

Revisiting the Cowichan Indians

LETTER FROM THE REV. C. M. TATE, MISSIONARY TO THE FRASER RIVER
INDIANS, B.C.

41 SOUTH TURNER ST., VICTORIA, B.C.,
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DEAR FELLOW-LEAGUERS:

Just a year ago we were in the midst of the influenza epidemic, which carried off so many of our Indians, and among the tribes to suffer most were those connected with our Cowichan mission. Mr. Dockstader, the missionary teacher, whilst endeavoring to attend the suffering people, was repeatedly prostrated with the disease, and finally was compelled to give up his work, which, for nearly four months, was supplied by the writer of this article. I was already familiar with the field, having in the year 1894 been appointed missionary to the Indian tribes on the east coast of Vancouver Island, with headquarters at Victoria.

Beginning Missions for the Cowichans.

During that year (1894) frequent visits were made among the Cowichan tribes, and the people were glad to hear the gospel message in their own tongue; but it was not till the following year that any signs of success were observed, when the Rev. J. C. Spencer was sent as my colleague, to reside at Duncan. Here Mr. Spencer opened a day school, and through his untiring efforts with the children, managed to reach the hearts of the parents. Mr. Nicholas succeeded Mr. Spencer in 1896, and in 1899 we moved to Duncan and built our first mission house on that field, our predecessors having lived in rented houses.

The History of the Work at Koksilah.

After a thorough survey of the mission, we decided to open day schools at Quamichan and Koksilah, both of which were so successful that the usual school grants were made by the Government. Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds took charge of the work at Koksilah, but Mr. Reynolds died shortly after his appointment, and his wife carried on the school until Mr. Dockstader and his family were moved there from Nitenat. On our removal to Victoria in 1910, the mission house at Duncan was sold and a comfortable modern building erected at Koksilah, where a beautiful plot of agricultural land was acquired by the General Board of Missions and where object lessons in farming and gardening are constantly before the eyes of the Indians. The idea of an experimental farm in the midst of a large Indian settlement is all right, if the missionary could have a farm instructor associated with him; but when

the missionary has also to teach the day school, besides being preacher, doctor, lawyer, and in general demand, unless he be superhuman he is liable to make an all-round failure. We are hoping that a teacher will be sent shortly to take charge of the day school, and thus relieve Mr. Dockstader to do the necessary visiting, which is all important on an Indian mission; and if it should be a male teacher, with a knowledge of farming, so much the better.

Working again in Koksilah after Nine Years.

It is always a pleasure for any pastor to visit a former charge, but to none more so than an Indian missionary. Although we have kept closely in touch with the Cowichan Indian mission ever since we left the community nine years ago, yet every succeeding visit brings something new to our attention: a new house has been built by one, a new barn by another, a third has planted an orchard and we must needs go and see it; some have been laid aside by accident or disease, and they must be visited, whilst death has entered the homes of others and the consolations of the gospel can alone give satisfaction under the sad circumstances.

Old and New Ways of Mourning.

Oh, yes, the Indians are just as appreciative of sympathy and condolence as other human beings, and respond just as readily as do others. How different the expressions of sorrow today to those of forty years ago, when the mother of a dead child would cut off her beautiful tresses of shining black hair, and with her finger nails scratch the skin off her face! Her next act would be to burn all the clothing belonging to the dead child, and the best of her own clothing, that her child might not be destitute in the spirit world. Sometimes we have remonstrated with them when they have been throwing the good clothing into the fire, together with saucepans and dishes full of good food, that they were simply destroying all the valuable stuff; but they usually replied that the spirit of the clothing and the food would go to sustain the spirit of their loved one. Some of the older people may still secretly keep up this practice, but the younger generations have learned the better way of preparing their own hearts to meet their loved ones in the Father's house above.

We should like to ask of the members of our young people's societies that on every missionary night, at least, they would pray definitely for the natives of our own land, knowing full well that "the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much."

Yours faithfully,
C. M. TATE.