

Ball. a. 977. Sec.
No 396

THE INDIANS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

BY

DR. FRANZ BOAS.

During the last seven years my studies of the North American Indians have led me frequently to the coast of British Columbia, into the recesses of its deep fjords and to the storm-beaten shores of its islands. In the following remarks I will describe some of the results of my studies and some experiences, but I will dwell particularly upon the interesting customs which it was my good fortune to observe in a cruise along the coast last winter.

Many are the tourists who nowadays in commodious steamers pass up and down the rugged coast of British Columbia on their tour to Alaska and many a time have the beautiful fjords, the snow-covered mountains the foot of which is clad in evergreen forests been described in vivid colors. But a different impression is left on the mind of him who in a small canoe passes through the intricate channels of the coast, tossed by tempestuous squalls which blow down the sides of the mountains and struggling against the rapid tides which in places rush like torrents through narrow openings. The overwhelming solitude and stillness of the shores, the monotony of the dark pines and cedars, of the channels and of the roaring cascades beget a longing for the sight of human work, of human habitation, that swallows the admiration of the magnificent scenery. Gladly welcomes the traveller the smoke which is seen to arise in the far distance, at a place where the steep coast line is interrupted by a small flat and which indicates the presence of an Indian village. While thus travelling from place to place with my Indian friends I had ample opportunity to become familiar with their life, their customs and their ideas.

Before describing the life of the Indians I may be permitted briefly to summarize what we know about their general appearance and their relationships to each other and to the rest of the American race. The casual visitor is first of all struck by the remarkable similarity of the natives of the North Pacific Coast with the races of Eastern Asia. Even after a long acquaintance with the people single individuals are found whom one might almost mistake for Asiatics. It happened to me even last winter that I met a broad-faced, light-complexioned person, with brownish, almost black hair,