

Pacific Coast Indians To-Day

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Scattered along the coast of British Columbia and throughout the interior there are numerous Indian villages varying in population from twenty-five to seven hundred and totalling for the Province about twenty-five thousand. The majority of these have been reached by missionaries of the Roman Catholic, English or Methodist Churches.

Missions have been established and schools opened, to which the parents are encouraged to send their children.

The influence of missions among Indians has never been estimated at its full worth. Much of the peace and quiet of the country, and avoidance of bloodshed at the incoming of white people was due to the influence of Christian missions. Missionaries entered the various villages when Paganism prevailed, learned the language of the people, and not only preached the Gospel but also taught lessons of cleanliness, thrift, industry, frugality, sobriety, which have enabled the Indians to arrive at the state of civilization where we find them to-day. Most of them have abandoned Pagan customs; occasionally, however, a man becomes discouraged and lapses into his former life.

For a quarter of a century Indians continued to improve all along the coast until about three years ago when a large number of white people, and in many cases foreigners, crowded into the country. These people brought evils with them and from them Indians soon learned customs which already show a deteriorating influence on their moral and social life.

The family ties among Indians are strong. They love their children, nor do they easily consent to part from them. Most of the Indians have separate houses where each family resides in peace and quiet, very different from the time when social families lived in a large lodge.

Male members of the tribes engage in mining, fishing, logging, farming, surveying, cruising, carpentering, boat building, and, in short, almost any kind of work. The women and girls find ready employment in basket and mat making, filling cans at canneries, drying fish and berries and home duties.

To-day their homes usually consist of frame buildings, in many cases painted outside and inside—papered walls, with oilcloth, linoleum, and even carpets on the floors. Full use is made of chairs, tables, beds, cupboards, sideboards, dishes, sewing machines, organs and gramophones, some of which will be found in every house, and in a few houses all may be seen—or heard.

They dress comfortably, and it is an every-day sight to see in any and all villages, clothes lines well filled with an array of white clothes, quite unknown a few years since. Hundreds of dollars monthly finds its way to the large department stores from lonely Indian villages.

These villages vary in size, and are usually built on a most desirable site. Some are kept in good sanitary condition. In a few villages, water systems have been laid, conveying water from some nice stream to the homes of the people.

In most of the villages it is not difficult for even a stranger to find the mission property, consisting of school, church and mission house.

The day schools are conducted much the same as public schools among white people. The chief drawbacks are the fact that the children do not understand English, and their habits of moving about more or less, thus being absent from school. Usually if an

Indian goes out trapping or to cure salmon and berries, his family goes along.

After children have attended a day school for a time they are passed on to an industrial school, where they take up trades in the case of boys and housekeeping for the girls. Some of those ex-pupils have done well; others it is true do not seem to have been greatly improved.

By some critics of mission work it has been said that the Indians are harder to manage now than a quarter of a century ago. It is true that the trader cannot now get three prices for his goods—the Indian will order from a department store. Nor can the fur dealer get skins for a fraction of what they are worth—the Indian gets quotations for fur from many quarters and will send his furs to far-off markets. All along the coast Indians have invested in gasoline boats and they manage them exceedingly well. What with horses, cattle, gasoline boats, improved houses and furnishings, no one who knows the facts would hesitate to say Indians have made wonderful progress.

At present more or less unrest prevails over the question of original title. The Indians say, "The timber all over the country is taken from us. The streams from which we took fish are given to others under license. The land everywhere is being taken by almost every countryman save our people." They cannot understand why the Government will not allow them title to land nor take their money for land when and where they would like to buy.

The Government have persistently refused to record births, marriages and deaths among Indians. These and many other things are making them feel dissatisfied. They are, however, a law-abiding and a peace-loving people. No instance is on record where an Indian has ever molested a white woman, even in most isolated places.

While the Indian does not see eye to eye with his white brother, and prefers to make his living in his own way, he has many traits much to be admired—and our Indians are well worth saving.

Mr. Fletcher S. Brockman has summed up his estimate of the degree of sacrificial devotion required on the part of the home churches and the missionaries themselves, for the redemption of China, in the following words:

"A picture comes before me to-day. One half a billion of people gathered around the rim of the Pacific, people that have for centuries been divided from us by walls that are high. I see them the youngest of all peoples upon the earth; I see them as perhaps to-day the most intense and active; I see them in a state of flux; I see them with the manacles of the past fallen from them, and with the breath of the twentieth century upon their brows. I see them waiting for the very best the world has for them. If there is heroism here to-day I call you to a war whose end is peace. Is there patriotism, I call you to a statesmanship which is laying the foundation of God's Kingdom. Is there imagination, I call you to see redeemed millions marching into the presence of our King. I would rather live in this hour than in any hour the world has seen. I would rather have a part in this task than any task the world has ever known. I would rather die in this cause than live in another. I would rather go through it poverty stricken and in want than in any other to have wealth and ease and all the honors that the world could bring."