

I

The Bella Coola are a small tribe inhabiting the coasts of Deep Inlet and Bentinck Arm, two long and narrow fiords situated in about latitude 52° north, in British Columbia. Their habitat extends along Bella Coola River, which empties into North Bentinck Arm. The name "Bella Coola" is a corruption of the word 'Bilxula,' by which name the tribe is known to the Kwakiutl. There is no term in their own language embracing all the tribes speaking the Bella Coola language. It seems that at a former time the tribe was quite populous, but, owing to various epidemics and the introduction of other diseases, its numbers have dwindled down so that at the present time it has been reduced to only a few hundred souls. The language spoken by the tribe belongs to the Salishan family, more particularly to the group of dialects spoken along the coasts of Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. The great similarity between the Bella Coola and the other Coast-Salishan dialects leads me to assume that at one time the tribes speaking these dialects inhabited contiguous areas. At the present time the Bella Coola are separated from other tribes speaking Salishan languages by a considerable stretch of country which is inhabited by tribes of Athapascan and Kwakiutl lineage. Vocabulary and grammar have been highly modified, particularly by an extensive elision of vowels. The relation of their language to the other dialects of the Coast Salish is similar to that of the Tillamook, another language belonging to the Salishan family, which is spoken on the coast of Oregon, in an area separated from the rest of the Salishan territory by the district inhabited by the Chinook.

Physically the Bella Coola bear evidence of long-continued contact with the northern Coast tribes and also with the Athapascan tribes of the interior. Evidently intermarriages have been quite frequent so much so that their present physical appearance differs considerably from that of the southern Salishan tribes, of whom they form a branch. The same is true in regard to their customs and beliefs which differ fundamentally from those of the southern Salishan tribes.

In the present paper I shall describe the mythology of the Bella Coola and discuss its development.

II

Our previous knowledge of the mythology of this tribe is based on studies made by Adrian Jacobsen, Philip Jacobsen, Goeken, and the writer. In 1886 I published a few brief notes on their traditions.¹ Goeken pub-

Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte. 1886, p. 206.