

West Coast of Vancouver Island

4—Present and Prospective
(By G. O. Buchanan.)

The Agent's Province.

The Indian agent for the Dominion government for the West Coast, Mr. Neil, visits the villages regularly, and has, by virtue of his office, almost absolute powers in Indian affairs.

In the case of the lost schooner Fawn the Indian department negotiated a settlement with the owners of the vessel as to their accounts with the Indian hunters.

The gross amount, when ascertained, was paid to the department and by it disbursed to the heirs.

The question of determining the heir devolved upon the Indian agent, as also precautionary measures to prevent the destruction of the money. Mr. Neil has found it necessary to be most explicit in warning the Indians that property coming to them in any way through the medium of the government must in no case be destroyed. Thus the chief's house has been spared after the recent movement because some expenditure of Dominion money was represented in its construction.

The inducements offered to seal hunters have been bettered year by year, until the owners think a limit has been reached, and yet each year the difficulty of getting crews becomes intensified.

Sealers Get Hunters.

Captain Searle of the Libbie had his crew at Friendly Cove "signs" in November last. But he lay the whole month of February in the cove waiting for his hunters to come on board.

The advance, which used to be \$25 per man, has grown to \$50, and must be paid in cash.

The "cutius potlatch" a bonus of \$5 is paid when the canoes are on board.

By way of advances the captain had distributed some \$1,500 and his signed crew who were under the provisions of the Merchants' Shipping Act, and who might legally be at any moment seized as deserters, sat on the shore all day, and in their houses at night, and gambled for the steadily vanishing pile.

When Tom lost \$400 at a sitting, he went on board and stayed until the captain opened up the chest and gave him a pair of trousers at \$2.50. Selling the trousers to Charlie for \$2.50 Tom re-entered the game, and the next morning had \$300.

Generally at night a deputation met the captain in the store, and in victory Chinook demanded larger advances, that the "cutius potlatch" should be paid in cash, not in goods that "blasted" the store, and before long, and finally that the rate per skin be raised \$1.

In support of the last demand, at a critical moment an Indian was introduced who had come from Hesquelt, with the news that a schooner in Clayoquot Sound had raised the price.

One who has not heard a virile Indian arguing a case such as this, has not heard oratory.

And here we heard a fine testimony to the work of Father Brabant in an answer of the orator to an emphatic contradiction of Captain Searle.

"Hesquelt Indians, Catholic Indians, halo cutius wawa" (no worthless talk). In an early stage of the discussion, Monkey, who alleged that he had been twice refused "advances," skipped out to Ahouset. It was gravely proposed that the Quadra be sent after him.

Nor were the captain's troubles ended when he got his crew away.

The spring trip along the coast is not generally profitable, but is regarded as necessary in order to secure and build a crew for the summer trip to Bertha Sea.

In June the captain was back in the cove, and again there was the rustle to get the crew aboard. With sails hoisted and anchor hoisted short, the captain was waiting for the last tardy canoe, when a puff of wind sent the schooner dragging, and before he could be gained, the Libbie touched the rock.

The damage was trivial and was repaired in one tide, but the Merchants' Shipping Act was now in evidence on the other side. The Indians would not sell in a damaged vessel, and the captain was forced to secure another schooner, and take out another schooner.

"Pitlamping."

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The first is "pitlamping," practiced by both Indian and white hunters. At low tide the animals resort to the beach, the deer to eat seaweed, and fur animals for clams and mussels. At night the light from a head lamp, a canoe can be seen reflected in the eyes of the beasts, and the hunters shoot without knowing what they are killing. The animal they are firing at, particularly the hunter is not in want of venison, deer so killed are left on the shore, or, if wounded, to die in the edge of the woods. Moreover, in the darkness, fur animals hit and not killed outright, are seldom found, and so uselessly perish.

The second is the stripping of cedar bark. For ages the squaws have stripped cedar trees for the inner bark, of which they make mats. In cruising in the woods one seems never to get beyond the scene of their operations. Cedar constitutes perhaps 25 p.c. of the growing timber, and scarce a tree has escaped, while some have been visited four times in 100 years, and a strip taken from each quarter of the tree.

The damage amounts to millions of dollars, and is still going on.

(It is most discouraging to the Indians should be encouraged in industry, but material in comparison with cedar bark. The Indian department might well consider whether something else could not be supplied that would answer the purpose, so that, without hardship, they might be forbidden to destroy the trees.)

His Ignorance.

Different stages in educational advancement are exemplified at Nootka. In the spring considerable quantities of furs are on hand, and the Indians resort to the store with their catches, prepared to negotiate. That an old couple has come from Nuchaltitz (30 miles) with a dozen skins, is no sure evidence that they expect to sell. To the Indian time and distance have little meaning. He knows, or says he knows, just how much he can get in Kyquoot, or Hesquelt, or Clayoquot, and even in Victoria or Seattle, and from his point of view it costs him nothing to go to either of these places.

Some of the younger people who have been at the mission schools, can comprehend value in figures. The storekeeper figures a lot at \$75, and offers one-half in chickimin (cash) and one-half in kithas (goods), and while his customer may not accept the offer, he at least understands it. With the older people, numbers beyond 10 or 20 have little significance. The skins are spread upon the counter and the storekeeper makes his bid in coin piled up beside each. The Indian closely examines the money, perhaps takes it out of the store, but with no intention of accepting any of the preliminary offers made him. The deal which began in the morning is terminated at night by the return of the money and the removal of the skins.

Token Sticks.

In contempt of the white man's coin, the Indian sometimes produces his token sticks, and the storekeeper counts out to him, two for a mink, eight for a marten, and eighteen for an otter, or one for every dollar offered, and the Indian goes away and carefully considers the sticks, and probably brings them back.

I was told that it was common to give them beans as tokens, and that in event of a sale and the subsequent redemption of the storekeeper counts out to him, two for a mink, eight for a marten, and eighteen for an otter, or one for every dollar offered, and the Indian goes away and carefully considers the sticks, and probably brings them back.

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In the inspection of skins, however, it is a case of "let the buyer beware." The whisks of the seal may be inserted, the tails of the minks sewn on, and a fine dark marten worth \$15, if deprived of its stove polish becomes a \$6 blonde. The Indian shows no shame if detected in such frauds, and glories if they succeed.

One old Indian particularly pernicious, had with him a dead-seven boy of ten. As he tolled over silver coins and token sticks, the boy kept tally and the father continually turned to him. "Blasted" the storekeeper, and counted the boy, but