

THE CARVINGS AND HERALDIC PAINTINGS OF  
THE HAIDA INDIANS.

EARLY in the spring of 1883 I was instructed by Professor Baird, chief executive officer of the Smithsonian Institute of Washington,\* to visit Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia, and further investigate the subjects indicated by the heading of this article. I accordingly proceeded to that group of islands in June, 1883, and remained all summer, making collections for the United States Fish Commission the National Museum and the Bureau of Ethnology, and was enabled, by the assistance of a very intelligent young Haida, who acted as interpreter, to decipher the meaning of the carvings on the heraldic and mortuary columns and totem poles, and the hieroglyphic paintings and drawings of those interesting natives.

Careless and casual observers term all Indian carvings as idols or objects of worship. But the Indian is not an idolator; he does not bow down or worship the image of created things. His worship is secret, and performed in seasons of retirement in the depths of the forest. His ideas of the existence of a Deity are vague at best; and the lines of separation between it and necromancy, medical magic and demonology are too faintly separated to allow him to speak with discrimination. The Indian's necessities of language at all times require personifications, and his carved columns are picture writings readily understood by all. They are legends of adventures of giants and dwarfs, and while he amuses with the tales of the conflicts between monsters and demons, fairies and enchanters, he also throws in some few grains of instruction in the form of allegory and fable, which enable us to perceive glimpses of the heart and its affections. The mythical belief of the Haidas is similar to the Algonkin. The Raven, or Nekilstas, of the Haida is like Manabozho of the Algics and Hiawatha of the Iroquois. He has all the powers of a deity, and can assume any shape he pleases; and so of the Hoorts, or Grizzly Bear, the Skana, or Killer (orca), the Helinga, or Thunder Bird, etc. This play between the zoonic and mortal shapes of heroes must constantly be observed in high as well as in ordinary characters. To have the name of an animal, or bird, or reptile, is to have his powers. The ordinary domestic life of the Indian is described in plain words and phrases; but whatever is mysterious or abstract must be brought under mythological figures and influences. Birds and quadrupeds must be made to talk, and even the clouds, which chase each other in brilliant hues and constantly changing forms in the heavens, constitute a species of wild pictography which he can interpret. The phenomena of storms and meteorological changes connect themselves, in the superstitious mind, with some engrossing mythos or symbol.

\* In 1873 I commenced the study of the meaning of the tattoo marks, paintings and heraldic columns of the Haida Indians of the Queen Charlotte group, which was published in a memoir, No. 267, of the Smithsonian contributions to knowledge, January, 1874. The late Professor Joseph Henry remarks of this memoir that "it is a valuable contribution to our general knowledge of anthropology and archaeology, while yielding besides a special contingent to the ethnology of the North American continent. Under the latter of these heads it raises some questions which seem of great significance, and which it is to be hoped will lead to further investigation."

Figure 1, which, as drawn by my Indian assistant, Johnny Kit Elswa, represents cirrus clouds, or, as sailors term them, "mare's tails and mackerel sky," the sure precursors of a change of weather. The centre figure is T'kul, the wind spirit. On the right and left are his feet, which are indicated by long streaming clouds; above are the wings, and on each side are the different winds, each designated by an eye, and represented by the patches of cirrus clouds. When T'kul determines which wind is to blow, he gives the word and the other winds retire. The change in the weather is usually followed by rain, which is indicated in the tears which stream from the eyes of T'kul.

Figure 2 represents the raven (hooyeh) in the whale (koone). The Haidas are not whalers, like the Makahs of Cape Flattery, and I never knew of their killing a whale; but occasionally a dead whale drifts ashore, having been killed by whalers, or sword fish, or killers. The Haidas do not care to look for natural causes, but adopt the mythological dogma that the raven goes into the sea and is swallowed by the whale, and assuming another shape causes a dreadful griping in the whale's belly, which, frantic with pain, rushes ashore, while the invisible hooyeh walks quietly out and is ready for another adventure.

Figure 3 represents the killer (orca ater), which the Haidas believe to be a demon who is named "Skana." He can change into any desired form, and many are the legends about him. One which was related to me was that ages ago the Indians were out hunting for seals. The weather was calm and the sea smooth. One of these killers, or black fish, a species of porpoise, kept alongside of a canoe, and the young men amused themselves by throwing stones from the canoe ballast and hitting the fin of the killer. After some pretty hard blows from these rocks the creature made for the shore, where it grounded on the beach. Soon a smoke was seen and their curiosity prompted them to ascertain the cause; but as they reached the shore they discovered, to their surprise, that it was a large canoe, and not the Skana, that was on the beach, and that a man was on shore cooking some food. He asked them why they threw stones at his canoe. "You have broken it," said he, "and now you go into the woods and get some cedar wythes and mend it." They did so, and when they had finished the man said, "Turn your backs to the water and cover your heads with your skin blankets, and don't you look till I call you." They did so, and heard the canoe grate on the beach as she was hauled down to the surf. Then the man said, "Now look." They looked and saw the canoe just going over the first breaker and the man sitting in the stern; but when she came to the second breaker she went under it and presently came up outside of the breakers as a killer and not a canoe, and the man, or demon, was in its belly. This allegory is common among all the tribes of the Northwest Coast, and even with the interior tribes, with whom the salmon takes the place of the orca, which never ascends the fresh water rivers. The Chilcat and other tribes of Alaska carve figures of salmon, inside