

DATOS

SOBRE

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

COMUNICADOS POR EL

Reverendo THOMAS BRIDGES

In response to the kind suggestions of the devoted and able Director of the Museum of La Plata, & with the hope that the information here given will prove interesting to many readers, & helpful, I now write the following brief account of the Christian Mission so long established in Tierra del Fuego, and of my work in connection with it, & of the present state of that country & its people and its prospects in the future.

Some forty years ago the Mission was founded by the zealous efforts of Capt. Gardiner R. N. who in a voyage previously made through the Magellan Straits was struck with the miserable state of the natives he then met as regards their ignorance of God, and the immorality of their lives. So funds had been raised, & an equipment formed for beginning the Mission. This consisted of the generous founder, a Doctor of medicine, a Catechist, Carpenter, & three pious Cornish fishermen, with a years' provisions, two new Pinnaces fitted with all requisites & two small Boats. The party arrived safely at midsummer and after landing them & their goods, the barque that brought them resumed her voyage.

The natives hearing of the wondrous visitors gathered from all sides in increasing numbers their cupidity rendered them more & more troublesome dangerous, and as none of them knew any English, or the Englishmen any word of the native language, friendly intercourse became increasingly difficult, and it became evident to the Missionaries that they must either assert their power by using their firearms against the natives, or give up their position & go elsewhere. But by this time, some months after their arrival, some of them were in very weak health, and so they unhappily determined to seek an asylum in some secluded spot in the country, rather than incur the risk of a passage across the ocean to the Falklands. So they found their unhappy asylum in Spaniard Harbor, at the head of Aguirre Bay, where they lingered on in daily sickness

weakness, & hunger, but upheld in a wonderful manner in all mutual fellowship, and rejoicing in the love of God. Journals were faithfully & regularly kept, and report the exceptional difficulties under which they lived. The fish supply on which they had reckoned proved very disappointing, as did also the birds, and animals. They also forgot their supply of gunpowder which was taken on by the Vessel. They made several trips to Picton Island to take in supplies of their stores, which they had taken the precaution to bury there.

However the end of it all was, that after the lapse of 8 or 9 months they had all died of sickness & famine.

Attempts had been made to forward them supplies from Montevideo & the Falkland Islands without success. At length shortly after the death of the Chief & last survivor, a Schooner from the Falklands was chartered, & came with supplies. On searching for the Mission party at Picton Island; a notice was found painted on a prominent rock "Hasten to Spaniard Harbor, Aguirre Bay, we are starving."

On reaching the latter place they found it a scene of death and ruin. Natives had been there, ransacked everything burnt the Pinnaces, for the sake of the Iron on them.

Such bodies as were found were buried, and all written papers & books carefully collected & sent home.

In reply to the earnest prayers of the dying Martyrs and in accord with their wise counsels, the result of their painful experience, the Mission was started afresh, & on a more efficient plan, & met with very considerable success, not however, without many dangers & difficulties. Many earnest & faithful men engaged in its service, and in 1859 a massacre occurred at Wullya, of the Crew of the Mission vessel, & a Catechist, followed by the sacking of the vessel of everything movable by the covetous natives.

In 1861 I entered the service of this Mission, my duty being to learn the language of the Natives, & to teach them the precepts & hopes of the Gospel. This course I followed in safety at a Mission Station established in 1856 in the Falklands. To this Station some few natives were brought from time to time in the Mission Vessel for instruction in religion and the duties of civilized life, and were in due time exchanged for others, and in this way many natives had come under Christian influences, and had acquired knowledge of farming &c. Associated with others in this work I continued in its good cause from 1861 to 1886. During these years I had well learned

the Yahyan language, and reduced it to writing and its structure had set forth in various grammars.

Many of the people had become Christians, & had settled down to a life of Christian rule, and civilization, cultivating the soil with good results, keeping cattle, making butter, and had even risen to regularly employing hired labor on their farms. Associated with others, I began residence in the country in 1869, & there I have lived ever since with my family. The prospects of the natives for some years were most encouraging, for they had largely improved physically, as well as morally, and at the Mission Station over 30 families had enclosed gardens and among them owned, between 70 & 80 head of Cattle, given to the deserving among them by the Mission. Also in many places round about, many natives had small cultivations and the health of the people was good, and their numbers fast increasing, there being many large families of healthy children, and every indication of progress in every way. The first drawback was through the spread of disease, directly traceable to the visits & improper conduct of Sealers. Scrofula & unclean diseases continued to develop themselves increasingly, and the people very rapidly decreased, & became disheartened in their works. Finally came measles & other diseases, and in a few weeks swept through the land & took away fully two thirds of the survivors. So terrible have been the results that 3000 natives have dwindled down to less than 300. And a like fatality has befallen the other tribes comparatively unaffected by the Mission agency.

Besides being helpful in improving the natives, the mission has been directly helpful in saving the lives of shipwrecked mariners, who have found kind treatment by the natives & been conducted by them in safety to the Mission station & other points where they could obtain help. These services have been recognised by various European governments, and medals and recompense awarded to the Mission & the natives.

One thing is proved incontestably which is that Christianity & civilization are good & effectual to raise & bless all races of man equally, and that it is the vices of men that alone tend to their ruin.

Since 1886 I have been settled with my family in Tierra del Fuego as a colonist among the natives, & dependent chiefly upon their labor, and we have done very well, and done an immense amount of profitable labor of many kinds, and we find beyond doubt that a life of regular work & Christian prin-

eiples is most helpful to the natives. We find the natives work well & happily when assured of adequate reward. They shear our sheep, make fences, saw out boards & planks of all kinds, work well with the pick & spade, are good boatmen & pleasant companions. We find their labor profitable, more so I think, than we should find that of any imported labor.

Our prospects are good, last year the increase of our sheep was 80 %. In four years our cattle have increased from 46 to 150, and our sheep from 140 to 620. The cows yield good milk, and we find dairy work pays very well. The pasture of the country is good, but capable of indefinite improvement, composed of over 20 varieties of grass, but chiefly composed of a hard dry grass, which the cattle avoid during summer, when they find abundance of the better kinds, but in winter thrive on it, as it is then almost their sole sustenance, & stands the winters frost & snow perfectly. By labor beautiful pastures can be formed, as the humid climate greatly favors its growth, & no new kinds need be imported. Under feeding the natural grasses greatly improve. Beyond all doubt the industries of the country will be 1st Pastural, 2nd Woodcutting, 3^d Mineral, 4th Fishcuring. Pastural y agricultural pursuits will be extensive in the east & north, owing to the immense extent of good camps, and a suitable climate. All along since our introduction of cattle some 20 years ago they have done exceedingly well, & require no aid during winter, either in shelter or food. They show no signs of degenerating in size or quality, and the rate of increase is rapid, and the health splendid. Sheep thrive equally well, as also do horses.

As regards woodcutting. The supply of timber is inexhaustible, and is good for all kinds of purposes. The townships of Sandy Point is wholly built of it, as also the Farm buildings in the Falklands. As fuel it is excellent, and fences made of it last for 20 years. Trees grow to diameters reaching even to 6 feet, & attain a height of 70 & 80 ft. They consist of 3 varieties of American beech, one of which is an evergreen, and the only other of consequence is the Winters bark, the wood of which is soft, & when dry very light. As timber it is of very little account. The finest timber is found some little distance in, and on eastern slopes. For beams and framing for ship & housebuilding it is better fitted than for boards, as it is very liable when cut thin to warp & shrink unevenly. It is readily sawn.

As regards minerals, gold is found in an alluvial deposit

only right through Onisin, i. e. the large eastern island, and has yielded good results to the working miner for many years. The Islands in the S. E. as Picton, Lennox & New Islands also abound in gold. In the west are many indications of rich deposits of copper, iron & sulphur, and there can be no doubt that other metals will be found.

4) As regards fish. These are found at seasons in immense quantities, there being vast shoals of sprats of two varieties, and four or five kinds of choice fish that prey upon the sprats. Besides these are found in the rivers and river bays immense quantities of Mulletts & Smelt, and in many localities two kinds of Rock cod of good quality can be hooked at all seasons. Besides there are many kinds of smaller yet valuable fish, chiefly plentiful through summer and autumn & early winter. Besides these fish there are abundance of the finest mussels, whelks & other shellfish.

THOMAS BRIDGES.

Incidents in the life of Rev. Th. Bridges

COMMUNICATED BY HIMSELF TO HIS FRIEND

F. MORENO Esq.

Director of the Museum La Plata.

Some 12 years ago when resident Missionary at Ushuaia, in the midst of some 500 natives, a party of natives arrived from the south in their canoes to tell us that a shipwrecked party was on an exposed headland of their country Atduaia «New Year's Sound» where they had been living a considerable time, but at length had all died of starvation, and were lying unburied. One of these unfortunates was a woman. The natives had spent considerable time in their passage to us, in which it had been necessary to haul their canoes over a neck of land. Furthermore we learned that two men with their families had visited the scene of the sad fate of the brave English seamen, but too late to save life. For though two of them still lived, and the natives tried to induce the stronger of the survivors to trust himself with them, they could not prevail, but they left beside the poor men a bucket of water, & a roast stag, and then took their departure, as they could not haul up their canoe on such an exposed & rugged shore. For several days after, they were unable to return because of a gale, & when they did, both of the survivors were dead.

The natives had many days before seen the spread of white canvas, under which the dying men were sheltered from the weather, but they were afraid to go earlier, fearing treachery from the western Indians, who some years before had beguiled a number of them & killed them. At the earliest possible day we went in the Yawl Mission Vessel to ascertain the truth, & to do what we could for the dead. But though our vessel was specially adapted for her work in those tempestuous

regions, we found we could not beat to windward from False Cape Horn. The second time we drifted down among the Wollaston Islands & were in considerable danger, drifting hopelessly before the S. W. gale during the night among Islets but little known.

However the weather moderated, & we determined to return to the Mission Station, and reach *Black Head* the scene of the Catastrophy from the westward. This we did successfully after many delays owing to bad weather, & anchored near by. We then rowed to the headland & found the dead bodies lying in a row, fully dressed. The captain's wife was among them. The natives had before this repeatedly visited the spot, & taken away for their use all that they could find, but had not touched the dead, save to bring the last two and place them with the rest. As far as I can remember there were eleven bodies. On looking about, a diary kept by the captain was found, in which we learned that his vessel was the «San Rafael» of Liverpool, bound to Valparaiso with a cargo of coal. This took fire, & the ship's party had to leave her to her fate. They left in two boats, and the other boat was picked up by a passing vessel. But unhappily at night & during a snow-storm the boats separated, and the captain & his party only too glad to rest, landed on the first land they could reach, and after their boat was smashed against the rocks of their dreadful prison did they find out the hopelessness of their lot. They found the promontory abrupt all round, and cut off from the land at the back by an impassable cleft, through which the rough sea surged continually. They landed there at night in a snow-storm. So they began the life of death, dealing out with a sparing hand the few stores they had, eking them out with the meagre shellfish their rocky home supplied. Fortunately they could get firewood, but not of good quality as the bush there was of dwarfed evergreen trees. However they lived there some seven weeks, when they all rapidly failed & passed away. the living being too weak to bury the dead.

The poor captain wrote to his son a day or so before his death telling him that he was then almost blind, and deplorably weak and wretched, yet he expressed his earnest wish that his son would live as a Christian should.

We found it a difficult matter to bury the dead, because the rock immediately underlay the scanty soil, which was an inseparable network of roots, for owing to the excessive humidity the vegetation was truly wonderful. We did this last

sad duty to the unfortunates as best we could, according to the rites of the Church of England. Such property as we could collect & recover from the poor natives we did, & sent it home to the authorities and in due time the poor natives were recompensed for their humanity & trouble, with a present of £ 40 worth of clothing from the British government, & we workers in the Mission service were encouraged by a gracious letter of appreciation of our work from the Queen.

On another occasion we heard a report from the Eastern natives that there was a company of shipwrecked men wandering among the outer Islands, & I went to seek & help them. The season was late in Autumn & the weather was wintry, and frost & snow were everywhere. Our vessel was away in the Falklands. So with a good crew of five Indians and a lad of 14 years of age the son of one of our Catechists I went in quest of these men. The day was snowy & very cold, and at night overcome by cold & wet we landed for rest & refreshment. It was quite dark, but the natives managed admirably, & we spent a good night. It froze sharply that night, and the next morning the cold was intense, but the air was quite calm & clear. We made all the haste we could round the Eastern & southern shores of Navarin Island & also circumnavigated Lennox Island. We found traces of the seamen, but they had, as we afterwards learned got safely off to some passing vessel. We were absent from home in our small boat for ten days, & our natives greatly commended themselves to us for their good qualities.

On another occasion wishing to know more of the country I took a boat-voyage with a Catechist, my eldest son, & a crew of six natives in a large whaleboat. The weather was at times as pleasant as at others it was adverse & disagreeable, and we were absent from home, doing much of our travelling by night, because the days are so very stormy.

The first day was so rough that our stores were wetted, & we could only get to the westward against prevailing winds by rowing.

We met with various natives on our voyage all being most friendly. At last we reached Oaiacirr, our furthest point west, and where was the isthmus over which we had determined to haul our boat, & so get into the inner waters of a large district called Aghaia. It required two days hard work to haul our boat over, and the weather was very stormy & snow

fell frequently. We had to camp in a bog, but the next day none of us were the worse for our hardships.

As we were sailing down the waters of Agaia we came across natives, but they were so frightened that they hastened away for their lives. They had not seen the boat ascend, & how it came there they had no idea, and though one of our crew was known to them, and a near neighbour he could not prevail upon them to stop, for they were afraid we were «Asasin» from the west, whose only object could be to kill all we met. So we landed at the head of a long creek, and found every thing saturated. During the night it snowed much, but owing to our native crew we had a good night, & they were as always, very cheerful and helpful. The next day we walked across an isthmus leading us to one of the creeks of Atduaia on the South coast of Hoste Island. But it was a perfect scene of desolation in spite of the rank forest growth. As everywhere in western Fireland animal & bird life was very scarce, and we saw very few signs of human life. We then returned to our hut, and having breakfasted departed, and the weather being fine we rowed well. On the way we landed here & there & to our surprise found cultivation where the natives grew potatoes & turnips.

The next day we reached Wullaia the scene of the massacre of the Mission party of eight persons in 1859. Here we also found cultivations & spent a pleasant day. We were surprised to gather ripe & good raspberries as this bush has become quite wild there, having been brought from the Falkland Mission station many years before.

During the afternoon which was very fine we spent our time admiring the beautiful scenery, fishing for Saj or Rock cod of which we caught some fine specimens, and also in gathering a supply of Shapi. This is a bivalve, with very thin & transparent shells, which are able at pleasure to change their quarters. They adhere by clipping the leaves of the kelp with their shells, and when conscious of danger by our pulling up however gently the kelp which they weighed down, for they were a numerous colony, they darted backwards & forwards but always downward so that it was somewhat difficult to capture them. The natives have reason to speak of them so highly as they do, They are only plentiful in a few favorite places. We reached home at midnight of the tenth day, having rowed most of the way.

On another occasion, when the natives were in a highly

excited state because of blood quarrels of many months standing in which many had taken a chief part, now on one side, now on another, aware of danger I had convened a special meeting to guard against an increase of the evil. At this meeting we were able so to realise to the native mind the danger they were in, & the folly and sin of the course they had been so long following that they at our instigation solemnly promised to help no side, & to do their best to stop all further fighting & murder. No sooner was this impression made & these promises given than a large party of men prepared for a murderous fight with a party then resident at the station. But they had come too late, and in a short time they scattered among our people, & no fighting took place. It was an important crisis. Murders & thefts were numerous, & few men indeed there were whose persons did not attest by many a scar of the quarrelsomeness of the people as a race. They were very ready to take offence, and they ordinarily were very careful not to give offence. Their relations to each other were very much improved when they came under Christian influences, life & property became secure and each ones rights respected, and public opinion ruled the community for good. This opinion was however largely ruled by us, at our daily meetings for instruction & divine worship.

In proof of the superstition that used to prevail I mention the following.

An elderly, and very strong man, and a great rogue had brought me some fish for sale. I let him into the kitchen, & had occasion to go into another room to get the wherewith to purchase it. Having paid him to his satisfaction he left. Sometime after having occasion to use a knife I went to the kitchen table to find it, but it was not there. After thinking, I came to the assurance that my fishman had stolen it. I forthwith went alone to his wigwam to accuse him, & regain my knife. However he disclaimed all knowledge of the knife, and I could only state the reasons I had to believe that he had taken the knife I said I should speak to the people tomorrow on this subject unless the knife was returned. I then went up to my house. Not long afterwards I heard a great noise of coughing & Vomiting, and on opening the door was surprised to find my culprit with my knife in his hand, but all wet. He had just coughed it up he told me. He said he had not stolen the knife, but wishing to convince me he was a true wizzard, his spirit had taken the knife, and now he had brought it up again. He asked me not to speak of the subject tomorrow.

On another occasion a native asked me to speak on his behalf to reclaim for him an axe that Arupawaian had stolen from him, because this Arupawaian was a very violent man, & he was afraid to speak to him. Accordingly that afternoon I went into Arupawaian's wigwam, & after some general & pleasant conversation mentioned the object of my visit, and claimed the axe for my client. But the man was excessively violent & excited, and would not give up the axe, though he did some time afterwards, when I got some of his own friends to back me in my demands.

THOMAS BRIDGES.
