

MISSION WORK IN ALASKA

PROGRESS MADE IN CIVILIZING THE NATIVES.

HOW THE MONEY GRANTED BY THE UNITED STATES FOR GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IS EXPENDED.

SITKA, Alaska, Dec. 16.—For ten years and more thousands of earnest, generous Christian people in the States, through their respective church organizations, have been contributing to the maintenance of missions in Alaska. I have not seen any statement in regard to the progress and condition of that work, except from interested sources, not always accurate in statement. For instance, the Governmental Agent of Education in Alaska embodied in his annual report to the Commissioner of Education the statement that nineteen teachers were employed at the mission and training school at Sitka during the school year of 1888. In contrast with that, a month after the report was submitted he published the names of all the teachers for the past year in the journal of the missionary society, and only ten teachers appear in that catalogue, nine less than the number officially reported to the Government, which gave a subsidy of \$12,500 to aid in the industrial education of the natives.

When Gen. O. O. Howard was in command of the Department of the Columbia, which, in matters of military jurisdiction, included all of Alaska, he visited the Territory, and finding that the mission organizations of the churches were doing nothing toward the civilization and Christianizing of the natives there, he took particular pains to urge that work upon those societies and the immediate necessity of attending to it. Vincent Colyer of the Board of Indian Commissioners in 1869 came to the Territory, and upon his return to Washington urged the attention of Congress to the necessity of doing something toward educating the natives, and succeeded in getting an appropriation of \$50,000, but none of it was ever used, and the appropriation lapsed.

The first organized attempt in this direction was made at Fort Wrangle in 1876. Several Indians of the Tsimpsau tribe of British Columbia, who had come under the influence of William Duncan at Old Metlakatla, near Fort Simpson, crossed to Fort Wrangle to obtain work in cutting wood for the military post, expressed a desire to hold religious services, as they were accustomed to do on the other side of the boundary, and Capt. T. P. Jocelyn of the Twenty-first Infantry, in command of the post, assigned them a room for that purpose. Mr. Duncan is a Scotchman and has always had a predilection for the Presbyterian form of church government, and whatever ideas his people got from him in regard to ecclesiastical control were in that direction. In September of the same year the Rev. Thomas Crosby visited Fort Wrangle and organized a Presbyterian church, and funds were raised for the erection of a chapel.

Soon afterward, Mrs. McFarland arrived, and with assistance from home and from the white traders and the officers at the post she laid the foundations of a home for destitute and orphan Indian children. The Cassiar mine excitement arose, eventually, and thousands of miners from all parts of the country flocked to Fort Wrangle, spending the season fit for placer mining up the Stikine River, about two hundred miles in British territory, and wintering at Wrangle. The Stikine Indians then had a village of about three thousand men, women, and children near the military post, and for two winters, on account of the presence of so many white men, hundreds of them, the most abandoned and reckless characters, that place was turned into a perfect pandemonium of saloons, dance houses, and places of Indian prostitution. Amid all these discouraging surroundings the mission work was carried on by brave and devoted men and women, and the home for destitute children was put on a sure footing.

Unfortunately an accidental fire the next year destroyed the buildings, and the home had to be abandoned. Since then the Government has maintained an Indian school at that point, and the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions has sustained a missionary and his family. The greatest obstruction to mission work and general education, not only there, but in all parts of the Territory where missions have been supported for ten years and more, is the fact that none of the missionaries or the teachers employed by either the Church or the Government knows more than a few words of the native dialects. The principal effort has been to force the Indians, children and adults, to think and speak in English. The next Protestant missionary effort in South-eastern Alaska was begun at Sitka, by the organization of a school for the natives, under the auspices of Capt. Beardley of the navy and his wife and a Mr. Ansdin, who came to the country as an employe of one of the ships visiting the waters of Alaska. This was established in the old Russian barracks, and became the nucleus of the large mission and training school with its 200 Indian pupils conducted under the auspices of the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions.

The first attempt at Christianizing the natives of Alaska was made by Russian monks who crossed Behring Sea in the seventeenth century, and established missions among the Aleuts on the west coast of America. Cannibalism and polygamy then existed all along the North Pacific coast. When Alaska was ceded to the United States, in 1867, the Russian missionaries had brought all the natives from Behring Sea to Sitka within the influence of the Church, and many of them could read and write. From Sitka down to the British boundary and up to the northeast along Chatham Straits and Lynn Canal Russian intercourse with the natives was little more than that of trafficking for their furs and skins. The result was, that when the American missionaries and teachers came among them they did not encounter the same prejudices which they found among the Aleuts and Esquimaux of the west coast and in Behring Sea. At Sitka there has long since been a Greek-Russian Cathedral. The relics and jewels of this church are the most magnificent in the entire country. Their value is estimated at \$100,000, and the starting and gorgeous display made by the high church dignitaries and priests on the numerous feast days of the Church are eminently calculated to stir the imagination and mystify the senses who flock to the services.

By far the greater portion of the natives of the large village adjoining Sitka are communicants of the Russian Church. Religious services of an ornate character are held in the cathedral half the number of days in the year. Besides this appeal to the wonder of the Indians the Russian Church authorities support a prosperous Indian school in the building some distance from the cathedral, also occupied as a parsonage and smaller chapel. This is by far their most successful Indian school in the Territory. The benches are constantly filled, and many of the Indian parents attend to watch the progress of their children. The priest, who is very active and energetic, brings all his influence to bear upon the native parents, for the purpose of interesting them in the education of their children, and the result is that not only here, but in all other parts of the Territory, where there are Russian Church schools the attendance of native children is more than 200 per cent. above that of the Government or the Protestant mission schools.

The Dawes Senatorial committee when here last Summer recognized this difference in the interest taken by Indian parents and approved the suggestion of the local Government authorities that paid Indian policemen should be employed at all the schools at the various Indian villages to enforce attendance, otherwise the large sum of \$50,000 annually expended for Indian education would be utterly wasted. That is the condition of things now. There is scarcely a daily average attendance of 10 in a school population of from 150 to 200 at each village in Alaska. Fifty thousand rubles are each year appropriated from the Imperial Treasury at St. Petersburg for aid to the Church and the support of schools in Alaska. Part of the Church revenues is derived from the sale of candles at funerals and marriages and from the rent of church property devoted to secular purposes, which the Greek-Russian Church, under the provisions of the treaty, was allowed to retain. This is not very valuable, however, as a source of revenue. The Russian churches among the Aleuts of the seal islands of St. Paul and St. George in Behring Sea are, in great part, supported from contributions of the industrious wage-earning people of these islands. The Alaska Commercial Company furnishes coal free of cost to the parish priests of the islands.

There are ten Russian schools and churches to the westward of Sitka, excluding the two of each at St. Paul and St. George and including that on St. Michael's Island below the mouth of the Yukon. Of late years there has been a decided improvement in the character of the Russian priesthood on this coast. Formerly they were characterized by drunkenness, gambling, and general licentiousness. The advent of Bishop Vladimir, the Bishop of San Francisco, whose jurisdiction extends over Alaska, marked the beginning of a decided change in that respect. He is imbued with progressive ideas, and is, though a subject of the Czar of Russia, and intensely loyal to the mother Church, is strongly American in feeling. He has made strenuous and effectual efforts at reforming the clergy of his diocese, and directed all his influence in extending the work of the church schools in the development of American sentiments. By a ukase issued about two years ago he required all the priests to acquire the English language as rapidly as possible in order to be able to teach and preach in that language. He has also established an excellent school in San Francisco for the education of the young Russians of Alaska and creoles of the westward for mission work among the natives and their own people. Educated and purely American surroundings and American influences, as in a city like San Francisco, he informed me that it was his belief that these young men would be better fitted for their peculiar tasks and duties than many of the older priests who have, from time to time, been sent out from Siberia and other provinces of Russia.

When the Russians turned over the Territory the population of Sitka—European—was about

4,500. The Church had a theological seminary here, and also an educational institution attended by young women from all the Russian settlements and trading posts to the westward. The Russian population has wasted away until there are scarcely 250 people who trace their origin to Russian ancestry in any degree. The fact is that there are only four families in Sitka of pure Russian blood. The rest are mixed with native blood. Every vestige of the theological seminary has gone. When the American troops came, in 1867, nearly all the young women in the female seminary were enticed into prostitution and dissipation by some of the officers and many of the men of the army, and thus all traces of the influence of that school, except the presence of a few adults of both sexes of a mixed origin of an American character, have been obliterated. The Presbyterian Church obtained the strongest foothold among Protestant organizations in Southeastern Alaska. By some agreement, tacit or otherwise, with other Protestant Churches, that Church was permitted to assume control of the entire mission field in this section of the Territory.

The Presbyterians were first on the ground—before any development of the gold and fishery industries. There was little apparent inducement to rivalry. As the result of this sectarian pre-emption the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions has succeeded in establishing and maintaining stations at Howkav and Klawak, on Prince of Wales Islands; at Fort Wrangle, at Juneau, Chilcote, and Sitka, in Southeastern Alaska. At Howkav Miss McFarland, who had attempted the Indian children's home at Fort Wrangle already referred to, and after not a very satisfactory experience at Sitka, established another such home with funds raised by her in the East, independent of any assistance or co-operation on the part of the Board of Missions. She had fairly succeeded in getting it under way, and it was full of promise of great usefulness when fire overtook her again two months ago and utterly destroyed the buildings and every vestige of her arduous and self-sacrificing labors. Let me remark here the great importance of homes of that kind in Alaska. There is no legislative body of any kind in the Territory, no Indian agencies, and no local municipal government or authority. Congress has made no provision, though frequently urged to do so, for destitute orphans, either American or native. The entire care of that class of children depends upon the charity and generosity of the Church people of the East, or such as the meagre resources of the people here permit them to indulge in voluntarily.

The Mission and Training School at Sitka performs the office of an orphanage to some extent, and in that respect is indispensable. Several weeks ago the District Court, in default of any other provision made by law, or any appropriation by Congress for that special purpose, apprenticed fifty boys and girls, orphans and destitute, from all parts of Southeastern Alaska, to the manager of the Mission and Training School, the girls until they arrive at the age of eighteen, and the boys until they are twenty-one, to be taught some useful self-sustaining occupation or vocation. These children were all under the age of twelve years, and utterly destitute, and nearly all orphans. In the absence of any direct provision for their support by the Government, and in the absence of any establishment supported by the funds of the Board of Home Missions, it would require no vigorous effort of the imagination to picture the future sufferings and neglect of these helpless boys and girls.

Indian parents have affection and regard for their own offspring, as much, perhaps, as whites who may not be much above their elevation in civilization, but yet they have little regard for young relatives such as I have described. In some instances, relatives care for such children, but the rule is otherwise.

When gold was discovered at Juneau and vicinity in 1880-1, and miners began to flock in there in great numbers, many of them Roman Catholics and Canadian French from British Columbia, they were followed by the Sisters of Charity, who at once established a hospital and a home as far as their means would enable them, and a school as well for Indian children. This institution had the sanction of Bishop Sehgars of the Diocese of British Columbia. It has been mainly supported by the people of Juneau. A small Catholic chapel has since been built, and a priest assigned to the parish whose labors also extend to the neighboring Auk and Tarko Indian villages, many of whose people are employed in the great gold mine of Douglas Island, opposite Juneau.

Two years ago the Friends societies of Iowa and Kansas sent out two families to establish a mission and a school on Douglas Island. This is now in a flourishing condition, though the school is partly supported by the Government's paying the salary of the teacher. Several hundred acres of land at Sheep's Crule, on the mainland, three miles from Douglas Island, have been appropriated by the agents of the Friends' Society, and here they are opening up an industrial school to teach, among other things, the Indians to cultivate such vegetables as are adapted to this soil and climate. Russian success in that direction for years has demonstrated that there are at least a dozen varieties of root crops which may be successfully cultivated in Alaska. The Friends' Society seems to recognize the importance of teaching these people the art of diversifying their food as one great step toward their ultimate civilization.

The Presbyterian Mission at Chilcote has never been in a very flourishing condition. Those in charge of it recently do not seem adapted to that peculiar work. The mission is situated within a few miles of the three Chilcote villages, on the Chilcote River, and a few miles from the head of the Lynn Canal. These Indians are further removed from civilization than any other native families on the southeast coast or among the islands, except the Hoonahs. The whites have not yet won their entire confidence, except a few traders among them, whose interests are far from being identical with those of the missionaries. The Government pays a teacher at that point and furnishes the fuel and supplies, the mission society providing the buildings. The characteristic honesty of the Chilcote is illustrated by an occurrence of a few years ago. They took umbrage at the treatment of a native girl by the missionary, and resolved that the missionary and his family should leave the station in the dead of winter. The missionary and his family embarked on a cedar canoe, the wife being in delicate health, and rowed down the inlet 120 miles, in rough and foggy weather, to Juneau, the nearest place of safety. Their supplies for a year when they left were accumulated in a log storehouse, protected when they left by nothing more than a common latch. When they returned, a year afterward, the affair having been satisfactorily settled, they found that not a single article, either in the dwelling, the schoolhouse, or the storehouse, had either been disturbed or pilfered, though the winter had been an exceedingly severe one and food scarce at all the Indian villages.

Three years ago the Catholic Bishop, Sehgars, of British Columbia, with some Jesuit associates, entered the Yukon Valley by the Chilcote Pass and endeavored to establish missions among the natives and miners within British territory in that valley, as the Dominion authorities claim it. One of his associates, a young Jesuit student named Parker, in a fit of partial insanity and impelled, it is said, by the delusion that the Bishop intended killing him, shot and murdered Bishop Sehgars above St. Michael's. The body was brought down on the Tarko last year and interred at Victoria, while Parker was tried here for the crime, convicted of manslaughter, and sentenced to the penitentiary for ten years.

Three missions and schools, under the control of the Jesuit Fathers, were established on the Yukon, within undisputed American territory, by Bishop Sehgars. Their exact condition is not known to the authorities here, for while the present Bishop of British Columbia has asked the Bureau of Education at Washington to extend the same subsidy to those mission schools as is given to Protestant institutions of a similar character in Alaska, he has so far declined to furnish any kind of a report as to number of pupils there and at other places, as a proper basis of subsidy, as is done in the case of Protestant missions, though requested several times so to do.

The Free Church of Sweden has sent out two missionaries, who are stationed at Yakutat, 200 miles west of Sitka. Neither of them either speaks or understands Thlinkiet, and only one of them can understand a little English. There is one white trader at that point and about two hundred natives, who get a living by hunting and fishing. The ladies of the Methodist Episcopal Church support one mission west of Yakutat, while the Government pays the salary of a teacher at that station. Several of the teachers of Government schools at Ocnalaska and vicinity are Baptist clergymen, who engage in mission work when not employed in their regular school duties. The Russian priests at those stations have protested against such a union of functions and discouraged the attendance of creole and native pupils at the Government schools so long as these missionary and educational functions are united in the persons of the teachers of the Government schools. In that attitude they regard the Government proselytism as simply a covert for sectarian proselytism. Both the Commissioner of Education and the Territorial School Board have entered upon effective measures to guard against these evil consequences to the Government schools. Without the co-operation of the local priests and the native parents, in situations so remote, the Government school system among them will be an absolute failure. The Protestant Episcopal Church has established a mission at Anvik, on the Yukon, and is making preparations to enlarge it into an industrial school for the natives.

I have endeavored to pass in review in a hasty manner what has been done in mission work in Alaska, so that those at home may have some idea of how the money which is voted by Congress for Government schools is voted by the generous people of the States is employed, and with what present success and prospects of future success.