



THE CHURCH AND MISSION HOUSE, SKIDEGATE.

The wing nearest the church is the "Indian Room," where the Indians come to rest, get clothing or medicine.

## The Haidas of Queen Charlotte Islands

LETTER FROM THE REV. H. E. LIVINGSTONE, SKIDEGATE.

SKIDEGATE, B.C.

DEAR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS:

I have been asked to give an account of conditions and work on this field, and in the hope that the wider circulation of same may be of some help, I forward a copy.

It will be understood that the following is based upon two years' experience among Indians at Skidegate, and while some remarks might apply to all tribes of Indians, yet much of what follows is applicable only to Indians living under similar conditions to the above-named Haidas. Further, in making any comparison of their morals, ethics, and life in general, with those set by Christian ideals to-day, we must bear in mind that, comparatively speaking, these natives are only babes in the Christian religion, the first converted inhabitant of Skidegate being still alive.

**Skidegate and the Last of the Haidas.**

Skidegate is composed of the inhabitants from a number of villages that amalgamated under the influence of Christianity. It is situated on the south-east corner of Graham Island, one of the Queen Charlotte group. The population is about 260. Skidegate, with another village of Massett, on the same island, having a combined population of about 650, are all that remain of the Haida tribe of Indians, that formerly numbered probably as many thousands. The Haidas were a warlike people. In their dugout canoes they frequently invaded the territory of other tribes along the British Columbia coast, giving them good reason to fear the Islanders. In common with most other coast tribes, they were experts in engraving gold and silver, carving slate and wood, making baskets, etc.; but these are fast becoming lost arts.

Residing on a rugged, wooded island, the Skidegate natives depend chiefly on fishing for their livelihood. Being among the most progressive of British Columbia Indians, they are adapting themselves to changing conditions; so that instead of sailboats and canoes, they possess many first-class gasoline boats, the hulls of most of these being their own handiwork. They have "scrapped" the old one-apartment community houses in which a number of families cooked, ate and slept, replacing them with modern frame buildings, which are also erected by themselves.

**Difficulties of Our Work—Migrations, Idleness, etc.**

The chief obstacles to successful work among them are:—

(a) Their migratory life. Early in June, they (and this includes the whole family and, in some cases, dogs, cats, and chickens), leave home, some for a cannery on the islands, others for one on the mainland. It will be the end of October before the majority return. This makes any systematic, continuous effort impossible, either in educating the young or keeping up the spiritual life of the whole community. The cannery life brings them into contact with white people, very often of the roughest type; and the Indians, who are wonderful imitators, look up to any white man or woman as an example for conduct. Then these same white "beasts" are the means of leading too many of the native girls astray. On the other hand, there is a certain amount of distrust of white men, which leads the natives to put the missionary and other workers in the same category with many who have in the past taken advantage of them, financially and otherwise, hinting that they, too, are here for their own selfish profits.

(b) Then there are the old tribal customs that still, in many cases, have a damaging influence.

(c) Also there is an ingrained selfishness which appears in various forms, sometimes among themselves, but more particularly toward other peoples. This, at times, is discouraging to the worker; but he has to learn not too often to expect tokens of gratitude no matter how devotedly he may labor.

(d) Idleness during winter is a great mischief-maker. While many of the men are busy much of the time building houses, constructing boats, getting firewood or at similar work, still many have little or nothing to do; with

the result that too many are lazy and thriftless, spending much of the winter's day in bed, frequently to attend a dance at night. Numerous family and public feasts are given, a single one often meaning an outlay of hundreds of hard-earned dollars, to the impoverishment of the family, and on occasion, to the physical detriment of guests, giving the field nurse some extra work.

(e) Lastly, as a hindrance might be mentioned the handicap of having a different language to deal with. While the majority understand the English language to some extent, yet it is difficult to get home a lesson, even with the aid of an interpreter.

#### **Apparently Robust, yet Saturated with Disease.**

Physically, the Skidegate Indians appear robust, and when occasion requires, they will stand much hardship. Yet disease, tuberculosis being the most prevalent, is dormant in almost every family. This, to a very great extent, is inherited, being the result of immoral living and prostitution in past years; thus largely accounting for the tremendous decrease in numbers of one of the most handsome Indian tribes. To-day, however, the population is increasing somewhat. Disease is also propagated through lack of precaution in cases of sickness and death. There is, when procurable, a field matron, who is appointed by the Methodist Church and paid by the Government to look after their physical well-being.

#### **We Need a Boarding School.**

The educational work is rather discouraging, owing to the fact that the children are away from the village so much, and that they rarely hear English spoken in the home. There is a day school, the teacher, like the field matron, being found by the Methodist Church and paid by the Government; but the great need is a boarding school, where the children could be in attendance no matter where the parents were, and where the children would become proficient in the use of our language. True, we have a splendid Industrial School at Sardis, which is doing first-class work for those who go; but many of the parents will not send their children so far. Consequently, the majority of the boys and girls grow up without its advantages.

Intellectually, the Indians are clever, being fluent speakers and possessing a natural gift for music. The latter is developed at their religious services, funerals, weddings and other meetings, when their band and orchestra are frequently employed.

#### **Their Religion Fervent but Spasmodic—Undeveloped Morally.**

With regard to their religious life: They are very emotional, and seem never to tire of religious services on either Sundays or week evenings, when there is music, singing and testifying. The drum of the Salvation Army or their Epworth League appeals to them. Even in the quiet prayer-meeting their religious craving is revealed, when from fifteen to twenty men and women lead publicly in prayer. Yet their religious life is more or less spasmodic. This spiritual atmosphere is maintained through the winter, but with the

approach of spring, comes a restlessness to get away, and the enthusiasm wears off, not to be renewed until services are again in full swing in the fall. Their religion is also lacking somewhat on the moral and ethical side. (This is speaking generally; there are some splendid exceptions). This is to some extent due to the influence of past community life, which reflects upon the present environment of the home,—for example, the conversation in presence of children. The condition of living at canneries, huddled together in little shacks, also lends itself to looseness of conduct. The Indian girl, too, is exposed to far greater temptations than the ordinary white girl, at the hands of unprincipled white men. The Indians are also too ready to follow the ethical standard set by the godless white rather than that of a Christian type.

#### **Our Progress is Slow but Sure and Steady.**

To sum up. The question has been asked us, "Is it worth while spending time and money on these people?" We answer, Yes. It is our Lord's command. Whatever we possess of gifts, enlightenment and opportunities, to that extent are we indebted to them in common with other less favored peoples.

You ask, "Are they advancing?"

In looking back over one or two years, the rates of progress may not be very noticeable; but to compare their present life, conditions and environment with that of forty years ago is sufficient answer. One instance will illustrate: Last year, a cannery during the rush asked our village women to work on Sunday, there being a large quantity of fish waiting to be canned. Although the women could have earned from five to eight dollars each, they refused. And they are capable of greater things if the environment can be provided. I was guest recently in a home that has adopted an Indian girl from childhood. Under the favorable conditions, that girl has grown up to be as ladylike and true as could be desired, a credit to herself and the home of her adoption.

#### **Under Favorable Conditions They are Capable of Great Things.**

This is the ideal that we must have before us—to provide those Christian surroundings in our Indian villages. The Industrial and Boarding Schools are, to a great extent, our hope for the future. With their return home, the ex-pupils, accompanied by the school education and influence, will act as the leavening influence. Education alone will not do this; they must be changed in heart and purpose of life. This, too, is being done, under God's grace, in many instances, in these institutions.

#### **We Need Workers to Make Conditions Favorable.**

The work then is not in vain; and it calls for more workers to teach, nurse and minister to our native tribes, so that we, continuing with patience, may make of our Indian neighbors, many of whom are yet untouched by Christian influences, loyal Canadian citizens and true servants of Jesus Christ.

Are there any to whom the call comes?

Yours in the work,

H. EDWARD LIVINGSTONE.