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Family Life of the Haidas, Queen Charlotte Islands.

By Rev. C. HARRISON.

THE Haidas seem to be related from the lowest in rank to the supreme chief of the nation. Slaves, who were in thralldom until quite recently, do not rank. They were formerly bought and sold like dogs, but within the past fifteen years the missionaries have succeeded in inducing the Indians to free their slaves. Before the advent of the missionaries, a Haida chief had one or more wives, together with female slaves for concubines. The children of free born wives were alone reckoned as his, and the children of the slaves were sold or retained in slavery as he desired. The members of one crest cannot marry with others of the same crest; for instance, a bear cannot marry a bear, but must marry a whale or an eagle.

THE CAMP OR RANCHERIE.

The houses of the old Haidas are objects of intense interest to visitors. These structures are rectangular 70 x 60 feet, and are built with cedar hewn to the proper proportions with stone adzes or axes, having been erected before iron implements were known to the Haidas. The rafters are immense pieces of timber running the full length of the building, and hewn flat on the inside. The chopped surface is so level that a person would believe at a casual glance that the timber had been sawn. Some of the houses are built over pits, between which and the walls there is a space ten feet wide. The pits are about ten feet deep, and are entered by two steps, each five feet high, which is an evidence of the exaggerated notion Indians generally have of themselves. The pits serve as a protection from dampness, from smoke, and from sudden attacks of enemies.

THE CAMP FIRE.

In the centre of the pit is the camp fire. During the winter months they always keep a good fire burning both day and night. I have seen as much as two cords of cedar piled up at one time. Around this fire the Indians sleep, and the children play. It is also their cooking department, and there all the food is made ready. There the Indians tell of olden times, and there it is where the family discussions and conversations are held. Around this structure the ladies and gentlemen of the Haida nation dress and make their toilets, and all the duties performed in the white man's bedchamber were there discharged in the palmy days of old. They also eat their food around the camp fire. The old Indians do not need tables, and chairs are also dispensed with. A few good sized kettles are placed on the ground near the fire, and the family squat on the ground around them. One contains boiled

halibut, another potatoes, another boiled salmon, and another is filled with berries or grease. They use wooden spoons, also spoons made out of cow and deer horns, both large and small, and dig into which pot they like the best, and take both their soup and fish together. The women as a rule prepare the potatoes for the men and put them on the boards around the fire. The practice of making fire by simple friction is now at an end, as too much time is required and the result is not always satisfactory. They now use the white man's match. But if away from home and there are no matches, they make chips of dry cedar, and sprinkle a little powder over them, then they strike a piece of flint on the steel musket, which causes the powder to ignite, and set fire to the chips.

FOOD.

The Haidas feed twice in the day; early in the morning, and after the day's work is over. They have a great variety of food, such as bear's meat, salt venison, fresh, smoked, and dried salmon, fresh and dried halibut, hairsal, furseal, sea lion, salmon spawn, herring spawn, oolachans, herrings, flounders, black, red, and rock cod, crabs, clams, cockles, abalones, pecten clams, razor clams, rock borers, small fish grease, berries, and apples. They mix oolachan or small fish grease with all their food. They grow turnips, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, and parsnips, sufficient to last them for the year, and in fact, many of the old Haidas were accustomed to sell some of their potatoes up in Alaska. They formerly used the inner bark of the hemlock tree as sugar. They also eat many varieties of roots, as the fern root, wild carrot, and liquorice root.

ROYALTY.

Of all the blue blood in the world, the Haida, I dare say, is the most exclusive. I knew one old dame who could in appearance have shamed Macbeth's witches, being conspicuously ugly and disagreeable. She was greatly venerated by the bears and eagles, and was importuned at all times to enter their houses, and make herself at home. When she condescended to enter any house there was a special assembly for the occasion. The brawling children were subdued, and dignified quiet took the place of loud ejaculations and laughter. This woman had more authority than any of the chiefs. She was a chieftainess, and was descended from a long line of kings of the ages long gone past. Queen Charlotte Islands were formerly ruled by this woman and her husband. Each village now has its chief, who is a factor for good or evil as the case may be. Each succeeding chief must be a nephew or other relative of the deceased chief, but it is an utter impossibility according to the Haida laws for a son to succeed his father or even to take his name.

INFANCY.

As soon as the baby is born into the world, his mother wraps him in half a blanket, and puts him into a hammock, either to sleep or cry as he may wish. He very soon learns to take care of himself, and knows that he must fight his own way through life. Should he become ill he is taken great care of, and the mother nurses him carefully; otherwise, with the exception of nourishing the young one, it is left to go its own way whilst the mother attends to her duties. Very seldom do the Haidas bind their infants on a board, or tie them up into a motionless bundle. They give them their liberty, and leave them to themselves until the feeding time comes round.

WOMEN.

A girl as soon as she reaches puberty has the lower lip pierced, and this orifice is enlarged from time to time. A piece of whalebone or stone a quarter of an inch long, a quarter of an inch wide, and a sixteenth of an inch thick is inserted in the slit. The size of the stone is increased according to the marriage of the girl, and the number of children she bears, so that it is really a mark of caste. The Haida women have more lip than any others we know of, and to see a crowd of them quarrelling, the lip shaking with anger, is a sight not to be forgotten. The old women are generally at the bottom of all rows, and also act afterwards as peacemakers, looking as innocent as lambs. The women are great diplomats and generally contrive to have their own way, and it is a great mistake to imagine that they are treated as slaves.

MARRIAGE.

When a man takes a liking for a woman, he goes to her parents and makes overtures by presenting them with blankets amounting to a considerable sum, according to the price that she is valued at. If they consent he makes known his wishes to his desired wife. She then tells her companions, and they come together and assist her to get ready for the occasion. When everything is finished, the man goes to her father's house, and there makes a feast, and during the feast he rises and claims her in the presence of all as his wife. The following day they go to his house, and the bride's father gives biscuits and tea to all there assembled, and then the couple are considered to be married. During the whole time of the negotiations, courtship and marriage, a cannon is fired at intervals of six hours, to let all who are at the neighbouring fishing stations know. As I have before stated, members of the same crest cannot intermarry. The children always take the crest of their mother.

DIVORCE.

When the husband is no longer satisfied with his wife he leaves her, and she returns home to her family. Her uncle then demands payment from the man for the use of his niece, and the amount varies according to the number of children born. The charge is generally twenty dollars for the woman herself, and ten dollars for each child. The children are taken charge of by the wife's mother and father, and no further trouble is given to the parents. Healthy men and women each have their own work to perform, and are able to earn their own food and clothing, consequently a woman is just as well circumstanced if not better without being married. Should the wife desert the husband, the man waits until she marries again, and afterwards he takes another woman home to be his wife, without being liable to pay the fine. The property belonging to the husband remains his own during his married life, and the woman's property remains her own whether living with her husband or not.

DISKS.

The women are very fond of ornaments for the neck, hand and head, and each village has a native jeweller. The best and most skilled of all the native jewellers on the North Pacific Coast is the nephew of the old Chief Edenshaw. Edenshaw was the first who attempted to work with silver and gold, and he succeeded remarkably well. The jewellers make from half-dollar and dollar silver coins, and also from gold coins, bracelets, finger rings, earrings and bangles. The coins are beaten out to the desired thickness and width, and then bent into shape and carved. Some of the bracelets fasten with clasps, while others retain their shape by the natural spring of the metal. The finger rings are sometimes not joined after being bent. They are made both plain and ornamental, and sometimes an eagle or two hearts are carved on them.

EARRINGS.

Earrings are worn principally by the younger portion of the female sex, and are all manufactured by the jeweller of the tribe after the fashion of those worn by the English ladies. The ears of the old women are pierced in two and three places, and pieces of bone and wood about one inch in length, a quarter of an inch wide, and a sixteenth of an inch thick, were formerly inserted and worn continually.

NOSE RINGS.

Nose rings are still worn among the Haidas. These rings give the wearers an uncanny appearance. The lobe of the nose is pierced, and a piece of whalebone carved into a semicircular shape

is inserted. The bone is about two inches in length and three-sixteenths of an inch in diameter. Only the old Indians have their noses pierced, and they seldom use the ring, except when in full dress for the dance or the feast.

PHYSIQUE.

At the present time both the men and women are physically remarkable. The men attract attention by their size and apparent strength, and by the fulness and agreeableness of their features. Some of them are six feet four inches tall, and their bodies are developed in perfect proportions. They are expert seamen, and can sail their buoyant canoes in a storm that would be dangerous for ships. The women share the good qualities of the men. Some of them are tall, while others are under the average stature of womankind. They are exceedingly strong; they cut wood, sail and paddle canoes, and work as hard as the men. They have handsome and agreeable features, and are not so dark as the men. In intellectual power and mental faculties, the Haidas excel the ordinary class of Indians on the Coast. If compared with other Indians in British Columbia and Alaska, they will be placed at the head in respect to physique and mental activity. They are neither stupid nor foolish. When asked to think of things outside their own intellectual world they are quite ready to acknowledge themselves ignorant and willing to be taught. The young people are eager to be taught any fresh subject, and also evince a determination to master their books.

DRESS.

The women dress in prints, and not a few of them wear bonnets and hats. Before the arrival of the whites their clothing was scanty. They wore petticoats made of the roots of cedar and spruce. The men now purchase good tweed clothes, and the women indulge in the luxury of prints, ginghams, and sometimes silks. Old men are occasionally seen early in the morning wrapped in their blankets, but they soon have to dress decently in order to escape the ridicule of their grown-up sons and daughters. Girls wear a cotton dress only, and the little boys run about in shirts, unless they are going to see white men, when they dress specially for the occasion. The men and women seem to pay considerable attention to their personal adornment. They are proud of the mass of brilliant, coarse, black hair, with which nature has provided them. The men cut their hair periodically, and endeavour to cultivate moustaches and whiskers in imitation of the whites. The older men have not a single hair on their faces. The women dress their hair in braids or knots at the back of the head, and in bangs, for the Hudson's Bay Company has supplied them with curling tongs. Their glass beads are giving place to silver and gold ornaments, and will soon be valuable as curiosities,

as the present generation is not learning the arts of the ancient Haidas. And it may truthfully be added that if the Indians on the entire coast do not take better care of themselves than they have done in the past, not only will the white man's clothing and ornaments supersede the old garments and gewgaws, but they themselves, their villages and their hunting grounds will soon disappear, and their places will soon be occupied by those whom they are now so fond of imitating.

BURIAL CEREMONIES.

Many people look upon the Red Indian as a wild and uncultured savage. In reference to the duties which are required to be performed towards the dead they are not so. All men, and especially the chiefs, are greatly honoured on the departure from this mundane atmosphere. When he dies, the next to succeed him (generally his nephew) is presented with blankets, dishes, beads, guns, canoes, prints, pottery, dogs, axes, and furniture. They are not, however, for his own benefit, but for the benefit of the deceased, and those who take part in the burial ceremony. In fact nothing seems to be too valuable for the funeral. Christians are afraid to break the news of a friend's death to his wife, father and mother. Not so, however, with the Haidas. I have seen them make the coffin, and decorate it in the presence of the sick person when they have come to the conclusion that he will not recover. They also tell the sick man that he will not recover, and urge him not to attempt to do so. The members of his tribe and all the chiefs of the other tribes come in to see him, and talk of nothing else but of others who have had the same sickness and died. When he hears what they have determined that he should do, he then refuses to eat and drink, and so hastens his demise. When gasping for breath he is washed, and his shroud made of white cotton is then put on. White stockings are put on his feet, he is clad in a pair of white woollen drawers, and a white handkerchief is tied around his head. His neck is encircled with beads, a spot of red paint is put on either cheek, and a black one on his forehead. When thus arranged, all his friends enter the house, and wait until he dies. If the sick person be of a strong constitution they were accustomed to administer poison; in fact, the daughter of one old woman who was dying came and asked me to give her mother some poison, so that she might die before the salmon season commenced. They think very little of each other when in health and strength, but as soon as they are dead they become valuable, and are called good Indians. When a person dies they arrange a bed in the corner of the house, and cover it with white cotton, and place the deceased thereon, and then they cover him with a sheet of the same material. In twenty-four hours' time the body is placed in the coffin, and arranged in the position that it has to be buried. Then the time of mourning comes. All the old women of the tribe, and the friends and relations of the deceased begin

to groan, and sigh, and cry. The men groan out *āchadiā di kunē!* Oh dear, my son! and the women cry *ānāniā di kunē!* Oh dear, my son! After they have wept for one or two hours the greatest chief present calls for silence. Then the smoking feast commences. Tobacco and pipes are provided for everyone who attends, and the smoking begins in earnest and continues for several hours, until all are sick. During the smoking entertainment the chiefs and friends of the deceased, according to rank, will begin to extol the virtues of the deceased, and try to console his relations by reference to his disposition towards the poor, his love for his friends, and his kindness towards his wife and children; and they also are very careful to refer to his liberality when making a free distribution of his goods, namely, a *Pollatch*. Everything done in his past life passes under review, and they then conclude by saying, that his time had come, and that the gods wanted him, and he, being a good and wise man, had obeyed their summons. When anyone of importance dies news is carried to all the other villages, and they at once come to see the dead man, and also consult with his relations regarding the funeral arrangements. If the deceased person should belong to the Bears, the funeral preparations are made and conducted by members of the Eagle Crest and *vice versa*. After the funeral is over all the people are feasted by the deceased man's nephew, who then assumes his uncle's title and property.