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CUSTOMS AND ARTS OF THE KWAKIOOL.*

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DURING the summer of 1885, the writer was engaged in the geological examination of the northern part of Vancouver Island and its vicinity, the territory of the Kwakiool people. In connection with the prosecution of his work, he was in constant and intimate association with this people, and enjoyed many excellent opportunities of obtaining facts respecting them, of hearing their traditions and stories, and of becoming familiar with their mode of life and habits of thought. The notes, made at the time, are here presented in a systematized form. As thus set down in order, they are intended to be merely a record of facts and observations, and are offered as a contribution toward our knowledge of the Indians of the west coast. Notwithstanding diversity of language and dialect, these coast people form a single group in respect to arts, and to a less extent in regard to customs and traditions. The useful arts and modes of construction have

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evidently been readily adopted by various tribes from whatever source they may have originated. In dexterity and constructive skill, as well as in artistic representation, the Haida people, however, excel all the others.

The villages consist usually of a single row of houses ranged along the edge of the beach and facing the sea. The houses are generally large, and are used as dwelling-places by two or more families, each occupying a corner, which is closed in by temporary partitions of split cedar planks, six or eight feet in height, or by a screen of cloth on one or two sides. Each family has, as a rule, its own fire, with cedar planks laid down near it to sit and sleep on. When, however, they are gathered in the houses of smaller and ruder construction, at summer fishing-places, etc., a single fire may serve for a whole household. The household effects and property of the inmates are piled up round the walls, or stored away in little cupboard-like partition spaces at the sides or back of the house. Above the fire belonging to each family is generally a frame of poles or slips of cedar, upon which clothes may be hung to dry, and dried fish or dried clams are stored in the smoke. Eating is a perpetually recurring occupation, and smoke appears to ooze out by every chink and cranny of the roofs of the large houses, the whole upper part of which is generally filled with it. The houses of the Kwakwakaikwak are not so large or so well constructed as those of the Haida, though, if Vancouver's representations of them are to be accepted as accurate, they are more commodious and better built now than in his time. The introduction of metal tools may have produced a change of that kind. Wood-carving is practiced, but not so extensively as among the Haida, and carved totem-posts are not nearly so numerous nor so large or artistic in design as among that people. Such examples of posts of this kind as occur are also invariably separate from the houses, and no instance of a carved post forming the door of a house was seen in any of the villages.

The most valuable possession of the Kwakwakaikwak and other northern tribes is the "copper" or copper plate of which the peculiar form is illustrated in my "Report on the Queen Charlotte Islands." A conventional face is often scraped out upon the surface of the "copper." The most valued coppers are very old and have been handed down for generations. These are known as *llā-kwa*. Smaller "coppers" of modern manufacture are named *llā-llohsum*. A copper, to be of value, should be of equal thickness throughout, except at the edges, where it should be thicker than elsewhere. When struck, it should emit a dull sound and not ring. The dentalium shell, named *a-ll-a*, was formerly used as a currency, but, as with other coast tribes, the blanket is now the unit of value. A somewhat inferior quality, known in the Hud-

son's Bay Company parlance as a "two-and-a-half point" blanket, is the standard, and is named *ul'-hul-as-kum*.

When a child has grown large enough to leave the little cradle, tied into which it spends most of its earlier days, usage demands that the cradle, together with all the wrappings and bark forming the bedding and its appendages, shall be carefully collected and carried to a recognized place of deposit. This custom is not now strictly adhered to with regard to the cradle, but is still obligatory in respect to the bedding, which is generally neatly packed in a box or basket, and laid away, never to be touched again. Every village probably has such a place of deposit. That for the Kā-loo-kwis village is a sheltered recess in limestone cliffs at the western extreme of Harbledown Island. It is named *kī-ats-ū-kwāsh'*, or "cedar-bark deposit-place." Another similar recess in a cliff, filled with cradle wrappings, exists on the south side of Pearse Peninsula, east end of Broughton Island. At Mel'-oopā and at Hwat-ēs' there are similar places, that at the first-named village being beneath logs, at the back of the village, and not on the shore.

When a young man desires to obtain a girl for a wife, he must bargain with her parents, and pay to her father a considerable number of blankets. Owing to the great desire to accumulate blankets for the purposes of the *potlatch* or donation-feast, together with the scarcity of marriageable girls, the parents are very strict and exacting in this respect. The young man is often still further fleeced by his wife, who, at the instigation of her parents, may seize upon some real or imaginary cause of grievance and leave him. The father then exacts a further blanket payment for her return, and so on.

Medicine, or sorcery, as practiced by these people for the cure of disease, is much the same as among other tribes of the coast, though the peculiar tubular bone charm, employed by the Haida and Tshmisian, was not here observed. The sorcerer may be either a man or a woman, famed for skill in such matters, to whom their vocation may have been indicated by dreams or visions. Medicines may be given to the patient by his friends, but the sorcerer does not deal in drugs, devoting his attention solely to exorcising the evil principle causing the disease. This is done by singing incantation songs, the use of a rattle, and vigorous sucking of the part affected, which in many cases is kept up for hours and frequently repeated, and must always be handsomely paid for. Sickness is still, generally, and was formerly at all times, attributed to the witchcraft of enemies. Certain persons were known to possess the power, and were called *ē'-a-kē-nooh*. Such a malignant person, wishing to bewitch an enemy, is supposed to go through a series of complicated and absurd cere-

monies, of which the following is an outline: An endeavor is first made to procure a lock of hair, some saliva, a piece of the sleeve and of the neck of the dress, or of the rim of the hat or head-dress which has absorbed the perspiration of the person to be bewitched. These are placed with a small piece of the skin and flesh of a dead man, dried and roasted before the fire, and rubbed and pounded together. The mixture is then tied up in a piece of skin or cloth, which is covered over with spruce-gum. The little package is next placed in a human bone, which is broken for the purpose, and afterward carefully tied together and put within a human skull. This again is placed in a box, which is tied up and gummed over and then buried in the ground in such a way as to be barely covered. A fire is next built nearly, but not exactly, on the top of the box, so as to warm the whole. Then the evilly disposed man, beating his head against a tree, names and denounces his enemy. This is done at night or in the early morning, and in secret, and is frequently repeated till the enemy dies. The actor must not smile or laugh, and must talk as little as possible till the spell has worked. If a man has reason to suppose that he is being practiced on in this way, he or his friends must endeavor to find the deposit and carefully unearth it. Rough handling of the box may prove immediately fatal. It is then cautiously unwrapped and the contents are thrown into the sea. If the evilly disposed person was discovered, he was in former years immediately killed. If, after making up the little package of relics as above noted, it is put into a frog, the mouth of which is tied up before it is released, a peculiar sickness is produced which causes the abdomen of the person against whom the sorcery is directed to swell.

After death the body is immediately coffined, not a moment being lost. Should death occur at night, the coffin-box is set outside the house at once, till daylight may admit of its being disposed of. The face of the dead is first washed and the hair combed, and then the face and head are painted with vermilion and the body wrapped in blankets by near relatives or friends. It is then put into any box of a suitable size that can be found, generally one of those used for the storage of house effects or dried fish. The box so employed is named *tik-ī-ā-tse*. The body is doubled up, and no hesitation is felt in using violence toward it in order to press it into the box. The graves of the Kwakiool are of two principal kinds: little scaffolds to which the coffin-box is lashed, high upon the branches of fir-trees, and known as *tuh-pē'-kh*; and tombs built of slabs of wood on the ground. Small tent-like erections of calico are now often substituted for the latter, and the bodies of relatives or friends, dying at different times, are in both cases often placed together. If a person of importance or much

respected, a canoe (previously rendered unserviceable) is often drawn up and deposited near the grave. The trees used for the deposit of the dead are often quite close to the village, but when a tomb is placed upon the ground, it is generally on some rocky islet or insular rock, which may be farther away, but is still in sight from the village. Such islands become regular cemeteries. Graves in trees are generally festooned with blankets or streamers of cloth, and similar appendages are affixed to poles in the vicinity of graves on the ground. Roughly carved human figures in wood are also often added. These sometimes hold in their hands wooden models of the copper plates which are so much valued by these northern tribes of the coast. Similar models are also at times nailed up on posts near the graves. At Pā'-as (Blunden Harbor) the upper part of one of these coppers (but one of inferior value) was found broken in two and affixed at a grave in token of grief. The lower part was not found, and had probably been used before on some similar occasion. At Fort Rupert and Alert Bay, bodies are now frequently buried in the ground, owing to the influence of the whites. Such a grave is named *tik-i-ās*.

After the body has been deposited in the grave, a fire is made near it, in which some food is burned, such as dried salmon, fat, dried clams, etc., and all the smaller articles belonging to the deceased are thrown into the fire at the same time. The canoe, house, and other larger effects are then taken possession of by the son, father, daughter, wife, or brother of the dead, generally in the order named. The wife or husband of the deceased goes into special mourning for a period of one month among the Queen Charlotte Sound tribes, or for four months among the Kōs'-kī-mo. The survivor lives during this period separately in a very small hut, which is built behind the house, eating and drinking alone, and using for that purpose dishes not employed by other members of the tribe. The near relatives of the dead cut their hair short, or, if women, cut a small portion of it off. A widow marks her face with scratches, in token of mourning; among the Kōs'-kī-mo she cuts her face with a shell, and does not generally marry again for at least a year. In some cases, about a month after death, the men of the tribe collect in a house to sing a song which relates the deeds and virtues of the deceased. This is named *sā'-luma* or *kwai'-um*, the "crying-song." Children are sometimes, in the same way, mourned for by the women. When at Mel'-oopa ("Nawitti") in 1878, the first sound we heard at daybreak was the crying and lamentation of the women, the song being taken up first by one and then by another, in different parts of the village. This, it was ascertained, was in consequence of the death of a boy which had occurred some time before.

In my notes on the Haida people of the Queen Charlotte Isl-

ands, the facts which could be obtained as to the *potlatch* or donation-feast of these Indians and of the Tshimsian were detailed. This custom is common to all the coast tribes of this part of North America, and has extended, though in a less marked form, into the interior of the continent. The main features of the custom are probably identical, or nearly so, among all the tribes of the British Columbia coast. They are certainly nearly the same with the Haida, Tshimsian, and Kwakiool peoples. Among the latter, this ceremony is known as *pus-a* or *ya-hooit*, these terms probably denoting special forms of the ceremony appropriate to certain occasions.

As a particular instance of the custom, let us suppose that a Nim'-kish, of Alert Bay, has collected together as his own, or obtained control of, say, five hundred blankets, and wishes to make a potlatch to the Fort Rupert tribes. He goes to the Fort Rupert village and makes known his intention of distributing a thousand blankets at a certain date. He begins by lending out his stock of five hundred blankets, giving larger numbers to those who are well off, and particularly to such as are known to have the intention of giving a potlatch in return. This loan is reckoned a debt of honor, to be paid with interest at the proper time. It is usual to return two blankets for every one borrowed, and Indians with liberal ideas may return even more. The greater the number of blankets loaned out to any individual, the more he knows that his wealth and standing are appreciated by the stranger, who, later on, taking with him a thousand or more blankets, returns to his home at Alert Bay; at which place also, in due time, the Fort Rupert people arrive. The potlatch does not, however, then occur at once, as much preliminary talk, ceremony, and feasting are in order, and the Nim'-kish must entertain their visitors—first one and then another volunteering feasts and diversions. It may also, very probably, happen that delay arises because the man about to give the potlatch has not obtained the requisite number of blankets, many being owing to him and others having been promised by friends whom he is obliged to dun. The Fort Rupert people, becoming weary of waiting, lend all the weight of their influence to coerce the debtors into payment, and these may, in the end, be forced to borrow from others to enable them to redeem their pledges—all such arrangements leading to interminable haggling and worry. At length, however, all is ready, and, with the accompaniment of much bombastic speech-making and excitement, the mass of blankets is distributed in exact proportion to the social position of those taking part—or, what is the same thing, in proportion to their individual contributions.

To surpass the man who has last given a potlatch, and acquire a superior standing to his, the next aspirant must endeavor to

give away more than a thousand blankets, and will strive as soon as possible to be in a position to do so.

The nominal excuses for giving a potlatch are numerous, the most common being, however, the wish to assume a new and more honorable name. The name proposed to be taken passes by common consent, if the potlatch shall have been successful and on a sufficient scale.

Should an Indian wish to humiliate another for any reason, he may destroy a great number of blankets or much other valued property. This, according to custom, leaves his adversary in debt to the amount of the property made away with. It then behooves the debtor to bring out and destroy a like or if possible a greater amount of property. If he is not able to do this, he lies under the reproach of having been worsted by his foe.

The difficulties attendant on any effort toward the improvement of the condition and mode of life of the coast tribes of British Columbia are very grave; and the actual results of missionary labors, such as those carried on by Mr. Hall among the Kwakiool, and other self-sacrificing persons elsewhere, are in most cases, to all appearance, small.

It is difficult to induce individuals to abandon their old customs and bad habits, and nearly impossible to prevent them from relapsing, from time to time, owing to the fact that they still live promiscuously among and herd together with the mass of the tribe. Since the arrival of the whites, the Kwakiool, equally with other tribes, have become, in a word, "demoralized." They have lost, to a great extent, their pride and interest in the things which formerly occupied them, losing at the same time their spirit and self-respect, and replacing it by nothing. It is comparatively easy at all times to obtain a sufficiency of food, and food is at some seasons—as during the salmon-run—to be had in the greatest abundance with very little effort. Beyond this, there is nothing more to occupy their time fully and to keep them out of mischief. They are restless and unhappy. In some seasons, good wages are to be obtained by picking hops in the vicinity of Puget Sound, and it has thus become customary for many of the tribes to go south in the autumn, nominally for this purpose, but in reality with no great prospect of obtaining work. They may then be seen leaving their villages in bodies in their large and well-built traveling-canoes, whole families together with their household effects and children, and three, four, or five paddlers to each canoe, setting out cheerfully enough on their voyage of two hundred miles or more. They may obtain a little money while away, which they invest in goods and whisky, if they can obtain it (and in this there is unfortunately very little difficulty). They live, however, in the vicinity of Victoria and other large towns in a

state of shameless debauchery, and thus very often return in a diseased state to their homes.

The condition of these people is in no sense bettered by endeavoring to teach them moral maxims or religious dogma. They do not appreciate the truth of the former, nor can they in their low mental state rightly understand the latter. To endeavor to do so is merely to imitate the procedure of the Indian shaman over the dying. If, on the contrary, you speak to them of means of improving their material condition, or deplore with them the rapid diminution of their tribe, the more thoughtful and mature listen with the greatest respect and attention. The problem is, fundamentally, an industrial one, and is to be attacked, if successfully, from that side. They are naturally industrious enough, and capable, though not so persistently laborious as the whites, and less easy to control than the Chinese. They obtain a certain amount of precarious employment in connection with the canneries and other nascent industries of the northern coast, but have not generally the offer of any permanent remunerative work.

It is thus primarily essential to establish industries among them which will remove the temptation now felt to drift to the larger settlements and towns. Improvement in mental and moral tone will then naturally follow.

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