ADDITIONAL PAPERS

With regard to the enforcement of the clauses of the Indian Act which prohibits the holding of the Indian festival known as the potlach.

By Command.

JAMES BAKER,
Provincial Secretary.

Provincial Secretary's Office,
8th March, 1898.

Extract from a Report of the Committee of the Honourable the Privy Council, approved by His Excellency on the 22nd February, 1898.

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On a Report dated 18th January, 1898, from the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs referring to the Order of Your Excellency in Council of the 21st May, 1897, respecting the representations made by the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, through the Executive Council of that Province, that the Indians have become greatly disaffected through the enforcement of the clauses of the Indian Act prohibiting the holding of the Indian festival known as the potlach.

The Minister states that he has caused enquiry to be made into the origin, nature and meaning of the said festival with a view to the repeal of the clauses referred to, in the event of its being ascertained that the prohibition of the potlach is a well founded grievance; and he finds that the festival has a most demoralizing effect upon the Indians who participate in it; that through the efforts of the missionaries and Indian agents it has in the Williams Lake Agency entirely, and in the Fraser River Agency almost entirely, disappeared; that in the Babine and West Coast Agencies it still exists, but without the degrading features of mutilation and dog eating, and not to the same extent in any way as formerly; that in the other agencies it can also be suppressed without much opposition from the Indians if the law is administered with prudence and good judgment.

The Minister further states that the general consensus of opinion held by the Indian agents, missionaries and others interested in the welfare of the Indians, is that the law should not be repealed but that discretion should be allowed and great care exercised by the Indian agents in its enforcement. In this way, it is believed that, as the young and progressive Indians, who are, for the most part, opposed to the potlach, obtain greater influence in their tribes, and take the places of the chiefs and older Indians who favour its continuance, the custom will gradually die out.

The Minister believes that the repeal of the law now would be viewed by the Indians as an evidence on the part of the Government of weakness and vacillation, and would produce disrespect and want of confidence in the source from which it emanates.

The Minister therefore recommends that the law be not repealed but that Indian agents be instructed to continue their efforts for the suppression of the custom with great care and moderation, and that the Provincial Government be requested to instruct its magistrates to use their very best discretion in dealing with any cases of infraction of the law which may come before them.

The Committee submit the above recommendation for Your Excellency's approval.

(Signed) JOHN J. MCGEE,
Clerk of the Privy Council.

His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia.

VICTORIA, B. C.:
Printed by RICHARD WOLFENDEN, Printer to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty.
1898.