

NA-NA-KWA

OR

DAWS ON THE NORTHWEST COAST.

7.

KITAMAAT. B. C.

July. 1897.



TOTEMISM is of great value to the ethnologist, and nowhere can it be more completely observed, or more easily studied than in the isolated Indian villages of British Columbia and Alaska. It is not merely a system of rough crests and monstrous heraldry, but is symbolical of a vaguely religious and very definite social institution. A totem, crest, or as we say Kitamaat, *mahiniough*, consists of an intimate object, viz.— Raven, Frog, Eagle, Beaver, Grizzly Bear, Black Bear, Brown Bear, Fin back Whale, Salmon, Crow and so on. The aborigines regarded with the most superstitious respect the totems of their clans, believing there existed between the members of a tribe, and other tribes

bearing the same totem, an intimate and rather special connection.

One of the relations existing between a man and his totem is this, *he calls himself by its name*. So if the totem is an eagle, all the members of the same totem are eagles.

Again the natives commonly believed themselves descended from their totem, and therefore being akin to it treated it with due deference.

Seeing a school of fin-back whales on one occasion, I remarked to a man, "Is their oil no good, that you do not hunt or shoot them?" He replied, "Oh the fin-back whale is brother to so and so," naming one of his neighbors. And though great schools of these big whales are in the Inlet at all seasons of the year, they come and go unharmed. Then there are the ravens, those saucy black fellows are with us all the year round, on the coldest day in the winter, and the warmest day in summer, they are to be seen on the beach, chatting over their tasty morsels; and yet I have never seen one shot or hurt in any way. So a certain amount of respect is paid also by Christian Indians to their totems. The above remarks however are not applicable to all totems or all totemic clans.

The relation existing between a man and those of the same totem is also that of *mutual help and protection*. If a man respects and cares for the other members of his totem, he expects they will do the same for him.

Two months ago some of the Haidas of the Eagle totem came to Kitamaat to trade for Oolachan oil. They were complete strangers, and of utterly dissimilar language, yet upon it being ascertained that they were Eagles, the houses of the Eagles were immediately opened to them, and from them the strangers received entertainment and help.