

remains are gathered up by the host's servants, and distributed at the houses of all the company. These feasts conclude, after true Homeric fashion, with bardic recitals of achievements in war and hunting. The cooking of the unctuous meal is singular. 'Hot stones are put, by means of wooden tongs, into large wooden boxes, containing a small quantity of water. When the water boils, the blubber of the whale, cut into pieces about an inch thick, is thrown into these boxes, and hot stones are added until the food is cooked. This imperfect boiling does not extract half the oil from the blubber, but whatever appears is skimmed off, and preserved in bladders to be eaten, as a delicacy, with dried salmon, or with potatoes and other roots.' Silence while eating is considered a mark of politeness; and the host and one of his servants walk round during the meal to see that every one has got his due allowance of blubber, according to his rank. The women are excluded from these feasts, but they do not seem to be in any way ill-treated among the Ahts. As hunting and fishing are their occupations, their outdoor amusements are limited to swimming and some perfectly good-humoured competitive trials of strength. They have some plaintive and some joyous native music, and a grotesque war-dance; also a dramatic performance, called the Nook dance, which is very interesting and characteristic. They are large eaters, like the Mongols, but also, like them, have great power of abstaining from food. Fish of all kinds, ducks, geese, and deer, are their food; and Mr Sproat found out that when, either by the improvidence natural to the savage, or from real inability to calculate their probable wants, it happens that they are in straits for want of food, and they become weak and thin, they blacken their faces, to hide their altered looks. Surely there is a touch of nobility in this.

They drink nothing but water, and as a corrective of the injurious effects of a continued fish and animal diet, use various plants, in particular the gammass, which grows only in small quantities on the west coast; and though they complain bitterly that the encroachment of the whites is rapidly depriving them of this useful and almost necessary plant, they have never attempted to increase the production of it by any kind of cultivation. They dislike salt, and will not boil potatoes in salt water, even under the pressure of hunger. The Ahts are very fond of bartering, and keen hands at it; and their intertribal trade-laws are numerous, minute, and equitable. Property is common to the tribe. They possess good firearms, and make bows and arrows beautifully. The Nitinahts and the Klah-oh-quahts are famous for their canoe-making, which is unequalled. All the tribes excel in basket-making. The institution of slavery is highly prized, and strictly defined among these people, who, though they have unlimited power over their slaves, and might kill them with complete impunity, rarely treat them otherwise than well. They entertain much dislike and contempt for Chinamen and negroes, whom they believe to be much inferior to themselves. Their customs of courtship and marriage are formal, precise, and just. Of course, wives are purchased after the fashion of savage and civilised people, and rank is regarded as of paramount importance; thus, caste is very strictly maintained. Their idea of blood-relationship, and the duties and responsibilities which it involves, is so strong,

that Mr Sproat declares it to be the principal constituent in the structure of their simple society. Polygamy is not prohibited, but it is very rarely practised.

The Ahts are cold-blooded, vindictive, and suspicious, and their religious rites are sanguinary. Their notions of religion are of a vague and incomprehensible kind, but they have much faith in the efficacy of 'exerting their hearts,' as they call prayer, for obtaining what they desire. They are very fond of their children, and never beat them; but they neglect the sick and the old. They believe in omens and sorcery, and suffer as much from fear of supernatural evil as the most debased of the African tribes. An individual from whom Mr Sproat obtained a good deal of knowledge of the faith and the superstitions of the Ahts, gravely asked him if he had ever seen a soul, and said he had once seen his own, when, at the close of a severe illness, it was brought to him by the sorcerer on a small piece of stick, and thrown into his head. The traditions of their origin cherished by the Ahts are merely grotesque. They are entirely wanting in poetry; and their belief in an after-life is vague, dull, and uninspiring. They do not hope for any other or better kind of existence than that they possess; they fear, but do not aspire to the future, and they cling with melancholy tenacity to life. Hence, their medicine-men, coarse impostors enough, have immense power over them. It is impossible to read about these people, whose life has none of the terrible conditions which make it a relief to know that the Esquimaux will soon cease to exist, and not regret their decay, not wish that wise, powerful, and organised efforts should be made for the good of such of them as remain. The progress of their extinction is strangely rapid. In 1778, Captain Cook rated the population of Nootka village, in Vancouver's Island, at two thousand; and Captain Meares, ten years later, confirmed this estimate, and stated that the population of all the villages in the sound at Nootka amounted to between three and four thousand. 'The aggregate of the population of the sound now is barely six hundred souls, yet the natives have remained in almost a primitive state, only visited occasionally by a ship-of-war or a trading schooner. They have had plenty of food and better clothes than they possessed prior to their knowledge of blankets; and their number has not been lessened by any epidemic, nor by the division or emigration of any portion of the tribes.'