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# OUR WORK

## MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

OF THE

## Indians of Simpson District, B.C.

BY REV. D. JENNINGS.

THE space at my disposal will permit me to give only a brief outline of the manners and customs of the Indians of British Columbia, with whom I am most familiar, namely, those on the North-West Coast in the Simpson District, extending from the Naas River, beyond the 55th parallel of N.L., to Rivers Inlet, a distance of about 350 miles.

The following tribes of Indians live in the Simpson District: The Tsimsheans, occupying the territory from Port Simpson to Chinaman Hat, at the north side of Millbank Sound; the Niskahs, on the Naas River; the Kitikshans, on the Upper Skeena; the Hailtzas, including the people of Kitamaat, at the head of Douglas Channel; the Kitlopes, at the head of Gardner Inlet; the Bella Bellas and the Oweekaynos, on Rivers Inlet. On the North Bentinck Arm there are the Bella Coolas and the people of Kimsquit and Tallio, and the Hydahs on Queen Charlotte Islands.

The Tsimsheans, the Niskahs, and the Kitikshans speak cognate languages. The Hailtzas, from Kitamaat to Oweekayno, speak cognate languages distinct from the Tsimshean. The people of Bella Coola, Kimsquit and Tallio speak a distinct language from that of the other tribes, as also do the Hydahs. Although there are four distinct languages spoken besides the cognate tongues, yet, by means of the Chinook, a trade jargon, these tribes have a way of inter-

communication by which they can transact business and give limited religious instruction.

TABLE OF TRIBES.

| | No. of People. |
|---|---|
| Niskahs | 783 |
| Tsimsheans | 1060 |
| Kitikshans | 1113 |
| Hailtzas | 941 |
| Bella Coolas, etc. | 380 |
| Hydahs | 693 |
| | 4970 |

Bancroft says, "Early explorers spoke of those Indians as an intelligent, honest and brave race, although not slow, under European treatment, to become drunkards, gamblers and thieves." Vancouver found them keen traders, but honest, and some of them industrious, sober, cleanly and peaceable. He said the Tsimsheans were fiercer, more uncivilized than the Indians in the south of British Columbia, yet friendly. They were subject, he said, to sudden gusts of passion which were as quickly composed, and that the transition from violent irritation to the most tranquil demeanor was instantaneous. Of all

the tribes he had seen these appeared to be the most susceptible to civilization. This opinion has been confirmed by the experience of the past few years.

There are several great crests among the e people, having for symbols the fin-back whale, the frog, the raven, the eagle, the bear, etc.

These crests subdivide the tribes into social clans, and it is said that a union of crests is a closer bond than a tribal union.

These crests define the bounds of consanguinity. Persons having the same crest are forbidden to marry; *i.e.*, a raven cannot marry a raven, nor a bear a bear; but a raven can marry a wolf, and an eagle can marry a whale, etc.

All the children take the crest of th ir mother, and are incorporated into her family. It is also said that the children do not regard their father's relations as theirs. Therefore an Indian's successor is not his own son, but his sister's.

This social clanship has much to do in promoting hospitality among the Indians. A

stranger in visiting an Indian village will go to the house of one belonging to his own crest, where he will find a hearty welcome. I remember seeing a Hydah in need of a boat. He went to a Tsimshean bearing his own crest, asked the loan of a boat and got it, the Tsimshean remarking to me, "He is my brother."

Members of the same crest contribute to feasts given for display. They do not sit down with the guests, but serve. At feasts, what the guests do not eat they carry away with them. They usually bring their own plates, cups and saucers. Men alone usually partake of the feasts, while the women and children remained at home. Invitations to feasts were not to be declined.

The food of the Indians consists of salmon, halibut, black cod, herrings, herring-spawn, oolachan, oolachan oil, sea cucumber or trepang, crabs, cockles, dulse, berries, etc. Nature has provided a bountiful supply of food for these people. Owing to their having forethought, they usually have a good stock in store. If you

were the guest of an Indian the first course would be dried salmon and oolachan oil; the second course, dulse and oolachan oil; the third course, boiled rice and oolachan oil; the fourth course, biscuits and tea. The dessert might be mountain or other berries.

In their dances, which are carried on to a great extent in winter, the men dance alone. The women do not dance, but applaud, sing and beat time The dancers are usually dressed in some fantastic costume.

Two methods of gambling were common, one, a game of odd or even, in which the friends of the players kept up a continual din, by which the whereabouts of the gamblers could easily be ascertained even at great distances. The other game was played with round sticks of beautifully polished maple, about five inches in length, differently marked, numbering about seventy sticks in a bundle. The game was got when all the sticks were won. The luck consisted in naming the number and the marks of sticks previously wrapped by an antagonist in

grass. Gambling among the Indians is a great evil. Sometimes they gamble away all their clothing, even to their last shred, also their canoes, guns, etc.

Early in the morning, no matter how cold, the boys were driven out-of-doors naked, then into the sea, to make them able to bear great hardships. It is also said that mothers, for the same purpose, rolled their babies in the snow.

Dreams were believed to be the visits of spirits, or of the wandering soul of some living one. Their dreams have a wonderful influence over the dreamers as well as over the friends. The old medicine man has a soul-catcher. He will say to one whose superstitions he wishes to excite, "I had a dream about you, and I saw your soul out in the woods, or down the river, at a certain time, and unless I bring it back to you, you will soon die." Great excitement follows this statement. Inquiry is made of the medicine man as to the cost of restoring the soul. A bargain is made. The soul is restored, the doctor is paid the requisite number of

blankets, and the hope of long life again revives.

Tattooing the arms, hands, breast, legs and feet was practised by inserting pulverized charcoal into the newly punctured skin.

The men as well as the women pierced their ears. I have seen as many as four holes in an Indian's ear, as an indication the man had been well brought up. The septum of the nose was also perforated, and a ring was worn in it by the women. The women had also a curious practise of perforating the under lip, into which was placed a bone or a piece of silver. This perforation was afterwards so enlarged that the bone inserted would turn the lip over. This was a mark of high rank in the tribe. Persons of low rank were allowed to make only small openings in the under lip. To speak of the inferior size of the lip was a mark of derision. An old woman in reproaching a young woman would not speak of her youth and inexperience, but of the inferior size of her lip.

There were several orders among their medi-

cine men, such as men-eaters, dog-eaters, etc. The candidates for initiation into these orders would live, or pretend to live, in the forest for some days. When he returned, clad sometimes in a bear-robe, chaplet and a red bark collar, the crowd would fly at his approach. A few would remain and present their arms to him, out of which he would bite and swallow large pieces of the flesh. If he belonged to the dog-eating order, a dog would be his victim.

To cure disease, in many cases recourse was had to the rattle of the medicine man and his strange, weird songs, together with such aid as he might call in, as the beating of tambourines and dry boards.

The medicine men use various devices to deceive the people. The following is related by Mr. William Duncan, who said, "One very dark night I was told there was a moon to be seen on the beach. On going to see, there was an illuminated disc with the figure of a man upon it. The water was then very low, the tide being out, and one of the conjuring parties had

lit up this disc at the water's edge. They had made it of wax with great exactness, and presently it was at the full. It was an impo ing sight. Nothing could be seen around it. The Indians supposed the medicine men to be holding converse with the man in the moon." Cauterization was sometimes practised to cause counter irritation. Pieces of bark or cotton, wound tightly together, were set on fire and placed over the part where the pain was located. I have seen as many as twelve raw spots on a man's chest at one time produced by this process.

Marriages were solemnized by the parents of the bride giving a feast and acknowledging before the assembled crowd that the couple were to be man and wife.

Polygamy was practised in olden times, and is yet among pagan tribes.

Often the old and helpless sick were left to die alone, quite uncared for.

Some of the dead were cremated, some buried in boxes up in the trees, or placed in

large boxes at the top of totem or crest poles, and others were buried thinly under ground, a rude shed being built over the grave, in which were placed articles belonging to the departed.

The word "potlatch" means a gift. The word, as used in British Columbia, means the act of giving away property, usually in honor of the dead. When this was the case, the person giving the property away would assume the name and titles of the departed. Sometimes a man is anxious to be made a chief, and for years he accumulates property, consisting of trade blankets, boxes of pilot-bread, bales of cotton, mats of rice, furs, etc. A time is appointed for the distribution of the property. Messengers are sent to the various villages lying around, to give invitations to the gathering. The people, young and old, assemble at the appointed time. At first a feast is given. Spokesmen of the chief, after the meal, state the reasons for calling the people together, tell of the deeds of valor, the rank, the greatness of him in whose honor the potlatch is given. The

guests make reply in terms lavish of praise to their distinguished host.

Then comes the distribution of the gifts. The chiefs of neighboring tribes receive portions proportionate to their dignity. Then the rank and file get their portions, which often consist of narrow strips of cotton or blankets. Often in the spring-time of the year may be seen heathen women wearing blankets made up of such strips sewn together, which they had received the previous winter. There is much extravagant waste of property at these potlatches, as the burning of money, the breaking up of valuable canoes and the smashing of excellent rifles around newly erected crest poles, all to show their indifference to wealth. Then, too, the potlatch is a time of great dissipation, lasting, in some cases, over fifty days.

Mourning for the dead is expressed by great wailing done by the women. The friends of the deceased cut off their hair and paint their faces black to show their grief.

Some time ago an Indian woman remarked

that before the Missionary came they did not know what it was to have a kind act done without expectation of some return. Even the women who entered the house of mourning to weep with those that wept, expected pay for their wailing, and usually got it. They had no knowledge of that grand old principle, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Selfishness is the pagan law.

Their dress was made of the skins of wild animals, the bark of trees, or cloth made from the hair of the dog or the wool of the mountain sheep.

The Indians were skilled in making canoes out of a single tree; a canoe in some cases being 60 feet in length, 6½ feet beam, and a depth of 4½ feet, accommodating a large number of passengers. They carved spoons out of the horn of the mountain sheep, and also of wood, and tastefully ornamented them. They also made wooden dishes, out of which they ate their food. From rootlets they wove baskets,

in which they were able to put their fish, etc., to boil in water heated by red-hot stones. These baskets were so closely woven as to serve the purpose of a pail to carry water. They used stone axes, hammers, adzes and sledges.

They worshipped objects in nature that were terrible to the sight in time of storm, such as a rock or point of land. To these their prayers were offered and their sacrifices made; the good God, they thought, needed not to be appeased. They also believed in the transmigration of souls. The place of the good hereafter was a great house, they said, and the hell for the wicked was as follows: The lower extremities of the body and a part of the trunk were turned into a part of the mountain, while the upper part of the body with the head remained alive, exposed to the winter cold and the summer sun, and to the rain and snow, forever. If a person died in peace, anxious to depart this life, that soul did not return to live in another body; but if one was hurried out of the world against his will, the soul of such a one would

return and live in the body of another yet unborn.

Great numbers of the people in the Simpson District have given up their heathen rites and have joined the ranks of the Christian forces, and so form a part of that great army now battling against the powers of darkness. Wonderful changes in the lives of these people have taken place. Instead of being degraded savages, they are now living as respectable citizens, aiming at a pure life in Christ Jesus.

Mr. Alex. Ross says, "There is less crime in an Indian camp of 500 souls than there is in a civilized (white) village of half that number." "Let the lawyer or moralist point out the cause."

Let God be praised for the change.

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