

are known as *hitema* or "torches," a word that is also used to refer to torches proper, fir branches gummed and lit at one end, that were in earlier days employed to light one on one's way. The number of ceremonial torches lit at the puberty ceremony is symbolic of the number of months after the ceremony that the pubescent girl is to spend in seclusion and be subject to the menstrual taboos. The number varies between four, six, eight, and ten, according to the tradition of her family; it is rarely less than four, for with two torches the minimum number of four months of seclusion have to be observed, nor is an odd number of torches permissible. Four seems to have been the normal number in earlier days. Each of the ten "torches" were then given to a man apiece, who filed out of the house and arranged themselves in a row, with their backs to the right wall of the house, and facing the river.* They stood with their torches planted upright on the ground, whence the name of that part of the ceremony that takes place outside the house, *hitcapas* or "torches standing outside the house." In the centre of the row of torch-bearers was placed the pubescent girl, on either side of her a thunder-bird dancer. These wore thunder-bird masks (*!tisk!atqoz^usim^s*) and were wrapped in blankets that covered everything up clear to the masks, so that nothing of the faces or bodies of the dancers was visible. Meanwhile four other men put down on their hair and bedaubed their cheeks with red paint; down and red paint are often used to symbolize a festive occasion, but have no further significance in this connection. Each of the four held a basin in his hands. One after the other they proceeded to the river, which was but a few yards from the house, dipped up water, returned in the same order to the girl, and each in order rapidly turned a short counter-clockwise circuit in front of her and quickly poured out the water at her feet. The four men, always in the same order, again dipped up water, returned to the girl, turned counter-clockwise circuits, and poured out the water at her feet. These actions were gone through four times in all; four, as among many other West Coast tribes, is the ceremonial or sacred number. At the same time the thunder-bird dancers moved their arms up and down within their blankets to imitate the flapping of the thunder-bird's wings, while a rattling noise, representing the sound of thunder, was heard to come from inside the potlatch house. The noise, as I learned, was produced by shaking stones in tin wash-basins. As soon as the last basinful of water had been poured out at the girl's feet, all returned inside the house, the still burning "torches" were extinguished, and the four men that had dipped up and poured out the

*Somas River, which flows out of Sprout Lake into Alberni Canal. It runs along the length of the potlatch house.