

CONTENTS

Maps / ix

Author's Note / xi

| | |
|--------------|--|
| INTRODUCTION | Clash between Two Heroes / 1 |
| CHAPTER 1 | The Field of Conflict / 5 |
| CHAPTER 2 | Two Men, Worlds Apart / 20 |
| CHAPTER 3 | Brabant's First Coastal Voyage / 40 |
| CHAPTER 4 | Brabant's Second Coastal Voyage / 71 |
| CHAPTER 5 | First Mission Established / 93 |
| CHAPTER 6 | Brabant Battles Smallpox / 113 |
| CHAPTER 7 | Attempted Murder / 122 |
| CHAPTER 8 | Recovery and Return / 136 |
| CHAPTER 9 | Potlatching and Funerals / 149 |
| CHAPTER 10 | Chiefs Maquinna, Nitaska, and Tawinisam / 162 |
| CHAPTER 11 | Climbing a Mountain to Dispel "Superstitions" / 173 |
| CHAPTER 12 | Chief Nitaska Dies; Tawinisam Blamed / 185 |
| CHAPTER 13 | Brabant Builds a Second Church / 193 |
| CHAPTER 14 | Brabant Returns to the Struggle / 208 |
| CHAPTER 15 | Thunderbird / 221 |
| CHAPTER 16 | "Sorcerers" and Rebellion / 229 |
| CHAPTER 17 | <i>Lōqwoná</i> or Shamans' Festival / 248 |
| CHAPTER 18 | A Culture in Transition / 264 |
| CHAPTER 19 | Shipwreck, Shamans, and a Hurricane Survivor / 277 |
| CHAPTER 20 | Brabant as an Agent of Acculturation / 288 |

| | |
|------------|--|
| CHAPTER 21 | Brabant Loses a Mentor; Confronts a New Hierarchy / 307 |
| CHAPTER 22 | The Tide Turns at Hesquiaht / 320 |
| CHAPTER 23 | Brabant Launches a School / 342 |
| CHAPTER 24 | Brabant's Final Years / 362 |
| CHAPTER 25 | Brabant's Legacy / 372 |
| CHAPTER 26 | Tawinisam's Legacy / 383 |
| AFTERWORD | The Dictionary Controversy / 396 |
| APPENDIX A | Alternative Spellings of Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Groups / 408 |
| APPENDIX B | Chinook Song / 409 |
| APPENDIX C | The "Catholic Ladder" / 411 |
| APPENDIX D | Charter for the Establishment of the First Mission at Hesquiaht / 413 |
| APPENDIX E | Additions to the Charter / 417 |
| APPENDIX F | The Legend of the Salmon Song's Origin / 418 |
| APPENDIX G | The Legend of Kwotiath / 420 |
| APPENDIX H | Catechism and Prayer Booklet Written by Father Brabant in Nootkan / 422 |
| APPENDIX I | Part of a Sermon in Nootkan by Father Lemmens / 423 |
| APPENDIX J | Origin of the <i>Lōqwoná</i> or Shamans' Festival / 424 |
| APPENDIX K | Analysis of Father Brabant's Reported Conversions / 429 |
| APPENDIX L | Probable Descendants of Ma-tla-ho-ah: Legendary Founder of the Hesquiahts / 435 |
| | <i>Endnotes</i> / 437 |
| | <i>Sources</i> / 470 |
| | <i>About the Author</i> / 481 |
| | <i>Index</i> / 483 |

INTRODUCTION

Clash between Two Heroes

Father August Brabant: Saviour or Scourge? examines the efforts of a notable priest who devoted most of his adult life to converting aboriginal people to Catholicism. It is also, however, a story of resistance by a little-known hereditary chief, his controversial nephew, and many members of their tribe. The ideological struggle between the missionary and this group of natives epitomized the most consequential cultural conflict that has occurred on the Pacific Northwest Coast — the intense discord and misunderstanding between two civilizations, two religions, and two cultures which left a lasting imprint on British Columbia. For twenty-five years on the west coast of Vancouver Island, this clash centred on two men: August Joseph Brabant¹ (1845–1912), a zealous Catholic missionary, and Tawinisam (c. 1820–1889),² a proud Hesquiaht chief. To their followers, each was a hero.

Tawinisam, who lived his entire life in the Hesquiaht area, could trace his clan's lineage back to that misty time when his forefathers first

appeared on the Pacific Northwest Coast. He and his people knew that they had lived in this part of the world for many thousands of years. They honoured tribal and inter-tribal spirits, possessed a rich oral tradition of myths and legends, and practised shamanism. Along with other Nuu-chah-nulth peoples, the Hesquiahts had formerly engaged in ritual cannibalism and they still kept slaves. Tawinisam was proud of this heritage and knew he had a special responsibility to protect and preserve it.

From his first encounters with Father Brabant, Chief Tawinisam — assisted for a short time by his nephew, apprentice chief Matlahaw — resisted the pioneer priest's efforts to bring European customs and a new religion to the various Nuu-chah-nulth peoples.³ Tawinisam used every resource at his disposal to wage a sustained battle to repel or eliminate the intruder, reject and resist his alien ideas, and promote adherence to a rich traditional culture that was under widespread attack. Brabant represented an immediate, local threat that had to be dealt with as swiftly as possible. Tawinisam's leadership and, in many instances, the Hesquiahts' response showed that indigenous peoples must be credited with making sound judgments about the white culture's offerings. During this period of cultural conflict, the Hesquiahts endured many hardships, but they were not mere helpless victims being overwhelmed by a conquering society. They tried to adapt when it seemed practical and they waged a sustained resistance to aspects of Euroamerican culture which they found unacceptable. They also had the perception and wisdom to recognize both positive and negative attributes of the missionary who came to "save" them.

It was not the first time Christian clerics had operated in different parts of what is now called Vancouver Island. Eighty years before Brabant arrived on the large island, a few Franciscan priests had occupied a short-lived Spanish outpost in Nootka Sound, about forty kilometres northwest of Tawinisam's territory. During the early colonial period, both Anglican and Catholic priests had established parish churches in the Victoria area at the island's more populated southern tip. These places of worship primarily served settlers, Hudson's Bay Company employees, coastal traders, travellers, and visiting sailors. But Father Brabant established the first permanent colonial mission that was aimed exclusively at

evangelizing indigenous people living in the wilderness. It was located at Hesquiaht, a remote coastal village near the mouth of Nootka Sound, about 275 kilometres northwest of Victoria.

Brabant, a Belgian by birth, was a product of ethnocentric nineteenth-century colonialism. By definition, “civilization” was superior to any ancient, “primitive” culture. Europeans, and especially those who emigrated to America, believed they had inherited a “manifest destiny” to “civilize savages” or even eliminate them, wherever they lived.

Father Brabant’s view of aboriginal people was paternalistic, condescending, and distrustful. He saw himself making a great sacrificial service to his God by bringing salvation to people he believed were inferior, sinful heathens destined to eternal damnation unless they became Christians. Convinced of this special calling, he felt compelled to create order out of the chaos he perceived among the Nuu-chah-nulth. During his active missionary years, Brabant struggled almost single-handedly to change many aspects of this ancient civilization. The changes that occurred were not, however, effected by Brabant alone. In most instances, his efforts were greatly supported by Canadian law, spurred by colonial industry and commerce, and aided by armed force. For example, Brabant’s presence may have contributed in minor ways to ending the intertribal warfare that had plagued indigenous peoples and alarmed white settlers for decades, but the pacification had largely been achieved by military gunboats prior to his arrival. Moreover, when these same sources of power were employed to impose European law and order among the Hesquiahts, Brabant did little to protect or assist the natives. Instead, he deliberately destabilized their traditional socio-political framework. Today, we can understand how Brabant’s efforts as a crusading missionary were biased and misguided. Nevertheless, he managed to impose many aspects of his alien vision on another culture and leave a lasting, if largely negative, imprint. Fortunately, that stain is finally being re-examined and erased. Along with other pioneers, whose numbers were relatively small compared with the large indigenous population, Brabant was instrumental in systematically undermining the aboriginal culture that he sought to transform. To this day, he is reviled by many Northwest Coast indigenous people for the devastation he instigated. Despite that tragic

legacy, as a resolute frontier missionary Brabant demonstrated a degree of courage, tenacity, and zeal that must be acknowledged.

Both Chief Tawinisam and Father Brabant participated directly in the most important transition period in Pacific Northwest Coast history: the intense cultural conflict that occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century in British Columbia. The story of their encounter personifies the struggle for survival of an ancient, fully functional culture that was brought to the threshold of being swallowed whole. It gives us vivid, provocative insights into this period of drastic social change, the intercultural misunderstandings that it generated, and the heritage it left for future generations.

Fortunately, we can gain considerable insight into Brabant's experiences by examining the reminiscences and letters that he wrote, and the reports of his work by other Euroamerican observers. The picture could be balanced further if the aboriginal viewpoint had been recorded. Unfortunately, the indigenous people have left little written material about this period. As Barry Gough has noted in his examination of Brabant's work, this lack of primary information makes it difficult to "counterpoise and test the documentation left by and about the missionary."⁴ Therefore, to probe Tawinisam's perspective and those of his followers, I have taken an approach that combines the methods of historians and anthropologists with a limited but necessary amount of interpretation and extrapolation from secondary sources. This multidisciplinary technique is required for an outside observer to gain some insight into how the Hesquiahts responded to the socio-cultural challenges they encountered during the colonization period.