

[Circular of Inquiry.]

British Association for the Advancement of Science.

Committee on North-Western Tribes of the Dominion of Canada.

At the meeting of the British Association at Montreal in 1884 the subject of Canadian anthropology came frequently under public and private discussion. The opinion was strongly expressed that an effort should be made to record as perfectly as possible the characteristics and condition of the native tribes of the Dominion before their racial peculiarities become less distinguishable through intermarriage and dispersion, and before contact with civilised men has further obliterated the remains of their original arts, customs, and beliefs.

Two considerations especially forced themselves on the attention of anthropologists at Montreal: first, that the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, traversing an enormous stretch of little known country on both sides of the Rocky Mountains, has given ready access to a number of native tribes whose languages and mode of life offer a field of inquiry as yet but imperfectly worked; secondly, that in the United States, where the anthropology of the indigenous tribes has for years past been treated as a subject of national importance, not only have the scientific societies been actively engaged in research into the past and present condition of the native populations, but the Bureau of Ethnology, presided over by the Hon. J. W. Powell (present at the Montreal meeting), is constituted as a Government department, sending out qualified agents to reside among the western tribes for purposes of philological and anthropological study. Through these public and private explorations a complete body of information is being collected and published, while most extensive series of specimens illustrative of native arts and habits are preserved in the museums of the United States, especially in the National Museum at Washington. If these large undertakings be compared with what has hitherto been done in Canada, it has to be admitted that the Dominion Government, while they have taken some encouraging steps, as by the installation of an anthropological collection in the museum at Ottawa, have shown no disposition to make the study of the native populations a branch of the public service. Anthropologists have thus two courses before them in Canada, namely, to press this task upon the Government and to carry it forward themselves. Now it is obvious that agitation for public endowment will not of itself suffice, as involving delay during which the material to be collected would be disappearing more rapidly than ever. If, however, a determined attempt were at once made by anthropologists, resulting in some measure of success, public opinion might probably move in