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# *Eye-Witness of Trouble at Metlakatla in 1882 Blames Late Bishop Ridley for it*

(By C. Harrison)

Before I came to British Columbia for a few months I was curate at St. Thomas', Stepney, London. I intended to go out to Calcutta under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society. In fact, I had my passage booked on the P. & O. Liner Eldorado, and had also provided all my wardrobe. Before the time of my departure, however, I had a serious illness and, on my recovery, the Medical Board refused to allow me to proceed to my destination and ordered me to the North Pacific coast until I fully regained my health and strength. After several presentations from friends in England, my wife and I left Liverpool in the S.S. Alaska, belonging to the Union Line, and eventually arrived in Victoria November 24, 1882.

When we arrived we found that the only steamer then running up the northern coast was the Otter, then owned by the Hudson Bay Company. This vessel was then in her winter's quarters as the company only allowed her to run during the fine weather months of each year. This being the case, we were compelled to stay in Victoria until we could get a chance to go north on some other vessel. We stayed at the old Douglas House, which at that time was the best boarding house in the city.

Three weeks after our arrival in Victoria, the late Mr. Saunders intended to send his auxiliary steam schooner Dolphin as far as the Skeena River. My wife and I secured our berths on her, but before she left I was taken suddenly ill with a severe attack of typhoid fever. On my recovery the American steamer Idaho was in the Victoria harbor preparatory to making her mid-winter trip to Wrangell. Captain Carroll was the master. I saw the captain and asked him if he would land us at Metlakatla as he passed by that village. This he arranged to do if I could secure a "special permit" for him to do so. I then saw the collector of customs, the late Mr. Hamley, and he very kindly granted me the necessary papers. .. .. ..

### Ridley vs. Duncan

We were ten days in making the trip between Victoria and Metlakatla, the present day steamers now make the trip in thirty-six hours. We arrived there three or four days before Christmas. On our arrival we found all the Indians in a great state of excitement. They were divided into two parties. About eight hundred remained faithful and true to Mr. Duncan, the pioneer missionary among them, and the balance threw in their lot with Bishop Ridley. Bishop Ridley got his own way, and Mr. Duncan took his Indians to a fine island in Alaska and there founded the finest town controlled entirely by Indians that can be seen anywhere either in Canada or the United States of America. He named the place of his new abode New Metlakatla.

From Christmas 1882 to the end of 1884 was the time of the bitterest struggle and animosity, and I was present in most of the proceedings between the two parties. My opinion is that the bishop was entirely in the wrong. Mr. Duncan had brought those Indians together from Port Simpson and elsewhere and had formed a Christian community at Metlakatla. He is was who first founded Metlakatla. He had rescued the Indians from the heathenish districts and from the influence of the medicine men, and for more than twenty years before the bishop's arrival had done his utmost to instill in them the doctrines of Christianity. They had by their own endeavors erected a magnificent church, school house and several industrial buildings, including a very fine cannery. When Bishop Ridley arived on the scene they were in a fair state of prosperity. I can definitely prove that all were happy and contented under Mr. Duncan's jurisdiction.

### Tackled Wrong Man

The bishop was sent out by the Church Missionary Society, and this society had paid Mr. Duncan his salary; consequently Dr. Ridley when he was appointed Bishop of New Caledonia imagined that he was head over all, and that all must obey his orders or resign. He tackled the wrong man when he began to give his orders to Mr. Duncan and to the Indians that he had rescued from heathenism. In my opinion the bishop was very arrogant, as he presumed on his arrival to dictate to Mr. Duncan what he should do in regard to the people that he (Mr. Duncan) had been trying to civilize for twenty years, and with whose social position and condition he was of all men on the coast at that time the most intimate. The bishop maintained that as the Indians had received baptism they were capable of being communicants. Mr. Duncan demurred and said that they were not sufficiently instructed in the rituals of the church to receive this sacred ordinance, and the consequence was the breaking up of the finest Indian village in British Columbia. The departure of Mr. Duncan and his Indian followers to Alaska was a severe blow to the authorities of the Church Missionary Society and a heavy loss to the merchants of Victoria from whom they purchased all their supplies.

The bishop, however, thought otherwise, and in an address he made at Metlakatla on the occasion of three addresses and testimonials having been presented to him by the clergy and laity, said "That you were about to show me some mark of your confidence I had been made aware, but I had not the slightest hint you were going to present this address of your esteem and affection. Much as I value these costly gifts, they are as nothing compared to the unity of feeling and spirit which prompted the giving of them. It seems like realizing a vision of impossibilities. It's a celebration of triumph on the battle field. On this point of land has been fought out a battle that has won not only religious but civil liberty. The addresses are full of reference to the long and painful conflict. But for this I should not even now allude to the defeat of those who formerly terrorised over the northwest coast. Very few at the time realized the true nature of the struggle. The general public believe me to be animated by merely ecclesiastical ambition. The newspapers with but one exception were unsparing in their vituperation. Only you living in the district, including a small band of much abused Indians, knew the actual state of the case, and my memory will ever gratefully retain the pleasant recollections of sympathy and offers of personal assistance in many an hour of peril. I was not surprised that some churchmen councelled me to give up the unequal struggle, though history might have convinced them that much more formidable obstacles to human progress had again and again been overcome by a determined faith in the ultimate triumph of truth. Now there is peace, unity and concord, for which on behalf of the church which I here represent, even more than my own, and yours, I humbly thank Almighty God."

### Free-For-All

I shall now quote a short account from my diary in regard to these troublesome times. On Wednesday, December 27, 1882, as the bishop and Mrs. Ridley walked in front of Mrs. Harrison and myself on our way home from a feast in the house of a chief named Paul, as we neared the corner of the churchyard I noticed a body of men were stationed there. As we approached one of them came forward and placed his hand before the bishop's eyes which he pushed away with his head. Chief Legaic then came and put both of his hands on the bishop's shoulders. The bishop pushed him to one side, and as he attempted to reach the mission house the whole crowd got round us and prevented us from moving a step, although they allowed the ladies unmolested to pass on. This they did and Mrs. Harrison called for reinforcements from the mission house as she imagined they were going to kill the bishop. An Indian named Huson struck the bishop a blow on his chest and then ran among the crowd. Immediately another Indian named Sitka Jim came forward to try and strike the bishop a second time. The bishop repelled his blow and struck him with a well directed aim, which sent him reeling against the prison. I was struck on the chest and back several times, also kicked, but did my best to pay them back in their own coin. Four men about this time surrounded the bishop and acted as a body guard, but even then some of the Indians continued to push their legs through and kick the bishop.

The jail at that time was situated about one hundred feet in front of the mission house, and as we neared that building, Legaic went up the steps, turned the key in the lock, and liberated the two prisoners whom the bishop had imprisoned that morning for stealing a drum. He then touched his hat with two of his fingers and said, "you see who is master now." When the body of Indians surrounded us I thought it was their intention to drive us down to the beach where they evidently had a canoe ready without paddles or oars and compel us to get into it and thus send us adrift. During the whole of the disturbance Huson kept shouting "that's to do the way the bishop," meaning evidently to say that is the way of the bishop always fighting.

### Gun Boat Arrives

On account of these troubles an American gun boat was placed at the disposal of the Canadian government, as there was no British gun boat at that time in Esquimalt Harbor. This vessel arrived at Metlakatla on January 17, 1883, and Dr. Powell, with Mr. Anderson were the two magistrates that were sent up to make enquiries concerning the late disturbances and to punish the offenders. Their penalties were very lenient; Huson and Legaic were fined ten dollars each, and Sitka Jim, being the worst offender was fined twenty dollars.

(Editor's Note — This is the twelfth of a series of articles by Mr. Harrison. The thirteenth, telling of his arrival at Massett from Metlakatla in 1882, will appear in an early issue.)

### CANNERY CLOSED

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