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A Brief Sketch of the
Tsimpsean People
Before 1857





Tsimpsean Chief in Dance
Costume

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By Mr. Edmund Verney

No one knows when the Tsimpsean people came into existence. The fact is that when the European navigators first visited the North Pacific coast, before the beginning of the last century they found the Tsimpsean race in the very places where they are today, namely, in the body lands between the mouths of the Naas and Skeena river. The Tsimpseans themselves know that from time immemorial they have always lived in the lands that they claim today and to which they have given different names.

After the Hudson Bay Traders had been among the Tsimpseans in and around Fort Simpson, some thirty years, and in 1857 when Christianity was permanently introduced in their midst, the population of the Tsimpsean people numbered about seven thousand, and this is believed to be a very conservative estimate. The language of the race was entirely of its own, and different from anything else on the face of the earth.

For the purposes of government the Tsimpsean nation was divided into nine separate tribes, which are as follows: Kispachlts, Kinachaugeek, Kitlan, Kit-

andoah, Kinnadoix, Kitzachtlatl, Killoozahoo, Kitchees, Kitwilkoyats. Each tribe was ruled by a chief whose authority was hereditary. The many cleared areas of lands in the regions of Metlakatla and Prince Rupert show to us today where these various tribes once had their winter homes.

The customs of the race were very many and were handed down from generation to generation. These customs show that the Tsimpseans were of an intelligent race of people. From them we get a glimpse of their religious observances, their training of the children, their strict regard to the care of health, their love of music, and on various occasions their frequent gatherings in large assemblies.

The business life of the Tsimpsean race was quite advanced and rather remarkable considering the fact that they were entirely isolated and had no intercourse with any others but themselves. Each tribe was engaged in a line of trade for the benefit of the others and at the same time different from the others. As for instance, the Kinnachaugeek tribe was a band of fur hunters both on land and sea, and it supplied all the others with its catch in exchange for whatever it needed in food, clothing and other things.

The Kispachlots tribe was engaged in trading mostly and it carried on many trading expeditions in different parts of the country. Its articles of merchandise were such as the people had made with their own hands, and such quantities of food that they reaped from the gardens of nature.

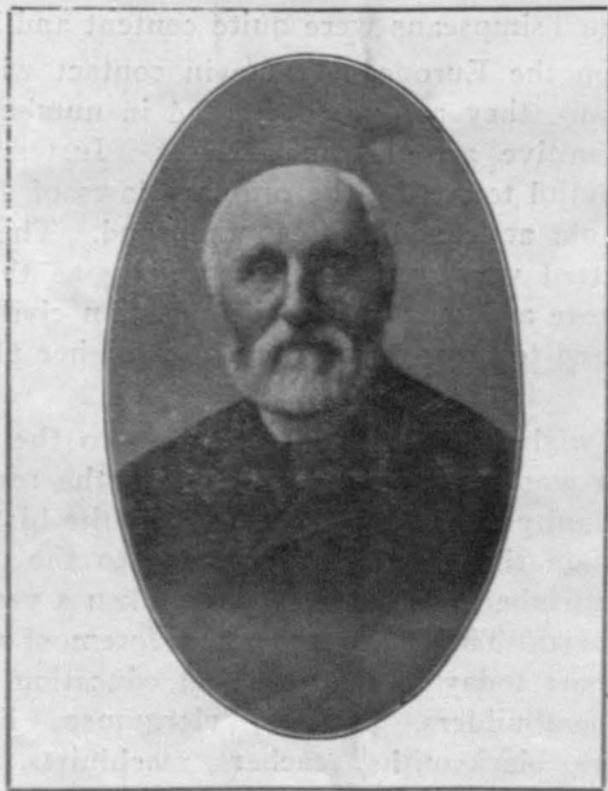
The Kitlan tribe was especially noted for its handicrafts. The members of this tribe worked in wood carving mostly and from their hands many

totem poles, canoes of various sizes, wooden cooking utensils inlaid with pearls and beautiful shells, were made.

All the others, as we have said, had their share in the business life of the nation; and left to themselves the Tsimpseans were quite content and happy.

When the Europeans came in contact with the Tsimpseans, they at once decreased in numbers and their primitive arts became extinct. Instead of a mere handful today, by the ordinary laws of growth, they should at least be fifteen thousand. This is to be regretted very much, and especially as they decrease more and more when the christian civilization is supposed to have raised them to a higher plane of life.

We wish to call special attention to the Kitlan tribe. It was the first one to embrace the teachings of christianity in 1857, and through all the history of missions on the North Pacific coast to the present day the members of this tribe have taken a very prominent part. They are among the foremost natives of the coast today in industry and education. Merchants, boatbuilders, printers, clergymen, licensed navigators, blacksmiths, teachers, machinists, artists, photographers, musicians, and many others are found among this particular race.



Rev. William Duncan was the first Missionary on the coast and at the present time is living in a among the Tsimpsean people.



Arthur Wellington was the first man to talk the English language and become a christian, he saved the Rev. William Duncan's life when he first came among the Tsimpsean people.

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