

Besides the dances and the use of masks, other customs are common to all tribes of the north-west coast. One of the principal of these is the use of copper-plates. These have frequently been described as being used instead of money, but this is not the case. They are manufactured from copper found on the upper Yukon, and given as presents by one tribe to another. The Indians value a copper-plate the more, the more frequently it has been given as a present. Every single plate has its name and its own house, and is fed regularly. No woman is allowed to enter its house. Almost every tribe has a tradition referring to their origin. Some say that a man who visited the moon received it from the man in the moon; Others say that a chief living far into the ocean gave it to a man who came to visit him, etc. Similar legends refer to the Haliotis shells which are used for ear and nose ornaments and bracelets.

The so-called Potlatch is a feast celebrated by all these tribes. A chief invites all his neighbors, sometimes to the number of a thousand and more, to his house, and presents every one with blankets, skins, and nowadays even with money. The Salish tribes have a kind of scaffold in front of their house, which is used at these festivals. The chief and two of his slaves are standing on it, and distributing the blankets among the guests. Small festivals of this kind are celebrated very frequently. An Indian who has been unsuccessful in hunting, and feels ashamed on this account or for any other reason, gives such a festival to restore his honor.

In the beginning of these feasts four songs are sung, and four different kinds of dishes are served. Then one of the guests stands up and praises the liberality of the host, who, in his turn, replies, praising the deeds of his ancestors. In this speech he frequently uses a mask representing one of his ancestors.

I mentioned above that the social institutions of the northern group and those of their southern neighbors are different; therefore their mortuary customs and marriage ceremonies are also different. The northern tribes burn the corpses of all men except medicine-men. These are buried near the shore, and the corpse of the son is always deposited on top of the corpse of his father. It seems that some of the Kwakiutl tribes used to burn their dead; but by far the greater number of tribes of this stock either hung up the dead in boxes in top of trees, the lower branches of which were removed, or deposited these boxes in burial-grounds set apart for this purpose. Chiefs are buried in a separate place. Food of all kinds is burned for the dead on the shore.

I shall describe their mourning ceremonies as illustrative of those in use of most of the coast tribes. The mourning lasts for a whole year. For four days the mourner is not allowed to move. On the last of these days all the inhabitants of the village have to take a bath. On the same day some water is warmed and dripped on the head of the mourner. For the next twelve days he is allowed to move a little, but he must not walk. Nobody is allowed to speak to him, and they believe that whosoever disobeys this command will be punished by the death of one of his relatives.