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In The World of Books

With Will R. Bird
Do you loan books? A survey made in two mid-western States reveals that twenty-two per cent of the books borrowed by friends are never returned. A reader who was interested made a personal check of his library and found he could not account for more than two hundred books he had loaned.

THE BELLA COOLA INDIANS by T. F. McIlwraith; University of Toronto Press, two volumes, illustrated; 763 and 672 pages; \$15.
These two volumes comprise what is by far the finest work I have seen dealing with any of the Indians of Canada. Professor McIlwraith is head of the Anthropology Department, University of Toronto, Associate Director of the Ontario Museum of Archaeology, and Keeper of the Ethnological collection. Over twenty-five years ago he made two visits to Bella Coola (Beautiful Valley) and spent

there the greater part of two years, more or less living with the Indians of that region and examining their way of life. The result of his work is beyond compare. No ordinary student or expert could have achieved so much. It took a person blessed with extraordinary patience and talent and the gift of making others aware of his sincerity. Here are records and a story that will be carefully preserved for all time.
We in Nova Scotia know that the Micmac Indians were better than the average Indians of the east, having a musical language, unique customs and a wealth of traditions. Glooscap was their man-god, and legends of his accomplishments were related at every Micmac campfire. Dr. Rand spent years in acquiring their language and studying their ways, and his little publications are of great value. It is a pity, however, that no one has made a study of the Micmacs similar to the work of Prof. McIlwraith.
His work is much more than a careful survey. He has gathered facts and put together a complete picture of the Bella Coola Indians, a picture that is unusually attractive for it reveals all the complicated details of Indian beliefs

and behavior. Every chapter shows that the author was possessed of infinite patience and tact, that he understood human nature, paid his homage to the past and won friends among the redmen to an unusual degree. It was characteristic of the man that he set himself to learn the language of the Bella Coola Indians, and succeeded to such an extent that he had no trouble gaining their confidence. His sincerity was impressive and soon the redmen were assisting him in his research, revealing to him secrets no other student of folklore or anthropology had been able to obtain.
In a lesser degree, Dr. Rand worked with the Micmacs. He mastered their language and he lived with them for weeks at a time yet his books do not show us that he was able to uncover details of ancient ceremonies and secret rituals that certainly existed. Prof. McIlwraith soon discovered that the Bella Coola Indians had a highly complicated social system and a very definite religious belief. He was able to have everything explained to him and after his second visit there was little in the lives of the redskins that had not been dealt with to the utmost. When the manuscript

was completed it had to wait over twenty years for publication, a tragic delay for what must certainly be the supreme work of the professor. One feels sure, however, that in the years to come many tributes will be paid to the zeal, ability and honesty this writer has displayed in his work.
The chapters are placed in perfect order. The first book deals with the location and the environment of the Bella Coola Indians, then with their religion, their social organization, the features associated with the "Potlatch," their myths, birth, death, marriage, the supernatural; medicine, magic, taboo, etc. There are excellent illustrations of various types of Indians, of the remains of villages, Bella Coola dogs, cats, five-peaked houses, dancers and head-dresses. One of the most interesting chapters in Book I deals with the Potlatch. The importance of heralds is described. The heralds go from house to house inviting the people to attend the different ceremonies connected with the Potlatch; in fact, they are a sort of town crier. During the actual rituals they repeat loudly a few phrases from the speeches being delivered, this to add dignity to the affair.
The Totem Poles played quite a part in the lives of the Bella Coola Indians, and only poverty limited their number. A chief preparing for a Potlatch would ask the construction of a Totem Pole provided he could produce enough wealth to pay for it. A great deal of work was involved and the carpenter had to be well versed in all types of carving and possessed of much historic knowledge. The ancestral name and myth of the Totem Pole was embodied in designs when the Pole was not to be used at a Potlatch, while a Pole used there might not bear anything representing the family concerned. All rites and regulations were complicated but the author has explained the features very clearly and in the doing has made a fascinating story.
Volume Two deals with the winter ceremonial dances, the songs, warfare, games, stories and the man himself. The dances are most interesting and I doubt if there was anything to compare with them in the Micmac ceremonies. The stories are good, but the Micmac legends are equally interesting. The Bella Coola Indians seemed far ahead of their time. Their secret societies and rituals seem almost as clever as some of our own organizations.
If you would like to know more of the races that inhabited this land before the white man came, it will pay you well to read this story of the redmen of British Columbia. It is fact and simply told but there is not much fiction that is more interesting.

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