

Bella Bella, B.C.

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Where is Bella Bella? If you look up your high school geography, and turn to the coast line of British Columbia, you may find it indicated among numerous small islands of this jagged coast line, but the name of Bella Bella will be missing. The government survey has not considered it sufficiently important to indicate to the world that such a place exists. Yet this obscure island situated two hundred miles north of Vancouver, has a history dating back into the misty past, that is thrilling with interest, and replete with daring and courageous adventure.

PAST HISTORY.

In the days that are gone, when tribal warfare was rife, and the hand of Christianity had not reached these northern tribes, the name of Bella Bella was known and feared by all the tribes from Nanaimo on the south to Alaska on the north. Not that other tribes were soft and weaklings, but the name of Bella Bella was known for bravery, courage, fortitude, intrepidity, and fearlessness, and woe to the tribe that dared fling its firebrand of insult to any member of this proud, arrogant, and merciless foe. To-day, recorded in the memory of those living, is the picture of one of the bloodiest scenes of warfare in the annals of Indian conflicts.

About sixty miles below Bella Bella lies an inlet of the Pacific Ocean known as River's Inlet, from the fact that here some twenty rivers pour their contents into the sea. At the extreme point of this spacious inlet it was my privilege to visit a tribe of Indians known as the O-we-kanos, the sworn enemies of the Bella Bellas. As I looked at their lugubrious and grotesque figures of apes with all kinds of grotesque figures of birds, beasts, and men, and saw by their tribal crests or coats of arms the history and heritage that past generations had handed down to the present, I was compelled to say, "how are the mighty fallen." The once powerful tribe has been so reduced by bloodshed in the past, and by the ravages of a disease in the present that it is consuming both flesh and bones, a disease that has set its seal of doom and utter extinction, upon the O-we-kanos, as surely as upon the leprosy victim. Scarcely one house did I find untouched by this dreadful scourge, "which eats as doth a canker."

INDIAN REVENGE.

The first cruel blow that caused this tribe to reel and stagger preparatory to its fall, was struck by the Bella Bellas quite within the memory of its oldest fathers. An old score of long standing against the O-we-kanos must be avenged. Under pretence of friendship the chiefs of Bella Bella invited the O-we-kanos to come and join them in a feast. The invitation was gladly accepted, never suspecting its cruel purport. Canoes were hastily laden with provisions for the journey, and with light hearts they set out to visit their neighbors. In the meantime the warriors of Bella Bella came down in their canoes to a place known as Schooner Pass which is a waterway between the mountains and an outlet to the open sea.

This pass was the scene of cruel treachery. No sooner had the canoes of the O-we-kanos got well into the pass than every man was subject to a murderous fire and few that day escaped to tell the awful tale of Bella Bella's revenge. That event was to the O-we-kanos what the Armada was to Spain—the beginning of its downfall, now rapidly being consummated by the more dreadful onslaught of hereditary diseases. If ever you go to Bella Bella ask for Old Dick, and there you will see a man who played the part of the deceiver in extending the invitation to the

O-we-kanos; and to this day the memory of the past haunts him, for while his tribe goes yearly to the very place of the massacre, he has never been known to accompany them for fear retributive justice might overtake him.

HEATHEN SOCIAL CONDITIONS.

Now why have I described this bit of Indian history? To show by way of contrast the transforming and transfiguring power of the Gospel of the Cross. Before the Gospel found them, rites and abominations were practised too vile to repeat. The spirit of pride and revenge were the cause of the most fearful atrocities. Home was a term unknown in the sense of protection, and comfort. Woman was the serf of man. By the order of a chief who was known as a man-eater, the life of a woman could be taken and her body supply the requirement of the horrid feast. Fifth and uncleanness characterized them in a high degree, of which there is still abundant proof to be seen in any tribe untouched by Christian civilization, and by no means absent from some of the villages designated by the term Christian. So much for the past, but what of the present? What of the warlike tendencies, the lust for revenge, the cruel abominations, and disgusting rites? Do they still go to war? Are they ready on the slightest pretext to seek revenge? Do they show in any degree the spirit of humility and of worship? These and other questions have as of late presented themselves to your minds over and over again. Let me tell you as tersely as I am able just what I found and what I experienced amongst these very interesting people.

THE INDIAN VILLAGE.

Regarding the general appearance of the village, I was agreeably surprised, and even wondered at the remarkable evidence on every hand of Indian ingenuity and skill. Instead of a squalid, filthy, revolting sight of tumbling shacks fit only for housing cattle, I looked upon a row of cottages extending along the beach in almost unbroken line for about one-eighth of a mile, presenting an appearance of civilized life which would compare with some of our modern villages in Ontario. There are numerous saw mills where all kinds of building material may be purchased at a reasonable cost. Some Indian villages run their own saw mills by water power or steam. Soon after my arrival I took a walk through the village and saw an Indian working at a turning lathe, and I saw he was preparing four legs to make a table for his home. By means of a flume (i.e. a trough) water is conveyed from the mountain stream which falls upon a small water-wheel, and by this means the Indian makes the mountain stream turn the legs of his table. I asked him how he came to understand the art of turning wood, and he said his brother Indian had been shown by the white man, and he had learned it from his brother.

IMITATING THE WHITE MAN.

A very remarkable feature in the British Columbia Indian is his power of imitation, and excellent attempt to reproduce anything he has seen done by a white man.

Yacht and boat building are by no means simple accomplishments. Before Christianity found them, the canoe was the limit of their attainment in boat building. From time to time yachts of various descriptions have sailed into the harbor. The white man has been mentally impressed and the result is a reproduction of the craft of their white brother, and to-day not a few are the proud owners of sailing yachts which, under full sail, are as graceful as a bird on the wing. This faculty of imitation has a very humorous phase in various instances. An Indian never thinks of knocking at another's door

but walks right in, for they regard themselves as one family. On one occasion an Indian subordinate chief went down to Victoria and saw a man ring a door bell of a fine residence with stained glass door. He conceived the idea of having the same, and so outside all the nobility of Bella Bella, even the resident missionary. He purchased a bell, a door frame, and some colored glass and brought them home in triumph, took away the old door, and put up the new, then strutted with the air of a noble and a fine finery. It reminded me very much of a tramp with old shoes and tattered garments crowned by a fine silk hat. The bell was seldom heard except when the missionary made a call, and a bland smile of approval and appreciation flitted across the Indian's swarthy face, that his matchless door should be thus honored.

The Indian women dress like their white sisters excepting the head gear, which is adopted only on special occasions. The almost invariable custom is the use of a shawl for head covering. The annual Christmas entertainment is the exception to the rule.

The change from sombre black shawls to spring and summer dowers of the gayest colors, interspersed with evergreen, myriophylls, and gaudy plumes, produced such a striking contrast, that I didn't recognize my own parishioners, supposing they were visitors from a neighboring village come to attend our celebrated annual Christmas concert.

FOLLOWING THE FASHION.

One of our missionaries, referring to this same characteristic, said that when society adopted the puff sleeves, his wife had hers slightly inflated, so as not to be conspicuous on arrival in Victoria. The Indian women noted the change, and dressmaking was the order of the day throughout the village. To the great surprise of the missionary and the mortification of his wife, there were assembled in the congregation Indian women who were bound to outdo their fair sisters. They wanted to be puffed up like others, only the puff reached the dimensions of a small sized balloon, as they stood even with the top of their heads, and imitated the owl to perfection.

This, while amusing, has an important lesson to the man or woman who goes to represent Christ. He cannot make a turn that is not watched and mentally estimated by these illiterate but far-seeing people. If a self-seeking spirit is manifest, his spiritual power will stand at zero, as far as his effectiveness for good is concerned.

WARFARE UNKNOWN.

Warfare is now a thing unheard of among them. They would as soon think of going to Greenland as they would of going to war. Not only do these once ferocious people not think of going to war, but the very implements used by their forefathers are not to be found anywhere except in a collection of Indian curios. A missionary is as safe among the Indians of Bella as he would be in the city of Toronto, yea, and more so, judging from the sad events in our city during the last few weeks.

Fighting with one another is almost unknown. The worst one man will do to another in case of a difference is not to speak to him, letting him severely alone for a season, an example that might profitably be followed by many white men and even some Christians.

Their religious life is excellent considering their opportunities. When you measure them by the standard of what they were in their heathen state, and what they are under the influence of Christianity, remembering that all this has been brought about through a taught and not a read Bible, we are compelled to say—this work must be of God.

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