



SONG OF THE BEARS

In the distant North Pacific, near Alaska's rocky strand,
Lie the islands of Queen Charlotte,¹ like oases in the sand.
Green those islands are in spring time, green in summer and in fall,
Greener yet thro' the long winter, when night's shadow, like a pall,
Hangs above them, and the rain clouds, hovering ceaseless night and day,
Bathe the land of Haidah with the waters sweet from far Cathay.²
Giant cedars crown the mountains, from whose trunks the Indian forms
War canoes that ride the ocean and defy the fiercest storms;
Totem sticks that stand as witness to the crest that marks his line,
And a hundred queer utensils, carved with many a rare design.
With his line of strongest sinew and his hook of fashioned bone,
Once he caught the dark-hued codfish,³ made the halibut his own;
With his arrow slew the grizzly, lordly elk and timid deer;
Often met in deadly conflict foes the bravest well might fear.
Years have run into the ages since the Haidah in his pride,
Bravest scion of the Mongol,⁴ ruled this region far and wide;
Now he numbers scarce a hundred, and when years shall count a score,
Grassy vales of green Queen Charlotte shall his footsteps feel no more.
In his war canoe of cedar, with its high and carved prow,
Rides he yet upon the billows, twenty men⁵ from stern to bow;
Twenty long, flat-bladed paddles perfect time to music keep,
As the twenty Haidah voices roll the bear song o'er the deep.
Weird that song is, strange its words are,⁶ for no white man ever heard
Language spoken like the bear song, tongue without a written word.
Where it came from, what its meaning, ancient legend faintly tells;
Thus the tale, by one related who among the Haidahs dwells.

Many years ago, so many that no language can convey,
When the fierce and fearless grizzly walked and talked in human way,⁷
Lived a youth named Quissam-quesus, strong and brave, before whose door
Stood a carved pole of cedar,⁸ which a sombre raven bore.
Near him lived sweet Kinda-wiss, a daughter of a mighty chief,
O'er whose high, ancestral totem perched a *choos* in relief.

NOTE 1—Queen Charlotte islands are three in number, having a length of 155 miles, and are the extreme northwestern portion of British Columbia, lying just south of the lower extremity of Alaska. They were discovered by Juan Perez, a Spanish navigator, in 1774, but were explored and named eighteen years later by Captain George Vancouver, the English explorer.

NOTE 2—Japan is supposed to be the wonderful land of Cathay, spoken of by Marco Polo. The warm Japan current, called *Kuro sioo*, flows northward to the Aleutian islands and is then deflected to the southeastward, passing down the coast of America, giving it the mild winter climate for which it is famous. Winter in the Queen Charlotte islands is a season of continuous warm rain, making luxuriant vegetation, a wonderful

Playmates, they, from youngest childhood, scarce a day were they apart;
When they grew to man and maiden, deep within each youthful heart
Flamed the fire of love eternal, and their plighted vows were said,
Though they knew paternal anger would descend upon their head.
What cared they that Haidah custom said that *choot* and *choos*' crest
Wedded must be, and the raven with the raven ne'er should nest!
Love to them was earth and heaven, and they roamed the forest free,
Where the birds sang sweetest music, or beside the restless sea
Watched the sea gull's graceful dashes, and the leaping salmon play,
On whose silver sides the sunlight shone like diamond's brightest ray.
Sweet their love dream was, but transient, rude awak'ning came too
soon,
Plunging them from highest heaven to abyssal depths of gloom.
Time had come when Haidah custom made demand that they should
wed;

Each must choose a *choot*, an eagle. Many bitter tears were shed
By the lovely Kinda-wiss, and fierce rebellion filled the heart
Of her lover, Quissam-quesus, who with life would rather part
Than to see his heart's bright jewel shine within an eagle's nest.
So, one day, in desperation, holding love above the rest
Of all earthly thoughts or duties, fled they to the forest drear,
Far beyond the reach of kindred, where no human eye nor ear
Could discover their retreat, or Haidah foot had ever been.
Far upon a rugged mountain, in a lovely, grassy glen,
By a crystal stream of water, 'neath a spruce tree's spreading boughs,
Built they love's enchanted dwelling, pledged anew eternal vows.
Such a life as fabled Eden saw before the tempter came
Lived these truants, fanning gently love's bright, sacrificial flame.
Mountains, valleys, far off ocean, lay within their sweeping gaze,



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contrast with the snow and ice of Labrador, which lies in the same latitude on the Atlantic coast. Owing to the humid atmosphere the forests of cedar and fir are extremely dense, and the trees are of monster proportions.

NOTE 3—Off the islands are fishing banks where is found a fish somewhat similar to the cod, which has been given the name of "black cod," because of its extremely dark flesh. It is a fine substitute for the true cod and is being caught and cured for market. The Haidahs were very skillful in fashioning hooks, spears and other implements of bone for fishing and hunting, and used them with great skill until the implements and weapons of the white man supplanted them. They even caught 400-pound halibut with their bone hooks.