

# The Vanishing Totems of British Columbia.

By KATHLEEN SCHLESINGER.

*Illustrated by Photographs lent by the Rev. Leonard Dawson.*

And they painted on the grave-posts  
Each his own ancestral Totem,  
Each the symbol of his household ;  
Figures of the Bear and Reindeer,  
Of the Turtle, Crane and Beaver,

Each inverted as a token that the owner was departed.

LONGFELLOW'S *Hiawatha*, xiv.

**H**IAWATHA, oppressed by the thought that all things in this beautiful world of ours are destined to die and fade into oblivion, taught his people picture-writing, that the heroic deeds of the warriors might

by Hiawatha, when, as yet, no totems marked the ancestry. As a matter of fact, all Indians do not seem to have had a Hiawatha to teach them the arts of painting and carving.

The desolate scene here depicted is near Lytton, in British Columbia, a place



BURIAL-GROUND, LYTTON, B.C.

not be forgotten, that the wisdom of the great ones might reach the generations yet unborn. He urged them to paint their ancestral totems on the grave-posts. Wise Hiawatha ! He understood the value of noble traditions ; the beneficent influence of living up to ideals.

The customs of North American Indians vary with each tribe, of course, but in our first illustration there is just such another burial-place as those referred to

where the missionaries have made many converts.

The bodies are buried in shallow graves, over which are simply placed a few logs surmounted in one case by a platform ; the inverted cooking-pots and utensils of the departed are stuck on poles ; his arms propped up by the grave and the wooden image of the dead are the characteristic mementos placed there by the mourners. Within the light fence to the left is a

grave on which rests the family canoe, broken into three pieces; over another is a large white blanket, stretched tent-wise over poles, under the shelter of which lie more treasures which the honoured dead prized highly during his lifetime, and which are intended to serve the spirit on its four days' journey to the nether world, the land of shadows.

Those isolated villages in British Columbia and Southern Alaska are a wonderful and striking sight, with their rows of log huts, in front of which tower the tall totem poles; the four supports of the roof are often covered also with carved and painted totems, and if you walk inside, you observe the same display of fabulous birds and reptiles, of grotesque human figures and heads carved, painted, or embroidered on all their utensils, hangings, and household treasures, so that the totem cannot fail at once to rivet the visitor's attention.

In fact, the totem is so intimately connected with the life of the Indians, both as individuals and as tribesmen, that its influence is paramount and all-pervading; it only begins to wane when the missionaries give the natives as a substitute the worship of the one Great God, and replace the code of traditions and of clanship by the Divine law of love as manifested in Jesus Christ.

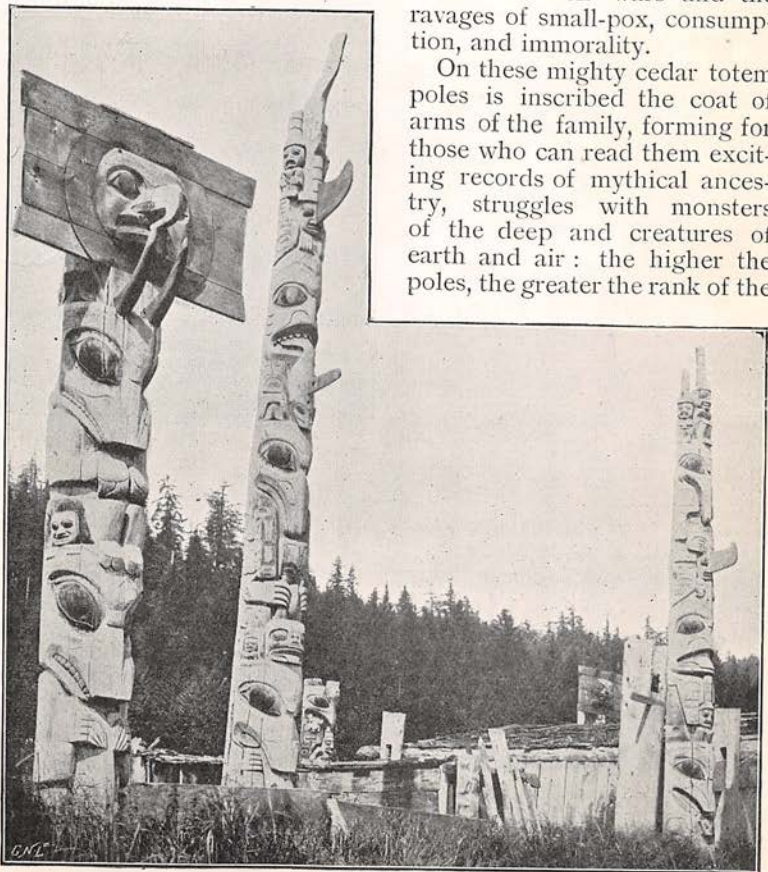
Yet the totem is not a god, although it has its religious as well as its social bearing; it is simply a cognisance which the native regards with superstitious respect, not because

it represents a superior or supernatural being, but rather because he believes that it is part and parcel of himself. The totems of the natives of British Columbia are living creatures, birds, beasts, and reptiles; the Indian shows his respect for his totem by not killing it, and in return he believes that it will protect him.

The Indian tribes all have their clan totem whom they reverence in common as a blood ancestor; through it they are bound together by the strongest of ties, which nothing can sever. Each individual selects, besides, his own particular totem on reaching manhood, the bird or beast appearing to him in a dream first, but this totem is not hereditary.

The camera has depicted some of the wonderful carvings of the Haidas of Queen Charlotte's Isles on the fast vanishing totem-poles erected round their dwellings by the natives, who are themselves doomed to speedy extinction by reason of their wars and the ravages of small-pox, consumption, and immorality.

On these mighty cedar totem poles is inscribed the coat of arms of the family, forming for those who can read them exciting records of mythical ancestry, struggles with monsters of the deep and creatures of earth and air: the higher the poles, the greater the rank of the



INDIAN CARVINGS, QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLES

Haida. The curious succession of hats, four or five deep, on the heads at the top of the pole to the right denotes a very powerful man indeed, for every hat means a potlatch given by the owner. This is a ceremony conducted on a very magnificent scale, which consists of dancing, feasting, and, last but not least, of a free distribution of valuable presents to the guests.

The whole clan saves up sometimes for a long time in order to help the chief to give a becoming potlatch, intended to eclipse those of other clans and to raise the chief to a higher rank in their aristocracy of wealth.

Only members of other clans are invited to the potlatch, and the more influential the man, the richer the presents he receives; but this is really a good investment for the giver, for by tacit understanding each guest is bound to make him a present of twice the value on some future occasion.

At Fort Wrangell on the Stikine River, a great point of interest is the house and grave of Shake, a Tlingit chief, who gave much trouble to the missionaries. When he died there was a potlatch which put all former ceremonies of the kind into the shade. His body lay in state watched over by his totem, a stuffed grizzly, with movable jaws and eyes, and claws of copper, while piles of furs and blankets, carved chests, curved copper shields called *lovs* past the counting, and gangs of slaves formed some of the many presents which his heirs distributed to the lucky guests. In the photograph, we see his ancestral quarterings on the pole to the right, on which are marked the foot-prints of the bear, which has taken refuge on the top. Shake's clan claims descent from this bear, who at the Deluge took refuge up a tree, whence he was rescued by the chief's ancestors, who brought him safely to land in their canoe. On the memorial pole to the left squats the chief, with his own totem, the whale, on his head, surmounted by three hats signifying potlatches.



SHAKE HOUSE, WRANGELL, ALASKA.

Under the tented pavilion lie Shake's ashes in a carved chest, according to the custom of the Tlingits, who always cremate their dead, with the exception of the medicine-man, whose body will not burn, and of the slave, whose body is cast into the sea or river, without more ado. A typical Tlingit stands by in his semi-European dress, with the addition of the inevitable blue-bordered blanket, of course, and the curious bell-shaped hat.

The last photograph shows another chief's grave at Wrangell, with the totem of the chief, a huge wolf, crouching on the log erection, inside which repose the ashes of the chief in a carved box.



QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLES.

The fourth illustration takes us back to Queen Charlotte Isles, where the best of these totem carvings are to be seen. Here we are among the Crow tribe, and in the foreground are the ancestral and memorial poles of the Eagle, the first carved from top to bottom, and exhibiting the heraldic designs belonging to the whole family; the latter plain, and surmounted by the Eagle, and at the foot his wife's totem, the Whale.

Some of the customs connected with Totemism in different parts of the world are very curious, and although they vary in detail, they all agree in the principle of respecting the life of the animal or plant

totem, and of paying to it certain honours.

The Omahas of the Buffalo or Black Shoulder clan arrange their hair on their foreheads in imitation of horns; the Small Bird clan of the same tribe leave a little wisp of matted hair in front for a bill, another over each ear to represent the wings, and a long piece down the back for a tail.

When a clansman of the Wolf or Bear clan is devoured by his totem, the members of his family account for it by supposing that the totem had disowned him on account of his disrespectful behaviour on some occasion or other, and a tragedy of this kind only increases their respect for the powerful one.

In conclusion, when the Totem goes the way of all the world and sleeps with his fathers, he is buried with full honours like a clansman, and mourned with ceremony.

These valuable photographs have been very kindly lent by the Rev. Leonard Dawson, a missionary in the N.W. Territory, Canada.



CHIEF'S GRAVE, WRANGELL, ALASKA.