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THE INDIANS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

A BRIEF REVIEW OF THEIR PROBABLE ORIGIN, HISTORY AND CUSTOMS.

(By J. W. MACKAY.)



WE find that in several important particulars these Indians differ widely from the race so often described by authors and travellers as the typical North American Indian.

The changes consequent on the opening of the country for settlement have largely modified their circumstances and habits, but in their pristine condition they mostly lived in large communities on and near the sea coast, depending mainly on the products of their fisheries for their sustenance. Their abodes were substantially built of wooden dwellings, and they were industrious, active and keen traders. Although they had frequent forays and occasional wars, they seldom entered on these from motives

of bravado and rarely took scalps; but for mercenary purposes they took all the captives possible, whom they sold as slaves, and many of them by such means amassed considerable wealth in kind. When they made a successful foray for revenge they decapitated their victims and brought the heads home as trophies. Sometimes, however, they were unsuccessful, in which event some of the attacking party would be brought home without their heads, as happened in the case of the Sooke chief, in 1848, who led a strong armed party to attack Tsu-hay-lam, a Quamichan chief. The attacking party numbered about 150 armed men, comprised of contingents from the Sooke, Songhees, Clalam and Skatchet bands. Tsu-hay-lam was at the time living at his stronghold on a rocky point which juts into Cowichan Bay with a garrison of six men besides himself. The attacking party landed at night and surrounded his premises. The Sooke chief and a young Songhees brave, both armed and carrying material for setting Tsu-hay-lam's palisades on fire, had nearly succeeded in igniting the material, when one of the main party displaced a stone on the hillside at the back of Tsu-hay-lam's enclosure, and the stone rolling down made noise enough to disturb the garrison, one of whom ventured to reconnoitre the enemy through a loop-hole. He was just in time to see the Sooke chief blow the smouldering embers of sil-tsip, or friction stick, into flames and shot the incendiary instanter, mortally wounding him. Tsu-hay-lam promptly sortied and cut the dying man's head off. He then hailed his now alarmed and fleeing assailants and intimated to them that they were at liberty to take away with them what was left of the slain warrior.

It has been mentioned that some of the Indians in former days amassed considerable wealth by trading and by selling into slavery the captives taken in their forays on their neighbours. In those times the Indians were largely communists within the circle of each band, and but for a habit, which I shall

