

UP THE SKEENA RIVER TO THE HOME OF THE  
TSIMSHIANS.\*

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IN a recent number of the *Monthly* I described some of the incidents of a visit to the Haida and Tlingit villages about Dixon's Entrance; now I am to speak of the Tsimshian villages on the Skeena River. The Tsimshian Indians are one of the five great stocks which make up the aboriginal population of the coast of British Columbia and southern Alaska. They are shut in by the Tlingits on the north and by the Kwakiutls on the south, while on the head waters of the Nass and Skeena Rivers they come in contact with the great Tinneh or Athabascan stock. The Tsimshians are probably the most progressive of all the coast Indians, and are one of a few stocks on the American continent which are holding their own in point of numbers.

Desiring to visit those villages which are least contaminated by modern influence, we ascended the Skeena River to the village of Kitanmaksh or Hazelton. The Skeena is the historic river of British Columbia; its name signifies the "Water of Terrors." Nearly every rock, every bend, every cañon is the scene of some mythical tale. The scene of the birth of the Tsimshian nation lies in its valley; the rock is still revered upon which rested the Tsimshian ark after the flood, and the "Dum-lak-an," "the new home and place of dispersal," is still a Mecca to which pilgrimages are made. In the modern development of the Omenica and Cariboo gold fields the Skeena has been the highway to the sea. For hundreds of years canoes have been paddled up and down its waters; it has been the highway for intertribal trade from time immemorial, and when the Hudson Bay Company's post was established at Hazelton, and merchandise began to pour into the upper country in a steady stream, the Tsimshians with their canoes enjoyed for a long time a monopoly of the carrying trade. Gradually, as they learned the ways and methods of the white man, the price per ton of freight from the coast to Hazelton began steadily to rise, until in 1891 the tariff of sixty dollars a ton was declared ruinous by the company, and they decided to build their own steamer with which to carry their freight up the river.

Port Essington is the chief port of the mouth of the Skeena, and in Essington we found ourselves on the twenty-third day of July. The *Caledonia* was up the river on her third trip, but was expected back any hour, but so delightfully uncertain is the river

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\* From a lecture delivered at the Field Columbian Museum, November 13, 1897.