

anthropology: coming to realize that Indian art can indeed be fine art, that the Edenshaws were powerful intellects grappling with man's great truths, that spirit dancing has something to teach our psychotherapists; in short, that the Indian cultures held, and hold, values which we need and must learn. These things do not yet carry much comfort back to the reserves, but they are happening too.

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*A Small and Charming World*, by John F. Gibson. Toronto and London: Collins, 1972. pp. 221, \$6.95.

The unfortunate title of this book suggests an Edwardian's reminiscences of Mousehole or some other Cornish fishing village which, in fact, could be "charming" only to the casual visitor. To discover, instead, that the book recounts selected observations and experiences of a provincial social welfare worker in some of the remote settlements of British Columbia's Indians comes, therefore, as somewhat of a shock. And as one reads the stream of anecdotes and more extensive "case histories," and is reminded of the chasms between welfare's provisions and workers' performances, in the world of social agencies, and what the people have to cope with, in their own "small and charming world," one begins to wonder about the values of the person who wrote this essentially personal narrative. Families are left homeless when their uninsurable houses suddenly go up in flames. Adolescent girls ask to be placed in foster care away from their familial difficulties, then want to return to the reserve after a brief taste of a materially privileged but alien way of life, then run away from their poverty-stricken village. "I used to come from one of the Hagwilget houses and feel as if I had been on holiday," writes the author immediately after remarking that "in the face of death or disaster, there was no tension." Elsewhere he says, "Possibly I am being influenced by a spell, by the enchantment of an almost timeless life."

And yet this book, addressed to the general public, has a mixed bag of messages, some of which very much need to be published and read and thought about. First, though the author is a government agent, he is in no sense a defender of the realm vis-a-vis the Indians, and many of his tales dramatize the dysfunctional efforts of the social services. Secondly, he is a respecter of whatever is left of the integrity of life on the reserves.

One rarely has the feeling that he intrudes or meddles. In fact he reportedly provides some very direct if simple services as he is asked for them. One senses his admiration of many of the persons he visits and his concern, especially for the children and the elders. Nor does he betray any illusions about what he is doing as a welfare worker, nor about how he is perceived by the people in the villages. There is a touch of the adventurer's boasting in a statement like, "The more terrible was the reputation of Indians, the more pleasant I found them to be," but it is clear where the author's allegiances lie. And when the distrust or drinking of some persons is described, it is done in a context that communicates the author's non-condemnatory attitudes. Probably these are important messages for some general readers.

But a problem with this kind of book is that one never knows how much of what is chosen for reporting is fiction or fact, reconstructed through distorted memories to support the author's personal perspectives. Pages and pages of direct quotations may derive from field notes or even taped conversations, but we are told nothing about the author's observational methods. The book is not popular anthropology, focused on individual persons and experiences. From the outset, the writer flatly states, "The morning hours of a Haida child on her island home are much the same as those of a little Coast Salish girl on the mainland," and later, "The anthropologists and sociologists might evaluate Babine, using their own distinctive variables; they would study a group. But Charlie and Duncan are individuals of the same age but different in temperament, experience and abilities." Nor is there any sophistication about personality theory in this book. And no author who is a professionally educated social worker would be content to write a book like this without some struggle toward proposals for addressing the dilemmas this writer merely describes.

In genre, then, this book, lacking a base in any academic discipline or long-range professional purposes, seems like the writing of a privileged traveller to somewhat romantically perceived far-away communities of indigenous peoples. As such, when the narrative hops from Kitwanooc to Kitsegueela to Homalco to Nuchatlitz, one yearns for an endpaper map to give the reader a better geographic orientation than the text provides. And from the point of view of British Columbian Indians' large-scale social and economic planning needs, compass readings remain completely beyond the "small and charming world" this author paints.