

QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS.

II.

MOUNTAINS clothed with dense forests of cedar, spruce and hemlock cover most of the surface of the country we are about to enter. Numerous wonderful inlets, sounds and channels divide it into an archipelago of many islands, of which Graham, Moresby, Provost, North Louise, Lyell and Barnaby comprise the greater portion of the area. Although so far north, being directly under the influence of the warm Japan current, which sweeps along these shores, the climate is mild, winters rarely severe, snowfall generally light, except on the mountains, and rainfall ranging from forty to seventy inches, according to local topography, the western slopes of the mountains receiving much the largest amount. Their most valuable known resources are fish, lumber, fur seal, sea otter and coal. Veins of gold and copper have also been found, but not sufficiently developed to indicate their extent and value.

They are inhabited exclusively by the Hydah Indians, now numbering about 800 souls, who live in the villages of Massett and Skidegate, on Graham Island; Gold Harbor, on Maud Island, in Skidegate Inlet; Cumshewa, on Moresby Island; Skedance, on Lyell Island; Tanoo, or Laskeek, on Tanoo Island, and at Ninstants, on a little island opposite the west coast entrance to Houston Stewart Channel. Their origin, in the absence of any written record or historical inscriptions, is an interesting subject for speculation. Their features, tattooing, carvings and legends indicate that they are castaways from Eastern Asia, who, first reaching the islands of Southern Alaska, soon took and held exclusive possession of the Queen Charlotte group. Their physical and intellectual superiority over the other North Coast Indians, and also marked contrasts in the structure of their language, denote a different origin. They are of good size, with exceptionally well developed chests and arms, high foreheads and lighter complexion than any other North American Indians.

Masset, the principal and probably oldest village of the Hydah Nation, is pleasantly situated on the north shore of Graham Island at the entrance to Massett Inlet. Fifty houses, great and small, built of cedar logs and planks, with a forest of carved poles in front, extend along the fine beach. The house of Chief Weeah is fifty-five feet square, containing timbers of immense size, and planks three feet and one-half in width and eighteen inches thick. The village now has a population of about 250, the remnants of a once numerous people, the houses in ruins here having accommodated several times that number. Massett is the shipyard of the Hydahs, the best canoe makers on the continent, who supply them to the other coast tribes. Here may be seen in all stages of construction these canoes which, when completed, are such perfect models for service and of beauty. This is the abode of the aristocracy of Hydah land—of Head Chief Edensaw, and of Weeah, Stilta, Kinaskilas, Kiltlouia, Spena and Cootay, minor chieftains, who have but little now remaining except their titles, of which they are

very proud. Most of the other villages named were offshoots from the parent colony, caused by family and tribal feuds and quarrels. Chief Edensaw and most of his people were away at North Island and other points hunting fur seal, their most profitable pursuit. Those remaining appeared quite friendly, and disposed to look with favor upon my undertaking.

I had no difficulty in obtaining the desired Indian guide, and at once proceeded with the work of examining the islands. Down Massett Inlet we paddled and sailed for thirty miles, through great flocks of wild geese and ducks, several of which were soon added to our provision supply. What a splendid body of inland water, from one-eighth of a mile to ten miles in width, deep enough for large vessels, abounding in choice fish and game, its shores covered with dense forests, where bear, land otter, and mink are numerous, altogether a veritable Indian paradise! For several days we coursed slowly along the eastern side, entering all of the indentations, and following up the streams flowing into it. My guide, a master of canoe navigation, and well acquainted with all of the waters of that portion of the islands, was of so little service upon land, both from ignorance of its topography, and in experience of foot expeditions, that I made my interior excursions alone. Indian trails were almost invariably found, extending from one to three miles along the water courses, terminating at or near bodies of the finest red cedar, which they had cut for canoes and poles, for carving and building purposes. Upon some of these trails considerable labor had been expended in bridging over ravines, corduroying marshy places, and cutting through the trunks of great fallen trees. Only a few of them showed much use of late years, being obstructed by logs and overgrown with bushes. But, poor as were these native roads, I was always very glad to find them, and correspondingly sorry when I could follow them no longer, for beyond progress was exceedingly difficult; fallen trees from one to eight feet in diameter, in all the stages of decay, thickly overgrown with moss, lying one above another, not unfrequently to the height of ten or fifteen feet, covered nearly the whole surface of the country. Several times I struck bear paths, so well worn that at first I thought that they had been trodden by human feet, but sooner or later they led me into thickets through which I could only go on all fours. I found a bear trap so constructed that, when sprung, an immense log would crush bruin to the earth; mink traps, where the animal was enticed by a tempting bait into a noose, which held it fast; and salmon traps, so made by means of wing dams, with lattice work and boxes in the centre of the stream, that no ascending fish could escape being caught. Grouse were very numerous, and so tame from being seldom hunted, that they would sit upon the branches of the trees almost within reach. They were excellent eating, quite fat and tender.

Returning to Massett I then prepared for a more extended trip, the circumnavigation of the entire group of islands, for the purpose of a preliminary survey of the coast country, to enable me to determine which portion