

# Incidents in the life of Rev. Th. Bridges

COMMUNICATED BY HIMSELF TO HIS FRIEND

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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.

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