Daily Evening Bulletin, (San Francisco, CA) Monday, February 02, 1863; Issue 98; col C
The Puget Sound Indians *Coming along*.
Category: News

The Puget Sound Indians.

[FROM AN OCCASIONAL CORRESPONDENT.]

STEILACOOM, W. T., January 16, 1863.

Many ingenious theories have been made as to the origin of the Indians of Puget Sound and neighboring country. They are so unlike the tribes between here and the Mississippi that it is evident they are in no way related. The Siwashes seem to be an improved edition of the Diggers of California, and both may be the *debris* of the superior tribes of the continent. The Siwashes are short, stout and firmly put together. They possess in a high degree that kind of fortitude which encounters danger with coolness and bears adversity with patience; but as for that kind which inspires daring and intrepidity, if they have it, it is held in abeyance. They have been cowed by the white man. They stand in fear of the race that is supplanting them; they are becoming the vassals of the "pale face." Yet if they should become thoroughly roused and organized there is no doubt they might be formidable warriors. The career of their noted chief, Seschi, who figured here during the late Indian war, proves this. Had his followers fought as he led, the Indian War of '56 and '57 would have terminated in a much more disastrous manner to the whites. Bold, daring and sagacious, perfectly familiar with all the country over which he rushed with the celerity of the deer, every stream an old acquaintance, every trail recognizing his step at once, he was no common foe. Towards the close of the war Seschi was taken prisoner. He was tried and condemned to the gallows. An adept in duplicity, he had convinced some of the whites that he was their friend. These proposed to prevent his hanging; but the majority knowing him better, from repeated acts of his bloody treachery, determined he should swing.

A gallows which is now standing was erected back of the garrison, and the warrior chief swung therefrom. His worshippers took down his body, made a great ado over it and carried him off for burial near old Fort Nisqually. The attention of the traveler is attracted to the spot by the immense number of trinkets hung round the grave, suggesting, at first blush, that Santa Claus with a heavy load had just broken down there.

These Indians exhibit much skill in the construction of their canoes. Those made of large fir trees are long and narrow, after the pattern of clipper ships. Their locomotion is generally two-squaw power, though not unfrequently the larger canoes are propelled by six or eight squaws—each being seated flat in the canoe and using a single paddle. They use a small sail when the wind favors. I have often been amused in looking at a Siwash and his clutchman starting off on the Sound. Mr. Siwash approaches the shore with the most imperturable air, waits very patiently for Mrs. Siwash to haul up the canoe, bail it out, put in the large load she has packed down and get everything ready. His majesty then gets in, and while Mrs. Siwash pushes off and plies the paddle with good effect, he takes a comfortable seat, draws a blanket over his shoulders, puts a liberal quantity of rifled whisky under his belt and a pipe in his mouth, and really seems to be enjoying the highest degree of canoeing felicity.

Their three principal articles of food are roots, berries and salmon. These they gather in their season, and cure for winter. However, such as traffic with the whites are not particular to lay up provisions, as they can nearly always get flour and molasses from those with whom they trade. Their manner of getting oysters, for which they find a good market, is to take a canoe-load of wood and drop down on to the oyster flats as the tide runs out. Then they wait till the flat is entirely out of water, when, building up a rousing fire, they fall to work gathering oysters. Having filled their canoe, they wait for the return tide, when they paddle in and peddle their shell fish through the town.

They still hold on to their ancient custom in curing their sick. When one of their number becomes ill, they suppose that the Evil One is exerting his influence over him. So they call in their priest and forming a circle round the sick person, begin the curing process by shouting, yelling, pounding and clapping hands, making altogether such a pow-wow that it would seem that pandemonium had broken loose and chaos come again. Still, severe as this is, some of their patients get well—or, to speak more to the point, all of them do not die under the treatment.

As help is scarce here, many families employ Indians as servants. In a few instances their cabins attached to some well-to-do households suggest a certain institution generally supposed to exist south of Mason & Dixon's line. For their

services these Indian servants receive about as much as they want to eat and some cast-off garments to wear, and, perhaps these are all they deserve.

Lo-the-poor-Indian is a gone-in institution. The heel of a superior race is on his neck. He is passing away and soon will be known only in history. A great people should deal magnanimously with him.

COMING ALONG.

Article GT3002305183