

## A LECTURE ON QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS.

DELIVERED IN LEGISLATIVE HALL, BRITISH COLUMBIA,  
BY JAS. G. SWAN.

*Mr. Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen:*

Before commencing my account of Queen Charlotte Islands, it will perhaps be proper for me, as it will no doubt interest some among you, to inform you why I, an American citizen, should have been sent by the American Government on a scientific exploration to the Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia. This leads me to give a brief account of the Smithsonian Institution, under whose auspices my visit to those islands was made.

### *Smithsonian Institution.*

The Smithsonian, is not an Institute, but an *Institution of Institutes*, so to speak, having under its immediate direction and charge, the Institution proper, which is the Executive head. The United States Fish Commission, the National Museum and the Bureau of Ethnology; it is, in short, what a university is to a college. It is governed by a Board of Regents, of which the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States is President; the others are the Vice-President of the United States, members of the Senate and House of Representatives, and distinguished citizens of various States. There are fourteen members of the Board. The members ex-officio are, the President of the United States, the Judges of the Supreme Court, and the executive heads of all the departments of Government. The Secretary of the Board is Prof. Spencer F. Baird, who is the chief executive officer.

The Smithsonian Institution was founded, and the first meeting held in December, 1847. The name was adopted from its founder, James Smithson, a wealthy English gentleman of great scientific attainments, who was born about the year 1754, and who died in France in 1829. He was the son of Hugh, the first Duke of Northumberland, and Elizabeth, heiress of the Hungerfords of Studley, and niece to Charles, the proud Duke of Somerset.

The will of James Smithson contained these words: "I bequeath the whole of my property to the United States of America, to found at Washington, under the name of the Smithsonian Institution, an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men." This will, which was very voluminous, had first bequeathed various annuities, which have long since expired, was dated October 23rd, 1826, and was proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, by Mr. Charles Drummond, a London banker, on the fourth of November, 1829.

The first announcement made to the American Government of the fact that the United States had become entitled to the bequest of Smithson, was in 1835, but the amount of the bequest was not fully received till August, 1838, when the ship *Mediator* arrived in New York bringing 104,960l. 8s. 6d. in gold,

which was re-coined into American money at the United States mint in Philadelphia, producing \$503,318.46, as the bequest of Smithson, which amount was deposited in the Treasury of the United States, who became trustees of the fund, where it remained till August, 1846, when a bill passed Congress, which became a law, and under it the Smithsonian Institution was organized, with the late Professor Joseph Henry as its first Secretary and executive officer.

The interest on the Smithsonian fund is applied towards defraying the expense of the Institution proper, and is added to by direct annual appropriations from Congress for the various Bureaus connected with it.

### *The Occasion of My Visit to Queen Charlotte Islands.*

I had for many years been interested in the study of the Indians of the Northwest coast, particularly the Haidas, of Queen Charlotte Islands, and in 1873 I prepared a memoir on these Indians, accompanied with sketches of their carvings and tattoo designs. This memoir was published by the Smithsonian Institution, in Contributions to Knowledge, No. 267, July, 1874. In the notice by the Secretary, Professor Henry says that "the memoir is a valuable contribution to our general knowledge of anthropology and archaeology, while yielding besides a special contingent to the ethnology of the North American Continent. Under the latter of these heads, it raises some questions of great significance, which it is hoped will lead to further investigation."

Prof. Henry was personally very much interested to have me make further investigations concerning the Haida Indians, but no arrangement was made during his life time, as he died on the 13th of May, 1878, and, although I went to Alaska in 1875, to procure articles of Indian manufacture for the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia, there was no provision made for my visiting Queen Charlotte Islands until 1883, when I was instructed by Prof. Baird, to make collections for the United States Fish Commission, the National Museum, and the Bureau of Ethnology, and to obtain all the useful knowledge I could relative to the manners and customs of the Haidas, of Queen Charlotte Islands; in short, to complete, as far as possible, my work commenced in 1873.

### *Voyage to Queen Charlotte Islands.*

In accordance with these instructions, I left Victoria for Queen Charlotte Islands, on the steamer *Otter*, Capt. Meyer, on the 18th day of June, 1883, and after calling at the various way ports, I arrived at Massett, on the north end of Graham Island, on Monday, June 25th, and was hospitably received, and comfortable quarters assigned me by Alexander McKenzie, Esq., in charge of the Hudson Bay Company's post at Massett.

I was accompanied from Victoria by my only assistant, a young Haida named Johnny Kit Elswa, a very intelligent Indian, who speaks good English, and who was of great advantage to me as interpreter and purchaser of articles of Indian manufacture, as well as general servant. I had no occasion for the services of a white man, and consequently took none in any capacity. Perhaps, if I had been accompanied by an intelligent white man as a botanist, I might possibly have added to our knowledge of the flora of the islands, but not being able to make extended tours inland for collections, I had to rely on Dawson's descriptions in his published account of his geological survey of those islands, made in 1878-79, and so