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LEGEND OF THE FIN-BACK WHALE CREST OF THE
HAIDAS, QUEEN CHARLOTTE'S ISLAND, B. C.

THE following story I heard among these people many years ago. What I then learned was merely a fragment of the tale as I know it to-day. After first hearing it, I spared no time or trouble, in order to obtain the whole if possible. Yet with all my labor, through many long years, I am afraid that what I now possess is very far from correct, but am determined to satisfy myself on this point whenever I have an opportunity.

What I do know I give in this paper, believing it to be an interesting piece of Haida Folk-lore.

As a people, the Haidas were, up till lately, divided into a number of *crests*, or clans, each having for its crest some animal, bird, or fish.

There were formerly two principal crests, or as some people style them, phratries, each being divided into a number of smaller ones.

The two principal were the Raven, or as he is called in the Haida language *Chaoeh*, and the Eagle, called *Choot*.

The smaller ones were as follows:—

The Raven contained the Wolf, Bear, *Scannas*, Skate, *Mut* or Mountain-goat, Sea-lion, *Che-moose*,¹ Moon, Sun, Rainbow, and Thunder-bird.

The Eagle contained: the Eagle, Frog, Beaver, Shark, Moon, Duck, Codfish, *Wasco*, a sort of whale, Whale, and Owl. Each of these crests had a legend. Those of the Bear crest and of the Sun crest have already been printed in the Journal of American Folk-Lore. That given in this paper is the legend of the *Scannas* or crest of the fin-back whale, *Orca ater*. *Scanna gan Nuncus* means, the hero or the story of the Fin-Back Crest.

SCANNA GAN NUNCUS.

It has long been related among these people, the Haidas, that at Quilcah, where the oil-works stand, about three miles west from the village of Skidegat's Town, lived, long ago, a boy, who dwelt with his aged grandmother. He was the youngest of a family of eleven sons, both his parents being dead, and also his brothers, of whom I shall say more by and by. Excepting himself and the old woman, no other person lived in that place, all the other Indians in that quarter being on Mand Island. Our hero and his grandmother belonged to a different crest from the others. Close to the spot where they lived were three stone boats or canoes. What is meant

¹ A sea animal, said to live in Skeena River, British Columbia.

by these I do not know, unless it be canoes made entirely by hot stones and stone hammers, as used to be the case in by-gone ages. This boy, it seems, was so weak and sickly that he could neither stand upright nor walk. His weakest parts were from the knees down.

One day he said: "Granny, put me into one of these three canoes," and this she did. After sitting in the canoe for a considerable length of time he became quite strong, and was able to walk like any other person.

After becoming strong, he used to swim about in the bay. One day, instead of a swim, he concluded to have a sail, and with this idea got his grandmother's aid to put one of them into the water. While this was being done, two of them broke, but they were successful with the third. After this, instead of swimming, he used to sail about on the bay, gradually venturing farther and farther from the shore.

One day, making a further venture than usual, he sailed up the Hunnah River, a mountain stream emptying its waters into Skidegat channel, four or five miles west of the place where he lived.

Tradition says that this river in olden times was three times larger than it now is. At present there is seldom water enough to float a canoe. It is also related that the waters of the sea came higher up on the land than is now the case. (Of the rise of the land evidence is everywhere to be found.)

After pulling up the river, he became tired, so in order to rest he pulled ashore and lay down. In those days at the place where he went ashore, in the bed of the river, were a number of large boulders, while on both sides of the stream were many trees.

While resting by the river, he heard a dreadful noise, up stream, coming toward him. Looking to see what it was, he was surprised to behold all the stones in the river bed coming down towards him. The movement of these frightened him so much that he jumped to his feet and ran into the timber.

He found he had made a mistake, because all the trees were cracking and groaning, and all seemed to him to say: "Go back, go back at once to the river, and run as fast as you can." This he lost no time in doing. When again at the river, led by his curiosity, he went to see what was pushing the stones and breaking the trees; on reaching them he found that a large body of ice was coming down, pushing everything before it. Seeing this, he took his canoe and fled towards home.

Some time after this adventure with the ice, Scanna gan Nuncus took his trusty bow and quiver filled with arrows and went out in order to shoot a few birds.

Walking along the shore, he saw at a distance what seemed to be a man, standing on shore at the edge of the bushes, looking at him. Wondering who the stranger could be, he walked over toward him and hailed him. Receiving no answer, he went up to him, and was surprised to find only a stump with a curving dome resembling a man's head. Turning to go away, a voice which seemed to come from the head said: "Don't go away; take me down, take me down." Hearing these words, he took the stump in his arms, pulling him down at the same time. I say him, because it was a man under enchantment. Taking him down broke the spell, and he instantly became himself again.

When thus restored, he told our hero that long ago he had been taking liberties with the *Cowgans*, who as a punishment had cast upon him a spell, under the influence of which he was to remain as a stump until a young man who lived with his grandmother would come and set him free, and he, our hero, was the person predicted. The *Cowgans*, or wood nymphs (literally wood mice), were said to be a number of beautiful young women whose homes were in the woods and among the mountains. At the head of these was a queen who was remarkable for her beauty, and who also lived in a magnificent palace in some unknown locality.

In order to discover the palace, and to see the queen, a thing permitted to none except those who could show some act of kindness done, the young man used to go to the woods and mountains, from which quest many never returned, and of this number were the ten brothers of our hero. These nymphs, it also appears, used to seek the company of young men, and lead them to take liberties with them, and when tired of their services would turn them into stumps.

The stump man asked our hero if he would like to see the queen and her palace, to which he answered yes.

"Well, then, go your way until you find a lame mouse trying to run on a big log, be kind to it, and it will show you what to do, and where to go."

After leaving the stump man, our hero did not go far until he saw a poor lame mouse trying to run along a large log of wood; he watched it for a while, and saw that it would run a little way and then fall off. Seeing this, he went and picked it up, put it on the log and set it going again; this he did several times. At last it stopped trying, and told our hero: "You are a good man and a kind one. Instead of killing me, every time I fell off the log you picked me up and put me on again. Many a one would have chased me and tried to kill me, but you did neither. I am not lame; I only feigned lameness in order to try you. You are Scanna gan Nuncus, and you would like to see the queen of the *Cowgans*. Your ten

brothers also wished to see her. They could not because they were bad men; they ran after me and tried to kill me. No bad man can try to kill me and see the queen and live. That was why they all disappeared so mysteriously. By trying to put me out of the way, they all met the same fate. Now, come follow me, and I will show you the queen and her palace."

The mouse led and our hero followed, through long grass bushes and timber, until they reached a beautiful country, where everything was fair and young. After travelling across this region for some time, they came to the palace. Anything so beautiful Scanna gan Nuncus never saw, nor ever could picture in his imagination.

"Now," said the mouse, "let us go inside, and I will introduce you to the queen of the Cowgans." This, it did, telling her that he was a good and kindly man who, unlike his brothers, did not run after it to kill it.

When they found the queen, she was sitting spinning with a wheel. She was so pretty and fair to look on that our hero nearly forgot himself. The queen made him welcome, left her spinning, and came and sat beside him, telling him that as he was a good man he should be always welcome to her palace, and whenever he decided to visit her he had only to come to the log, and he would find her servant, the mouse, who would show him the way. How long he stayed with her I have as yet been unable to learn. Thus much I can say, that his grandmother asked him where he had lived so long. He replied that while absent he had been where few or none had ever been before; he had visited the queen of the Cowgans.

After closing this paper, I find it necessary, for the proper understanding of a few points mentioned therein, to say a few words drawn from my own observation and research, and from the report of Prof. G. M. Dawson of the Canadian Geological Survey, who spent a part of the summer of 1878 among these islands. I wish particularly to call the attention of thinking men and women to our hero's encounter with the ice.

Who was the author of the story, or when it was adopted by the Scannas, I cannot say. Doubtless a tradition of ice coming down the valley of the Hunnah was current at the time when the Scannas chose that fish as their crest. This event happened very early in the settlement of these islands, for tradition says that at that time only one or two families lived on the southeast side of these islands, and that, excepting our hero and his grandmother who lived at Quilcah, all the others dwelt on a small village on Mand Island, a mile and a half away.

The Hunnah is a stream flowing eastward and southward until it

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falls into the channel from the axial range of mountains of these islands. Professor Dawson says that everywhere in the islands we find evidence of the descent of glacier ice from the axial range to the sea, and describes a number of valleys where action of ice on their hillsides is plainly shown. He also shows from the evidence given that the final retreat of these valley glaciers would seem to have been pretty rapid. A few years ago, I took an Indian with me up the Hunnah valley, in order to see for myself the effects of glacial action. After observation, I agree with Professor Dawson, as well as with the tradition, that the retreat of the glacier down this valley from the place of its birth at the head-waters of the Hunnah must have been pretty rapid. The great glacial period lingered longer in these islands, or else a smaller glaciation must have taken place. Whether this had anything to do with the legend, may be a matter of opinion.

Up to within a few years ago, it was customary, when a bevy of girls were going to the woods or mountains, to say: *Coosó tu toggan Cowgans?* "Where are you going to Cowgans?" The mode of spinning among the Haidas was with a spindle and disk or wheel, like various tribes in other parts of America.

James Deans.

VICTORIA, B. C.