

INTRODUCTION.

The Chilcotin Indians, from whom the traditions recorded in the following pages were obtained, occupy a territory lying chiefly in the valley of the Chilcotin River, in the interior of British Columbia, at about latitude 52° north.

Of Athapascan stock, their nearest relatives are the Carriers, whose territory is adjacent on the north, and who are the only Athapascan people with whom they come in contact. Towards the west a pass leads through the Coast Range to Bella Coola; and intercourse with the tribe of that name, which was formerly frequent, is still kept up to some extent. In early days there was also some communication with the Kwakiutl of Knights Inlet on the southwest. On the east the Chilcotin are separated from the Shuswap by the Fraser River, and do not hold very intimate relations with that people. In earlier times the two tribes were constantly at war, and even to-day there is a decided undercurrent of suspicion in their regard for each other. Towards the south their nearest neighbors are the Lillooet Indians, but contact between the two tribes is slight.

In former times, and down to within about thirty years, the centre of territory and population of the Chilcotin was Anahem Lake; and from here they covered a considerable extent of country, the principal points of gathering being Tatlak, Puntze, and Chizäikut Lakes. They ranged as far south as Chilco Lake, and at the time of salmon-fishing were accustomed to move in large numbers down to the Chilcotin River, to a point near the present Anahem Reservation, always returning to their homes as soon as the season was past.

More recently they have been brought to the eastward, and to-day the chief centres of the tribe are three reservations in the valley of the Chilcotin,—Anahem, Stone, Risky Creek,—and the Carrier reservation at Alexandria, on the Fraser River, where a few Chilcotin families reside. Besides these, there are a number of families leading a semi-nomadic life on the old tribal territory in the woods and mountains to the westward. These latter Indians, considerably less influenced by civilization than their reservation relatives, are known by the whites as "Stone Chilcotin" or "Stonies."

Although subjected to intercourse with the whites for a comparatively short period, the Chilcotin have assimilated the customs and ideas of their civilized neighbors to such an extent that their own have largely disappeared, except, possibly, among the families still living in the mountains, whom it has thus far been impracticable to investigate with any thoroughness.¹

The present collection of traditions was made during a visit to the tribe in the summer of 1897. The conditions were not particularly favorable for the work, for the Indians were by no means cordial at the outset, and good interpreters were not to be had. That great resource of ethnological work in the Northwest, the Chinook jargon, was also not available in this tribe. However, while

¹ For notes on Chilcotin customs, see Twelfth Report of the Committee on the Northwestern Tribes of Canada (British Association for the Advancement of Science, London, 1898).