

Until we left Vancouver and went up into the north country, I just was not aware of Indians and their difficulties.

In the city, in school or church we never came across them. So we learned a lot and we wouldn't have missed those first years in the Hazelton district.

Our first pastoral charge was at Hazelton - about 150 miles N.E. of Prince Rupert on the C.N.R. There we spent two busy, but happy years, amongst the white people. During that time one of our most frequent callers was an old Indian who used to walk 10 miles into town from his home on the reservation at Kispiox, on the Skeena and would come in for a visit to have a letter written or to ask for help on a sermon, for he was a lay preacher among his people. He was my first acquaintance with the Indians ~~people and his village~~ He had many stories to tell of his people and his village. My favourite was how he became a Christian.

He told us that about the year 1885 Rev. Thos. Crosby, one of our great missionaries to the Indians, visited Kispiox. This place was a safe retreat for the Indians from the raids of the Haidas and Tsimpseans, therefore, its name, Kispiox-the people of the hiding place. Crosby had been warned not to go there, but had had no trouble on his previous trip. The witch doctors had been very much worried because he had been taking the people from under their influence, so they decided to strip him of his power by taking away the bell which he rang to call the people to meetings.

They thought that he would be as helpless without it as they would be without their rattles and tom-toms. Crosby walked along the river bank as was his custom ringing the bell and calling to the people, "Come to Jesus," in a huge voice that always impressed his hearers. One Sunday as he passed the witch doctor's house they rushed out in a body and seized the bell. Standing nearby were a number of young men. They were not Christians, but they did not agree with such treatment

of a visitor so they pounced on the witch doctors, rescued the bell, returned it to Crosby, and acted as an escort to the place of meeting.

One of those young men was John Brown. He attended Crosby's meeting and became a Christian that day and never turned back. For over fifty years he was a Christian leader among his people. Through him we became very interested in the native people and when the opportunity came we went to Kispiox, where Mr. More was the Missionary - Teacher.

This was twenty years ago, but visitors from Kispiox still call in and we have letters still at Christmas time to keep us in touch with most of the changes.

When we were there Kispiox had a population of 300. but like all the Indian villages, the population is increasing rapidly because of better health conditions - especially the treatment of T.B. Their houses are scattered over half a square mile, on the point of land where the Kispiox River runs into the Skeena. Close around are the rolling tree-covered mountains, and in the distance rugged spires of the higher peaks. Most beautiful of all, down the Skeena rise the peaks of Roche De Boule Mountain. Wherever you go in that area Roche De Boule seems to dominate the landscape.

The village itself is built on grassy benches rising from the river. On a little rise in the centre of the village stood the church with mission house and school close by. I believe the mission house is the same, but the church having been burnt to the ground soon after we left, has been replaced.

Below^{on} the river front is the large community hall where feasts and parties are held. As in most villages of the coast Indians, Kispiox has its collection of totem poles. These are not so elaborately carved as the poles in the villages on the coast. The colours have faded and the Indians do not ordinarily re-paint their poles unless persuaded by the tourist or government agencies.

We found the Indian people very friendly from the first. They were constantly calling at the mission house for various reasons. As soon as they came back from their traplines or the canneries we would have the women at the mission house to pay us a visit and to see the children. The men came to visit with the missionary.

One of our frequent callers was John Brown, now and old man. Each time before going out on his trap-line he would ask, "How long you stay in Kispiox, Mr. More?" When my husband would reply, "Oh, I don't know just how long, John" he would say, "I hope you stay till I die". We stayed with Joh in Kispiox four years. In one of our first letters from there after we left we heard the news that old John had passed away. We had a feeling that perhaps we should have stayed another year.

Our most intimate friend among the people was a seventeen year old girl, Sarah Johnson. She came to us whe we first went there and said she would like to work with me to learn the proper way to do things. With a baby in the house and no running water or electric lights there was plenty of work to do, so we hired Sarah right away. Even if she had only answered the door she would have been a big help as there was a constant stream of callers who interrupted every job I started. Sarah became very expert at that. She soon learned when she could handle it herself, or when she had to call us, especially when she got over her fear of the telephone and could make and receive telephone calls. We had the only telephone in the village, and there were many calls every day to the Hudson Bay Company for groceries, or to the Indian Agent.

She was a great help in explaining the minister's point of view to her people, and in turn explaining their ways of doing things to us.

I remember one time in particular when Sarah was a peacemaker. One of the younger men of the village, Jack Wright, who had been very friendly previously, refused to shake hand with Mr. More coming out of church. We couldn't think of the reason for it, but decided to say nothing about it. Jack went out on the trap-lines a few days later. Returning in a couple of months he was in church the first Sunday and insisted on shaking hands in the most firendly manner. We didn't know until much later what had really happened. It was Christmas time and we hadbeen out in the village with the choir, carol singing all evening. Among other places, we went into Jack's home for refreshment. It was a nice little house and spotlessly clean, but the coffee was hot and Mr. More placed his on the window ledge to cool while he went to talk to someone and in the excitement of the evening, (and he is a bit absent-minded at times)

the coffee was forgotten. Jack and his wife jumped to the conclusion that Mr. More did not think their home was clean enough to eat in. It was Sarah who convinced them that this was not his reason for putting the coffee down. Sarah learned very quickly and we came to rely on her a good deal. She became a good cook and was always very clean. We felt safe to leave her in charge of the house and the children at any time. Sarah is now married - to a white - has about four children and is post mistress at Hazelton. We have cheery letters from her each Christmas.

Another of our Indian girls whom I'm sure you would have been thrilled to know was Annie our primary school teacher, a native girl born in the neighbouring reserve of Kitsegeulca. She took ^{her} High School Education in Prince Rupert and her normal training in the Res. School in Edmonton and came to Kispiox to teach as her first school. She had to win her place among the people as they had no confidence that one of their own girls could be an efficient teacher. She not only proved herself capable at Kispiox, but later taught successfully in two white schools. Annie lived with us and we enjoyed having her -- she was the kind of a girl anyone would welcome in their home.

Annie had a good musical education - could sing well and played the organ at church and Sunday school. During the war she joined the army and became a corporal in the W.A.C.S. and later married a young Science boy from Ontario. Annie and her husband and two children are now in Germany with the Canadian Army.

Here is the school and some of our primary class.

The missionary at the village was also the teacher, so with 75 children in the school were much relieved when the second room was built and a teacher obtained for the primary room during our second year.

Most of the children were anxious to learn. In some cases these reflected the attitude of the parents. In others the parents were comparatively indifferent. It was sad to have them coming to school without their breakfast or being kept home to dig potatoes or to clean the house. Aside from their language difficulty they

are normal children in every way and a pleasure to teach.

Schooling was very broken for many of them because they went with their parents to the logging camps, canneries and trap-lines.

The men of the village were better educated and more progressive than the women. They talked more freely and took a more intelligent interest in affairs of the church, school and village. We had a fine board of stewards. They were less bound by the old superstitions. Also they were well educated musically-about half of the men of the village being able to read music either for singing or some instrument - We had a grand men's quartette which sang unaccompanied on many occasions, and a band which played at weddings and funerals. Also they had a first class orchestra which was always in great demand - by whites as well as natives.

At the Ladies' meetings the women usually spoke their own language and I had to have an interpreter. It wasn't that they couldn't speak English, but were reticent about speaking it in front of their own people. They were very self-conscious and afraid of being laughed at by their own. They had a good sense of humour. You could laugh with them, but not at them.

In the matter of dress the younger women especially were quite modern. Each year they came home from the canneries with new hair-dos and new dresses and coats in the latest styles. Some of the very old women, too old to move outside of the house, lying in their corner on their blankets, having no interest in such things, were quite a contrast. Sarah's old grandmother was one of these. She could never be persuaded to sleep on a bed. She loved to tell the old stories of her people but she was a good Christian and sang many of our hymns in her native tongue. Her one vice was an old pipe which she smoked continually.

In their living conditions also there were great differences, just as there are among the whites. Some of the younger and more progressive families had well-furnished homes with piano, chesterfield, radio, etc. At the same time there were

a few families who took no pride in their furnishings or cleanliness. The rest of the villagers were ashamed of them. Whenever there was to be a big celebration in the village these homes would be invaded by relatives for a thorough-clean-up.

You may have heard that Indians are lazy, but that is not so. They are a nomadic hunting people, with age-old tradition of hard work when it was needed and feasting and relaxation when supplies were plentiful. Since the means of preserving food were few, there was not much point in going hunting when they had plenty of meat in the house. Then there were seasons when hunting and fishing got practically no results. It is still their custom to share what they catch.

Our modern way of living demands a different attitude which the Indians are adopting but it is still difficult for some of them to see why they should work hard when they have just received a pay-cheque. There is another attitude which is a bit more sound than ours. Their type of life required endurance and a man who unnecessarily strained himself did not make a good hunter, therefore, many of them still refuse to work under destructive tensions. In anything like their natural environment, they are not lazy -- very few white men could keep up with them in a canoe or trap-line.

I have a picture here of some of the men leaning on their shovels but that was after they had finished the work of repairing the foundations of the church. They certainly worked hard that day. The coast Indians are more fortunate than the others in that they can still earn a living by methods not too far removed from their ancient habits. Their three chief industries are trapping, fishing and logging, and they are good workmen at all of these.

In the summer practically the whole village goes to the fish canneries. Living conditions here are very primitive sometimes, where hundreds are living in close quarters conditions are often disastrous. In general, while the canneries are often their best sources of income, it is also the season of physical, moral, and intellectual degradation. Many times girls and boys coming from residential schools only saw their families at the canneries during the summer months when controls were largely off, and

the result was only too often demoralizing.

Only a few, the old and the sick, stay home from the canneries in the summer, but they were not idle. They caught and smoked fish for the winter season. Some of the smoke houses were kept very clean but that required both a thorough understanding of the right method and a constant careful control of the smoke.

At Christmas and Easter everyone came home for a week or more of festivities. Church services were crowded, the choir was at its best, the mission house was constantly full and their parties lasted until four and five in the morning. The parties in the community hall took the place of the old potlatches. Feasts were given when a child received its adult name. Every family had its famous name which was guarded jealously. Then there were wedding feasts and funeral feasts. The funeral feasts were given several months after the funeral and all who helped in any way were invited and given a present. They were open to all and the more people there the greater the honour to the deceased.

Weddings were very elaborate affairs. Most of them were very formal, the bride often had four to six attendants wearing long beautiful gowns. Their feasts were very formal. Long speeches and stories took up many hours. Naturally these were in the native tongue so we had to have an interpreter. Besides the speeches there was dancing and games and of course refreshments, not just a sandwich and a doughnut, but a real big meal which lasted a long time too. It was considered bad manners to leave food not eaten. Anything you could not eat you carried home.

Once in a long while they put on a feast with the old dancing and formalities. An invitation to one of these was a special favour to white people as they were very sensitive to what others thought of them. They know that some white people will make a long and interesting story about their old customs and forget to mention that now they have modern homes and big logging trucks.

One of our girls who was attending school in Edmonton told us of going to a meeting one one of the smaller churches to hear a speaker who had slides on the life of the Skeena River Indians. He showed pictures of the old dances, and told, as if it

were to-day of their old ceremonies (such as the dog-eater's dance), and then appealed for missionary money to help these poor benighted heathens. These old dances are to them just like our folk dances are to us, but no more.

The modern dances at the Kispiox hall were attended by both Indians and white people from far up and down the valley.

The Indians are a religious people. Most of them came to church every Sunday with the whole family, many of them both morning and evening. Though the schooling was all in English, the Indian language was spoken in most of the homes and so it was necessary to have an interpreter for the sermons in order to be sure that everyone understood, -- especially the old people. We had a large Sunday School as well as a fine Young Peoples Society, and C.G.I.T. and Explorers. Aside from their language difficulties they were normal children in every way and a pleasure to teach.

The Indian people are in the midst of the change from the old ways to the new. The old family life was in a community house where many related families lived together and all responsibilities for the welfare of the inhabitants rested upon the chief rather than the father and mother. The white man's diseases such as T.B. and Small Pox drove them out of the community houses into individual family dwellings. You can imagine how the Indians had to change their thinking and way of life. Since we white people caused all this change in their way of living we ought to take seriously our responsibility for helping them through their difficulties. For this reason the Dominion Department of Indian Affairs was organized. There are still larger family groupings than we are accustomed to. Their interest is our official responsibility. Today the Dept. of Indian Affairs has more adequate grants than in our time. The churches share in this has been to provide missionaries, teachers and nurses who live on the reserves and understand the people.

This is Sally Treiak one of our missionary nurses, who lived with us for two years in Kispiox. She was a graduate of Manitoba University and a trained nurse. She was a very enthusiastic worker. If anything happened to one of the Indians she took it to heart as seriously as if it had been one of her own.

She did wonderful work visiting the homes, encouraging cleanliness, seeing that the babies were properly cared for, doing dressings and getting people to go to the doctor before it was too late. After she left no nurse was available and the infant death rate more than doubled. We are thoroughly convinced of the value of the work of a good resident nurse. We did what we could, dispensing drugs, consulting the doctor, and visiting the sick, but we had neither the training nor the time to do effective work.

Here I'd like to say a word of praise for the doctors and nursing staff of our United Church Hospital at Hazelton - - Memorial. They are doing a wonderful job with a fine missionary spirit - staff - engineer. Under the present medical superintendent, Dr. J.E. Whiting the Staff still carries on with the same devotion. It may interest you to know that Norma's father was engineer at this hospital and that her mother came out from Toronto as a missionary nurse.

Nurses for the villages and ^{mission} hospitals are hard to find.

There are ways in which all of us can help these people. We can't all go out and be teachers and missionaries, but something we all can do is to be friendly and supply a Christian fellowship in which the Indian people and any other Minority group will feel at home. One of the natives of our village told us that he never knew that Prince Rupert was a friendly town until he went there as a delegate from our church to Presbytery. He had been there many times before, but the only kind of people he met were those who were mostly interested in his money.

Today the Indian Department along with the churches is trying to find the right kind of boarding places for students who come to the city. Lately a student group at U.B.C. (the University Native Canadian Fellowship) has been formed to help the native students and to promote a better understanding in the community.

Perhaps you have heard that the Indians are lax in their morals. This is only true to some.

Marriage customs are a mixture of old and new. Many couples lived faithfully together, their marriage validated only by the consent of the chief and the giving of a feast. This was the old way, but since the chiefs do not retain their old power, such

marriages are not as binding as they ought to be. On the other hand there are very fine Christian marriages, but since this law has not the social sanctions that it has in white communities, these also are too much inclined to break down. Where there is no missionary for any length of time, there will be a number of couples waiting for a Christian and legal marriage who have been living together for some time. Just a few years before our stay, there had been a mass marriage of ten or twelve couples.

It is not difficult to get Indian people interested in religion. Their old religion saw spirits in every living creature as well as oceans, rivers, rocks and trees. It was also a moral code motivated by fear of these spirits. I remember old Charlie Stevens returning after two days trip towards his trap-line because he had had an ill-omened dream. He had to pay the ~~medicine-man~~ ^{witch doctor} plenty to get rid of the evil spirit which he believed was threatening him. The witch doctor used certain traditional dances and chants as well as his reputed magical powers to drive out the evil spirits which were supposed to cause all sickness and misfortunes. With the Tom-Toms going continuously, the wild dances and the weird chants and yells, the sufferer must have certainly felt relief when it was over.

It was easy to get them interested in religion but it was difficult to lead them to a faith strong enough to cast off their fears.

The leaders among the young people were anxious to get rid of the witch doctor entirely. One day when we were away from the village, they 'phoned the police who promptly came out, found the witch doctor in action, seized all their paraphernalia and kept it. When they tried to start ^{up} the practice again a year or so later, this same group of young people burned their house to the ground.

They brought all kinds of their problems to the missionary. Family quarrels were among the most frequent. So the missionary was also the marriage counsellor. This meant calls on us at any hour of the day or night.

There were few "just family get-togethers" like we enjoy so much at Christmas - but the attention of all was centred on the community hall. Every night for about two weeks everyone in the village went to these parties from the oldest to the youngest and they lasted until 4 or 5 in the morning. Of course there was no school the next morning

and they could sleep in, but it didn't seem right that the youngsters should be out of their beds when they should be getting the most benefit from their sleep. More than that there was no home life.

This worried us a great deal, so after the first Christmas we decided something had to be done.

A month or so before the next Christmas Mr. More offered a prize to the boy or girl who had the best decorated Christmas tree in his own home. No points would be given for anything but home-made ornaments. This idea proved to have wonderful results- and I'm sure each Christmas we were there, there were not more than one or two homes minus a Christmas tree. I know because I used to go around with the judges (friends who had come out from Hazelton)...New Years Day was the day we judged and what excitement! In spite of their big families in most cases everything was tidy and clean. Bare wooden floors in many cases were scrubbed clean - not quite dry yet around the knots in the wood. All this had its desired effect - the family stayed home to enjoy their tree and neighbours visited back and forth.

Here is a picture of Maggie Harris, the winner of the contest for the first year with her prize. She was a lovely girl from one of our better homes. They had a large roomy house always spotlessly clean. She was clever, friendly and a very hard worker. After her public school education in Kispiox she went to the residential school in Alberni. She could not finish her high school, however, as her father's lumber mill burned down and Maggie got a job as stenographer to the Indian Agent at Hazelton and later became his private secretary. She is now happily married to a telegraph operator in Hazelton.

I think I have told you enough about our Kispiox Indians. My difficulty was not to find things to tell you about, but what to leave out -- so I wouldn't take up too much of your time.

If some of you girls are looking forward to a job where you are really needed, you could not do better than to spend a year or two, as teacher, nurse, or missionary in one of our Indian villages.

The Indians are a lovable people and the results of the work, though not spectacular, are very much worth while.

If I have introduced to you the Indians as just ordinary people I shall be satisfied. In closing, I'd like to tell you about a little episode that happened in Ocean Falls.

A missionary's young daughter came home from Kindergarten one day much concerned. I wouldn't want to live near Indians mamma, she said. They shoot people with bows and arrows and cut off their hair. Why, her mother answered, didn't you like the people in Kispiox? Why sure I did, but those were not real Indians. Those were just people.