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Incidents of Travel on the North-West Coast, Vancouver's Island, Oregon, &c., &c.,

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THE CHINOOK INDIANS.

(Read before the Canadian Institute, March 14th. *)

As it would be impossible for me in the confined limits of a paper like the present to give anything like a detailed account of all the tribes of Indians amongst whom I have travelled, I have considered that it would prove far more interesting were I to confine myself to one tribe, and give full information regarding their habits, customs and traditions. For this purpose I have selected the Chinooks, one of the tribes among whom I have been, most remote from this part of the continent, and whose manners and customs are so much at variance with our own, as, I trust, to render some notice of them, from personal observation, novel and interesting.

The Flat-Head Indians are met with along the banks of the Columbia river from its mouth eastward to the Cascades, a distance of about 130 miles; they extend up the Walamett river south about 30 or 40 miles, and through the district lying between the Walamett and Fort Astoria, now called Fort George. To the north they extend along the Cowlitz river and the tract of land lying between that and Puget's Sound. About two-thirds of Vancouver's Island is also occupied by them, and they are found along the coasts of Puget's Sound and the Straits of Juan de Fuca. The Flat-Heads are divided into numerous tribes, each having its own peculiar locality, and differing more or less from the others in language, customs and manners.

Of these I shall select, as the subject of the present paper, the Chinooks, a tribe inhabiting the tract of country at the mouth of the Columbia river. Residing among the Flat-Heads I remained from the fall of 1846 to the following autumn of 1847, and had consequently ample opportunity of becoming acquainted with the peculiar habits and customs of the tribe. They are governed by a Chief called Casenov. This name has no translation. The Indians on the west side of the Rocky Mountains differing from those on the east, in having hereditary names, to which no particular meaning appears to be attached, and the derivation of which is in many instances forgotten. Casenov is a man of advanced age, and resides principally at Fort Vancouver, about 90 miles from the mouth of the Columbia. I made a sketch of him while staying there, and obtained the following information as to his history and previous career:—Previous to 1829 Casenov was considered a great warrior, and could lead into the field 1,000 men, but in that year the Hudson's Bay Company and emigrants from the United States introduced the plough for the first time into Oregon, and the locality hitherto considered one of the most healthy was almost depopulated by the fever and ague.

* Various articles of dress worn by the Chinook Indians, specimens of their bows and arrows, spears, cooking utensils, and a skull taken from one of their graves, were exhibited. Several admirable oil paintings, executed by Mr. Kane, illustrated many important features of the lives and characters of the Chinook Indians. (See proceedings of the Canadian Institute, March 14th, page 211. *Canadian Journal*.)

Their principal settlement, Chinook Point, where King Cumcomley ruled in 1811, at the mouth of the river, was nearly reduced to one-half its numbers. The Klat-sup village now contains but a small remnant of its former inhabitants. Wasiackum, Catlamet, Kullowith, the settlements at the mouth of the Cowlitz, Kallemo, Kattlepootle and Walkumup are entirely extinct as villages. On Soveys Island there were formerly four villages but now there scarcely remains a lodge.

They died of this disease in such numbers that their bodies lay unburied on the river's banks, and many were to be met with floating down the stream.

The Hudson's Bay Company supplied them liberally with Quinine and other medicines, but their good effects were almost entirely counteracted by their mode of living, and their obstinacy in persisting in their own peculiar mode of treatment, which consisted principally in plunging into the river without reference to the particular crisis of the disease.

From these two causes their numbers have been very much reduced, and the effective power of the tribes so greatly diminished that the influence which Casenov owed to the number of his followers has correspondingly declined; his own immediate family consisting of ten wives, four children and eighteen slaves, being reduced in one year to one wife, one child and two slaves. Their decrease since that time has also been fearfully accelerated by the introduction of ardent spirits, which, in spite of prohibition and fines against selling it to Indians, they manage to obtain from their vicinity to Oregon city, where whiskey, or a poisonous compound called there *blue ruin*, is illicitly distilled. I have scarcely ever seen an Indian in that vicinity who would not get drunk if he could procure the means, and it is a matter of astonishment how very small a quantity suffices to intoxicate these unfortunate beings, although they always dilute it largely in order to prolong the pleasure they derive from drinking. Casenov is a man of more than ordinary talent for an Indian, and he has maintained his great influence over his tribe chiefly by means of the superstitious dread in which they hold him.

This influence was wielded with unflinching severity towards them, although he has ever proved himself the firm friend of the white man. Casenov for many years in the early period of his life kept a hired assassin to remove any obnoxious individual against whom he entertained personal enmity.

This bravo, whose occupation was no secret, went by the name of Casenov's *Sko-oom* or evil genius. He finally fell in love with one of Casenov's wives who eloped with him; Casenov vowed vengeance, but the pair for a long time eluded his search, until one day he met her in a canoe near the mouth of the Cowlitz river and shot her on the spot. After this he lived in such continual dread of the lover's vengeance that for nearly a year he never ventured to sleep, but in the midst of a body guard of 40 armed warriors, until at last he succeeded in tracing him out, and had him assassinated by the man who had succeeded him in his old office. The Chinooks over whom Casenov presides carry the process of flattening the head to a greater extent than any other of the Flat-Head tribes.

The process is as follows:—The Indian mothers all carry their infants strapped to a piece of board covered with moss or loose fibres of cedar bark, and in order to flatten the head they place a pad on its forehead, on the top of which is laid a piece of smooth bark bound on by a leathern band passing through holes in the board on either side and kept tightly pressed across the front of the head. A sort of pillow of grass or cedar fibres being placed under the back of the neck to support it.

This process commences with the birth of the infant and is