



Alcohol or What?

T T f a . P .

Excerpts from Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, *The Nootka: Scenes and Studies of Savage Life*. Victoria, BC: Sono Nis Press, 1987. (Original work published in 1868.)

They worked occasionally as labourers, and with their wages bought new blankets and planks for their houses ... They acquired a taste for flour, rice, potatoes, and other articles of food that were sold to them at low prices, and thus, on the whole, probably spent the first winter after the arrival of the colonists more comfortably than usual. It was only after a considerable time that symptoms of a change, amongst the Indians living nearest to the white settlement, could be noticed ... that a few sharp-witted young natives had become what I losing heart before intruding whites when, in the neighbourhood of settlements, they sullenly cut down their crab-apple trees, in order to gather the fruit for the last time without trouble, as the tree lies on the ground.

These excerpts describe the decline of the Tseshah people on the west coast of Vancouver Island after their village was turned into a sawmill settlement and their waterways became controlled by the British Navy. One might assume these excerpts illustrate commonly held beliefs about the role alcohol has played in unravelling Aboriginal cultures since first contact with European explorers and settlers.