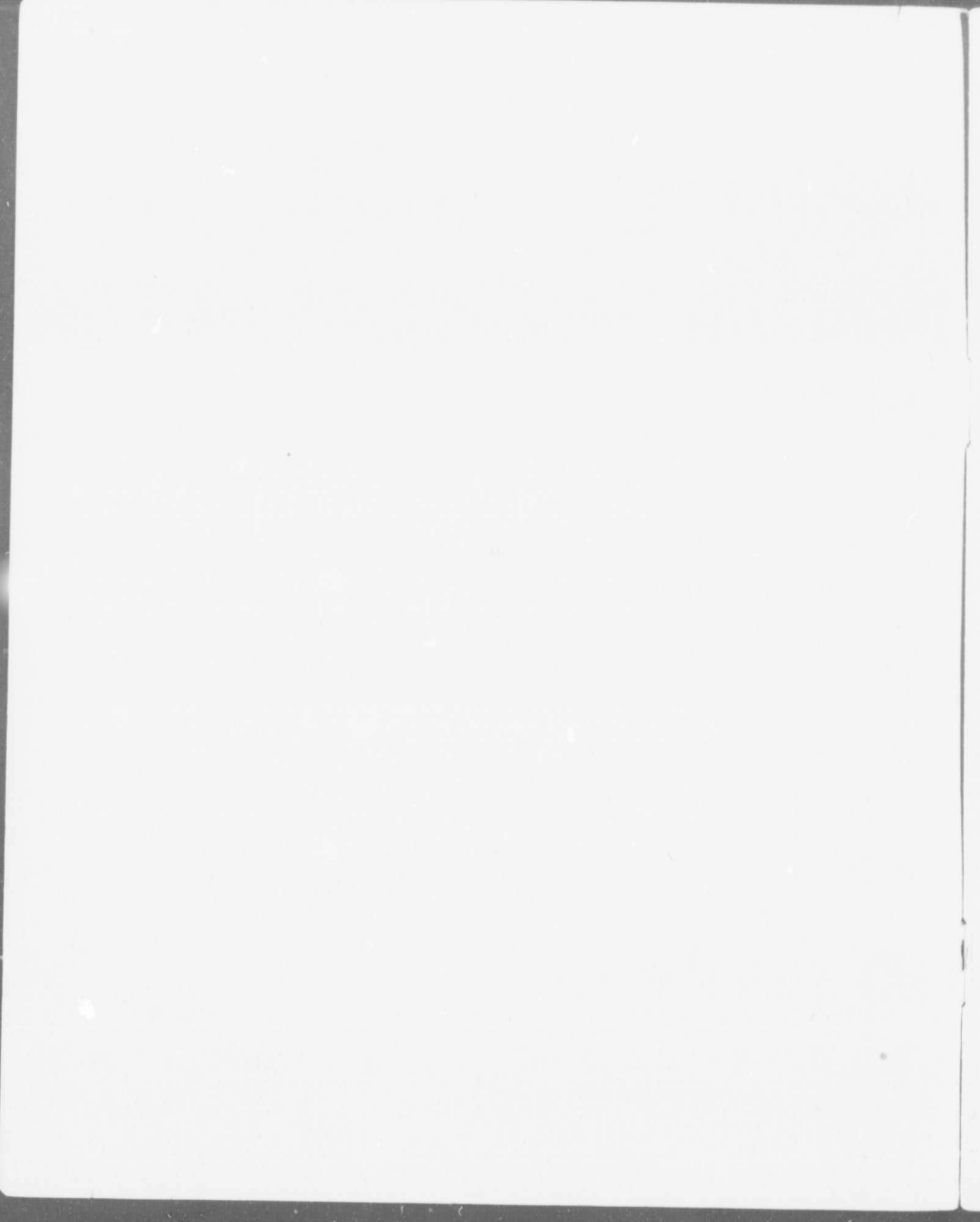
had with Hon. Dr. Roche, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs at Ottawa on 5th November, 1912

## RESUME OF ADDRESS

made by Rev. Canon Tucker, D.C.L., formerly Rector of Christ Church, Vancouver, subsequently General Secretary of the Anglican Missionary Society, and now Rector of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, Ontario.

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OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.



After introducing Rev. A. E. O'Meara as representing the "Friends of the Indians of British Columbia" and himself as representing the "Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada," Dr. Tucker first stated the case and then proceeded to give, in brief, the history of it. The case may be stated roughly as follows:—The Indians of British Columbia, as the original inhabitants of the country, claim that they have certain rights in the land and before the Government can sell or dispose of the land those claims should be considered. The Government of the Province, on the other hand, take the position that the Indians have no claims and, though they have never given any reason for their position, they positively refuse to modify it. It is on this clear-cut issue that we present our case to-day.

From the commonsense point of view it would seem to appeal to all unprejudiced and disinterested people that men who have inhabited a country from time immemorial and made their living there, must have certain rights which no newcomers should altogether overlook and override. Those rights should be extinguished in some equitable way by negotiation and compensation. Mere strength, or numbers, or

superior intelligence, or even the interests of civilization cannot justify us in disregarding what may be looked upon as an inherent right.

Now this is precisely what the British Government have done in their dealings with the Indians. When first the British flag was hoisted, on the Pacific Coast, by Sir Francis Drake, 300 years ago, it was all done after negotiation with the natives. Immediately after the conquest of Canada King George III issued a proclamation assuring the Indians that they would be protected in the free enjoyment of all their rights. This proclamation has been followed by repeated Acts of the British Parliament to the same effect. Indeed this has been the policy consistently pursued by Great Britain in dealing with the native races the world over.

When the Dominion Government came into being in 1867 they adopted the same policy. The Indians, over the whole of the North West, have been dealt with by negotiation and treaty and they have been granted reserves, annuities, education and other forms of compensation for the relinquishment of their claims. The question here naturally arises why have not the Indians of British Columbia been dealt with in the same way ?

Accordingly on the entrance of British Columbia into the Confederation this question arose, and the Canadian Government took a definite stand in favor of the recognition of the Indian claim as may be seen from the emphatic utterances of the Governor General, the Minister of Justice, and the Minister of the Interior of that period. And the Government of Canada have never departed from that position. During the late administration Sir Wilfrid Laurier told the Indians, at various points, that their claims would be submitted for judicial decision and he stated to a deputation of which we were members that the Courts existed just for such a case as this and that he would do his utmost to secure a judicial decision.

The present Government, shortly after their accession to power, took up the matter and in May last appointed a representative to visit British Columbia, investigate conditions on the spot and report. It is understood that Mr. McKenna's report is in the hands of the Government and various rumours are afloat, apparently not without some foundation, that an arrangement has been arrived at with the Government of British Columbia and that that arrangement entirely ignores the claims of the Indians. It is difficult to

credit such rumours, though they are stated with confidence and with much appearance of truth. We can only venture to represent that such a course of action would be in direct conflict with the action deliberately taken and consistently pursued by the British Government for a century, arising out of a Royal Proclamation which the Indians have always claimed as the Magna Charta of their rights ; such a course of action would be in direct conflict with the action consistently followed by the Canadian Government for half a century, under which the Indians have hoped and trusted and remained at peace ; such a course of action instead of settling this long-standing question would throw it into hopeless confusion and run the risk of fanning into a flame elements of danger that now lie in a smouldering state. The question has been crying out loudly for solution for 45 years. As the years pass by it becomes more urgent and, at the same time, more difficult of solution. It ought to be brought to an issue without delay. But that issue should be creditable to the Canadian people and satisfactory to the Indians.

