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Introduction



In the twenty-first century, as instant communication, supersonic transport and ubiquitous technology dominate our lives, it becomes more and more difficult to imagine what life was like for the settlers who arrived on the Pacific coast in the 1840s and 1850s. There were no telephones, telegraph service was yet to arrive, and it took a year or more to receive an answer to a letter mailed to England from British Columbia.

During the first fifty years, it took all the courage, resolve, faith, hard work and adaptability of those who ventured to the Pacific coast to surmount their many disappointments and sorrows. Roads and rail lines were non-existent. There were no schools or hospitals. Sanitation was primitive and when disease struck it was with devastating results, killing many. Life expectancy was only fifty years.

Some of the new arrivals were filled with the spirit of adventure; others were fleeing grinding, unending poverty; a few fled from persecution; and the most dedicated came to provide religious guidance and schooling for the emerging community. The two principals of this story lived much longer than most of their contemporaries, and they had great influence on the moral fibre of the people who knew and admired them. Their experiences taxed these adventurous and deeply religious pioneers emotionally and physically, but they came west prepared to overcome adversities in search of a new, better life for themselves and their contemporaries.

Reverend (later Bishop) Edward and Mary Cridge played a key role in the social, religious and political development of the land that would become the province of British Columbia. When they arrived in 1855, there were only three hundred settlers in or near Victoria, with others spread out over Vancouver Island. The Native population was estimated to be around twenty-six thousand. On the mainland, the European population was scant and scattered and the city of Vancouver did not yet exist. The couple came to Fort Victoria, the Hudson's Bay Company's lonely bastion at the southern tip of Vancouver Island, where they helped to guide its progress from a company outpost to the capital of the westernmost province in a new nation.

Edward Cridge was hired as a chaplain and for a time was the only Protestant minister in the community. A man of great social conscience, he had a liberality in his views that some of his brethren did not share. He reached beyond sermons from the pulpit and worked constantly for the betterment of all. Mary Cridge, who shared his convictions, was the rock to which he clung for love and support throughout their long lives together.

They had been educated in the British style of the times, with its emphasis on strict Victorian principles, but their Church of England school background gave them the freedom of thought to practise a way of life built on democratic and progressive ideals. Their contributions to social reform included encouraging education for all, caring for orphans, working alongside Natives, helping to establish a hospital and discouraging

racial discrimination, as well as teaching a simple evangelical religious message. Edward and Mary Cridge made a significant contribution to the development and history of British Columbia.

I

Edward and Mary



On a mild spring day, in the fields behind Christ Church, at West Ham, Essex, near London in the south of England, a young woman named Mary Winmill had just returned from a long walk with a man who, in the past three years, had become her close friend and confidant. She waved goodbye to him at the garden gate and walked slowly down the pathway, admiring the flowers. As she entered the house, she shook her head before her mother could ask the question so frequently voiced of late. No, Edward had not suggested marriage, and Mary, as well as her mother, wondered whether he ever would.

Mary Winmill was no longer a young girl, but an intelligent, attractive dark-haired woman, aged twenty-seven, and she was extremely fond of the young curate who seemed to enjoy her company so much. The two often discussed Sunday sermons and the teaching of young children. Their

lives were centred on the activities at Christ Church, where Mary was a schoolteacher and Edward was the newly ordained curate. She had hoped that on this particularly glorious day he would propose marriage, but he remained hesitant, and she knew he felt marriage might interfere with his work as a minister. There were, however, events taking place half a world away that would change the prospects for the Reverend Edward Cridge and Mary Winmill, making it possible for them to begin the great adventure that lay ahead.

Edward Cridge was born on December 17, 1817, in the small village of Bratton-Flemming, Devonshire, in southwest England, the son of John and Grace Dyer Cridge. His mother died when he was a small boy; his father, a deeply religious schoolmaster, tutored his son at home in the early years, a major factor in his early educational development and achievements. John Cridge's hopes for his son were realized when at the age of nineteen the boy became the third master of the grammar school at Oundle in Northamptonshire. Although he was young for this relatively senior position, Edward was well received by the headmaster, who valued him as "competent to undertake mathematics... Latin authors... and junior forms of Greek." He deemed Edward to be "active, efficient and trustworthy."¹

After Edward Cridge had taught for six years, the religious beliefs fostered by his father led him to further study with a view to becoming a clergyman. He attended St. Peter's College, Cambridge, and in 1848 passed examinations in theology and graduated with an honours degree in mathematics on February 6. It had been a heavy load involving many long hours of study, but he enjoyed academia. Cridge was a thoughtful, serious man but did not exclude himself from other aspects of life. He had a short, stocky figure and was a good athlete and horseman, having jumped as many as seventeen five-barred gates one after the other. He also developed a lifelong love of music, and in time became an accomplished cellist. Cridge was a founding member of the Cambridge Musical Society, a group he supported throughout his life and which exists to this day. During difficult times in his life, music gave him much comfort.

After graduating from Cambridge, Cridge was ordained a deacon at Norwich Cathedral, and appointed assistant curate and second master in the grammar school at Walsham, Norfolk. On February 24, 1850, he was made a full priest of the church at a ceremony conducted by Bishop Samuel Hinds. Several months later, he was appointed a vicar at Christ Church in the Marsh District on the Romford Road, the newest and poorest church in the parish of West Ham, a village near London. It was here that he met Mary Winmill.

One of his early parishioners described the Reverend Cridge as a man with a large head but an impressive profile. In later years he was heavily bearded. He seldom smiled during a church service, but his face was described as serene, with a pleasant, sincere expression that could not be ignored, for it emphasized that he *believed* the words he spoke in his gentle, refined voice. He was never a passionate preacher, but particularly in his later years he was a powerful figure in the pulpit and in society. His success with his parishioners centred on his quiet-spoken, deep-seated convictions, his belief in God, and the principles by which he lived.

Edward Cridge was as unquestioning in his desire to follow the teachings of the Church of England as he was in his loyalty to his country, his Queen and her empire. He firmly believed, however, that sweeping social reforms were needed and that the Church must play a leading role in effecting them. His commitment to the betterment of humanity had been established in his early years by his father and in lessons preached to him from the pulpit. He demonstrated his compassion at Cambridge, where he participated in raising funds for the thousands of people who were dying in Ireland because of famine caused by the potato blight, a catastrophe that too few others at the time found to be of much concern.

Cridge was born into Victorian England, with its worldwide empire on which the sun never set. For some time there had been a growing need for clergymen to minister to the men and women from Britain who were leaving their home shores for foreign lands. The Church of England saw its horizons broadening and undertook to spread the gospel to the inhabitants of these far-flung lands. Cridge could have looked to a future in a large,

well-established church in England, in the land he loved and knew so well. Instead he took an unanticipated opportunity to make a dramatic change in his life — to leave England. But he had important reasons for the decision, which he soon shared with Mary Winmill.

A growing schism had developed within the Church, a philosophical argument between those who preferred the High Church ritualistic type of service, reminiscent of the Roman Catholic Church, and those who favoured the simpler Low Church, or evangelical, form of worship. Cridge believed that the Church must follow the path set out by the Protestant reformers, and he rejected the exaggerated emphasis on ritualism in the High Church, feeling it was too close to Roman Catholicism. In West Ham, an established conservative parish, some members of the congregation believed Cridge was preaching Calvinism and predetermination, rather than the established Church doctrine with which they were familiar. They resented Cridge's approach and complained to the dean, his superior at West Ham.

The dean himself favoured High Church ritual, and in order to ease the tension in the parish, he suggested that Cridge take a leave of absence or look for another, more suitable parish. While Cridge had many redeeming qualities, he was also stubborn, and although he seldom showed it openly, he was easily riled by criticism. He refused to move to a church where the congregation would accept his Low Church beliefs. Fortunately the dean, a man of many years' experience, found a way to resolve the issue. He learned in August 1854 that the Hudson's Bay Company was looking for a new chaplain for its fort on Vancouver Island, where a new settlement was being established. He suggested that Edward Cridge apply.

Like so many others in Great Britain during the previous two centuries, Cridge jumped at the chance to join the "Company of Adventurers." He knew little of Vancouver Island, only that it was a largely undeveloped territory with a sparse population. He had corresponded with a fellow minister he had met at Cambridge, the Reverend Robert John Staines, who had previously held the position of chaplain at the new fort, after arriving

there in 1849. Staines had been hired by the chief factor of Fort Victoria, James Douglas, and had travelled with his wife to the far-off fur-trading post, which had been given the authority by the Crown to tap the area's abundant resources.

In his reports and letters to England, Staines described the sweeping forests of mighty trees, waters teeming with fish and the bounty of fur-bearing animals. There were minerals to be sought and there was land to be cultivated, but the colony lacked people to do it all. Although Staines had written about the territory in glowing terms, he complained about the Hudson's Bay Company factor. James Douglas, he said, was a difficult man. Staines' comments about Douglas did not deter Cridge from considering the job. Not only did Cridge realize that he was in a difficult situation with his own church, but he felt that the position offered an opportunity to teach the principles of Christianity in an area where they were largely unknown. He also believed the offer was "God sent," and therefore one which he could not ignore. As company chaplain, he would act as regional minister for the Hudson's Bay Company and provide Christian teaching for the children in the community.

Writing in his diary at a later date, Cridge explained he had no misgivings about deciding to leave England, believing that "the great clearness with which our heavenly father marked our path from the beginning" made every step so plain "that there was no mistaking it."² His religious views also seemed suited to a frontier life and the breaking of new ground. Years later he stated simply, "Intercourse with the world is not forbidden, only conformity of the world. Religion is of the will and not of compulsion." His beliefs are explained in a bible studies book that he wrote: "It follows that it is the will of God that nations should enjoy the inestimable benefits of freedom." Cridge contended that "the will of God and a sound governing system on earth assured the progress of freedom and created a balancing power which tends to preserve it from anarchy and wildness."³

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